



Canadian Mental
Health Association
Champlain East
Mental health for all

Association canadienne
pour la santé mentale
Champlain Est
La santé mentale pour tous

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Submitted by: Canadian Mental Health Association Champlain East

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Not long ago, a woman who had overcome a mental health crisis wrote a letter to a younger version of herself, detailing the challenges she would face.

"Your grades will drop. You will actually get into academic probation," [Daisy Martinez wrote](#) on social media. "You will get very depressed and start doing drugs. You will attempt suicide a few times, but this will [lead you] to receive help."

Mental health advocates hope more people will follow her lead in speaking openly about mental health challenges. For that reason, they are promoting Mental Illness Awareness Week (MIAW), which will take place the week starting October 3. This year, the focus will be on the importance of advocating for better care for people with serious mental illness (SMI).

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the authoritative guide to the diagnosis of mental disorders, defines SMI as "a mental, behavioural, or emotional disorder resulting in serious functional impairment, which substantially interferes with or limits one or more major life activities."

Schizophrenia is considered a serious mental illness as are bipolar disorder, major depression and other disorders that cause serious functional impairment.

Experts estimate that about five percent of adults in the United States suffer from serious mental illness. That number is roughly the same in Canada, where [one in five Canadians experience mental illness or addiction](#) in any given year.

The vast majority of individuals with serious mental illness have a poor quality of life. For example, [While 80 percent of them want to work, only 10 to 30 percent of them are employed](#).

Forms of advocacy

There are many ways to become an advocate. If you're struggling with mental illness, you don't have to talk about it on social media as Martinez did. You could make a difference by sharing your story with just one family member, friend or neighbour.

You could also support someone who needs help, volunteer with a mental health organization, encourage local politicians to prioritize mental healthcare or just speak up when you hear someone speaking about mental illness in a way that promotes stigmatization of it.



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You could also organize or take part in an event that promotes awareness of mental health and serious mental illness. This year, for example, you could get involved in a virtual awareness walk and other events organized by [Canadian Mental Health Association \(CMHA\) Champlain East](#). Visit them on Facebook at CMHAEast. A mini getaway Best Western in Cornwall and gift card prize package available to be won courtesy of Best Western Parkway Inn & Conference Centre and YourTV Cornwall. For details call or email Angele D'Alessio 613-551-9253 or dalessioa@cmha-east.on.ca #MIAW2021 #EndStigma

Perhaps the biggest step you could take in helping to promote understanding of mental illness is to keep in mind the words of former U.S. President Bill Clinton. In a 1999 address he said, "mental illness is nothing to be ashamed of, but stigma and bias shame us all."

The information provided is not a substitute for professional advice. If you need advice, please consult a qualified health care professional. For further information or if you want to access our services at CMHA, please call 1-800-493-8271 or visit our web site at www.cmha-east.on.ca.