

Canadian Mental Health Association, Winnipeg Region  
432 Ellice Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R3B 1Y4  
Phone: 204-982-6100

## News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### CMHA encouraged by Mental-Health Court

**Winnipeg, MB, June 8, 2011** – The Canadian Mental Health Association of Winnipeg is encouraged to see the Province’s \$600,000 investment to establish a Mental-Health Court in Winnipeg that will work with accused whose mental-health issues are contributing to their criminal behaviour.

CMHA’s Executive Director, Nicole Chammartin says “our organization frequently works with people whose mental illness has been a major factor in multiple run-ins with the Justice System, often these individuals are jailed and left to circumstances that will exacerbate their illness.” Chammartin goes on to say “Individuals who are incarcerated while dealing with a mental health crisis can be scarred by these experiences and at increased risk to reoffend.”

In a release from the Province yesterday, Justice Minister Andrew Swan states “By diverting people with mental illness from jails into treatment, we will reduce reoffence rates.”

**It is estimated that at least 30% of the people in the criminal justice system live with a mental illness.**

CMHA Winnipeg sees the development of a diversion court for people struggling with mental illness and committing non-violent crimes as a step in the right direction. Chammartin says “persons living with mental illness who have been in contact with the Justice System have a much better chance of recovery when they are dealt with in a responsive court system where the staff involved have important training on how to work with and support these persons.” Chammartin adds, “investments in the mental health service system that are coming with this program are critical to not only reducing recidivism, but preventing persons with mental illness in coming into contact with the justice system in the first place.”

In contrast to public misperception, the majority of persons with mental illness are far more likely to be victims of crime than perpetrators, especially violent crime. Though CMHA Winnipeg Region supports ensuring that we have a justice system that responds to the needs of persons with mental illness no matter the type of crime, we understand and support the decision to begin this project focusing on where the majority of the persons with mental illness are in contact with the system, often classified as misdemeanours, petty and nonviolent crime.

The Mental-Health Court is anticipated to begin hearing cases in the winter of 2011.

For more information contact:

Nicole Chammartin, CMHA
982-6103, direct line
479-3116, cell
<a href="mailto:nicolec@cmhawpg.mb.ca">nicolec@cmhawpg.mb.ca</a>

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.