

CANADIAN ALLIANCE
ON MENTAL ILLNESS
AND MENTAL HEALTH



ALLIANCE CANADIENNE
POUR LA MALADIE MENTALE
ET LA SANTÉ MENTALE

141 Laurier Avenue West/Ouest, Suite 701, Ottawa, ON, K1P 5J3

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health issues open letter regarding recent mental health coverage in the Canadian media

Ottawa, Ontario (March 10, 2009)

The Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH) has today issued an open letter to the Canadian public calling for greater understanding of mental health issues given recent press coverage of the Vince Li and Ashley Smith cases.

“In the case of Vince Li - found not criminally responsible for the murder of Timothy McLean because Li suffers from a mental illness - public response has largely reinforced stereotypes about the dangers of people with mental illness” says Annette Osted, CAMIMH member and Chair of the organization’s Mental Health Literacy Committee. “And in the case of Ashley Smith, an apparent complete lack of understanding about the effects of prolonged emotional distress and the impact of incarceration on an emotionally vulnerable young woman led to a situation where correctional officers stood by and watched as she killed herself.”

In its letter the Alliance calls for mental health awareness programs to be instituted that would increase the awareness of the Canadian public about mental health and illness, and simultaneously decrease the stigma that surrounds mental illnesses.

“Our compassion for the victims in both of these cases should also lead us to challenge the stigma surrounding mental illness and other obstacles that interfere with the diagnosis, treatment and recovery of affected people. We cannot truly say that justice will be served in the cases of Timothy McLean and Ashley Smith until we also examine the fact that gaps in treatment, stigma, fear, discrimination and cultural perceptions of mental illness also played a role in these tragedies” said Mrs. Osted.

About the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health

Established in 1998, CAMIMH is a national voice for action on mental illness and mental health. It is an alliance of organizations whose activities span the broad continuum of mental health. They represent: consumers and their families; health care and social service providers; professional associations; and community and research organizations. Together, they constitute a vibrant network of national, provincial and community-based organizations dedicated to serving the mental health needs of the people of Canada.

- 30 -

For more information, or to schedule interviews please contact:

Diana Devlin, Communications Co-ordinator
(613) 232 8218, (613) 324 0565
ddevlin@camimh.ca