

CANADA STANDING OUT IN MENTAL HEALTH INNOVATION AT APEC

As Canadians we tend to be timid in many global policy areas, but mental health is truly an area where Canada has never taken a back seat.

Last quarter I wrote about Canada's crucial, yet mostly unknown, leadership role in helping Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) economies adopt principles for ethics in the biopharmaceutical sector. Those exact principles will act as guidelines for industry within the 21-member countries to implement codes of ethics of their own. With Canada's help we have the potential to revolutionize healthcare systems around the world.

I made a case for a health care system Canada can stand behind, but there's more to the story still, and again Canada is at the centre.

There truly is no shortage of innovative projects underway for Canadians. These projects will have a clear impact on the Canadian health sector, and the work speaks for itself.

The APEC forum has chosen Canada to become a global centre of excellence in mental healthcare. This will involve hosting an international digital hub to coordinate and promote advanced research from some of the world's leading universities and health institutes involved in the diagnosis, treatment and public awareness of mental disorders.

The APEC hub, which will be hosted at the University of British Columbia in collaboration with the University of Alberta and the Mood Disorders Society of Canada (MDSC), will serve as a permanent and far-reaching working effort between Canadian mental health researchers across the country and their counterparts in the United States, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and more than a dozen other economies of the Asia-Pacific region.

And Canadians stand to benefit most. Canada's leadership in the project will benefit those Canadians suffering with mental disorders by guaranteeing access to world-class research from across Canada and the APEC economies, and to the latest breakthroughs in early intervention and treatments.

As MDSC and others have advocated for before, there is an urgent need to address mental wellness in Canada. Mental disorders are one of Canada's leading healthcare challenges. Among Canadian military members and veterans, First Nations, Inuit and Métis and youth, depression is the second most frequent cause of death. Over the past decade, rates of post-traumatic stress disorder have doubled in

the Canadian military and among first responders. An estimated two-thirds of indigenous survivors of residential schools have suffered from PTSD.

Not only will Canada's leading role in this global effort, which will formally be launched later this year, ensure the inclusion of issues important to Canada, such as mental wellness among indigenous peoples, but it will also allow Canadian leaders in government, NGOs and industry the opportunity to be at the forefront of the battle against mental illness.

Canada and its APEC partners face similar obstacles to mental wellness. Family physicians commonly lack the specialized training in the early diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders, while more than half suffering depression-related illnesses will leave their doctor's office without effective solutions.

Canada's work at APEC will also address other obstacles such as shortages of specialists, inadequate prevention programs, and limited access to quality care with continuity and effective medications.

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In keeping with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's vow to make the fight against mental disorders a priority, this international effort fronted by Canada will help to strengthen ties between Canada and some of our most important trading partners, including China, Japan and South Korea.

Canada's strong initiative for APEC is a bold move, but it's a sign of a country that is strong, aligned and proactive.

Too many suffer from mental health disorders without adequate treatment. Health care touches all Canadians in the most personal of ways, but these aren't personal problems.

Canada's leadership in this unprecedented program will benefit Canadians suffering from mental health problems by guaranteeing access to the resulting world-class research, best practices and global breakthroughs in early intervention and treatments for sufferers, and assistance to their families and caregivers.

If there is something our health care system should be proactive about, this is it. Canada's action on this program warrants national pride and attention. **P&I**



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