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News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Stigma around Mental Illness in the Workplace confirmed by Conference Board Study

Winnipeg, MB, June 22, 2011 – A Conference Board study released on Monday at the Workplace Mental Health 2011 conference in Toronto confirms that stigma around mental illness still exists in the Workplace . The report reads that "when it comes to mental health, misinformation, fear and prejudice remain far too prevalent, it is time for a change."

Canadian Mental Health Association of Winnipeg (CMHA) Executive Director, Nicole Chammartin says "the report confirms what we have been aware of for a very long time, that stigma in the workplace is a huge barrier to people receiving appropriate help and supports." Chammartin goes on to say "with 1 in 5 Canadians likely to experience a mental health issue in their lifetime, Canadian employers need to understand how this affects them and offer supports to their employees."

A Winnipegger that experienced first-hand what the stigma can do is David Albert Newman. Newman was diagnosed with schizophrenia six years ago. In 2003, Newman lost his job as an accountant, which he blames on his mental illness and the company's refusal to see anything but the bottom line.

"The attitude was, 'We will just shove you out the door,'" Newman recalled. But the economic identity and social inclusion that comes from a job "is astronomical to your recovery," said Newman, a full-time internal auditor for the Manitoba government. Medication and therapy are helping Newman to manage his disease as he works on his master's thesis in his spare time.

The Study's survey reports that 12 per cent of respondents said they were currently experiencing a mental health issue and another 32 per cent said they'd faced one in the past. The report goes on to state that "in addition to the effects of mental health on individuals, organizations are also feeling the financial costs. In 2009-2010, 78 per cent of short-term disability claims and 67 per cent of long-term disability claims in Canada were related to mental health issues."

The Conference Board suggests the following improvements:

- Focusing on education and communication to reduce fear, stigma and discrimination in the workplace;
- Ensuring the organizational culture is conducive to supporting employees' mental health;
- Encouraging senior executives to show demonstrable leadership around mental health; and
- Building managers' capacity to support employees by providing the tools and training required in their role.

CMHA Winnipeg offers courses such as Mental Health First Aid to employers and employees to assist in creating a greater understanding of mental health issues in the workplace. For more information call 982-6100 or visit www.cmhawpg.mb.ca

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The Canadian Mental Health Association, Winnipeg Region is part of a nation-wide, charitable organization that promotes the mental health of all and supports the resilience and recovery of people experiencing mental illness.