

## *Get the Facts:*

### **THE BC MENTAL HEALTH ACT = “THE RIGHT TO BE WELL”**

- Approximately one in 100 people worldwide suffer from schizophrenia—about 50,000 of our BC neighbours.
- Because schizophrenia is a brain disorder, many people who are severely ill do not recognize the fact that they are unwell.<sup>1</sup> The result is that—*due to the very nature of their disability*—they are often unable to voluntarily exercise their right to available treatment.

### **BC’s Mental Health Act is about the care and protection of our citizens who are affected by such illnesses.**

- Early treatment and stabilization on medication greatly improves the prognosis for people with chronic and severe brain disorders. New and better antipsychotic medications continue to become available, and there is a great explosion of information being generated by new brain research. *With timely and adequate treatment and support*, many people can now live safely and with dignity in the community.
- Hospitalization and treatment of people too ill to seek care for themselves should never be equated with incarceration in the criminal justice system. To do so not only adds to outdated stigma and prejudice about mental illness—it also deprives citizens of their *fundamental right to proper medical treatment and care*.
- Unfortunately, such confusion is common. As a result, there are already far too many people with severe and chronic brain disorders such as schizophrenia who have “fallen through the cracks” of the system. They have been abandoned to our streets and prisons simply because they are not well enough to seek treatment for themselves.
- Without treatment, some people commit crimes and are found not guilty by reason of mental disorder. Ironically, they will then receive much-needed treatment provided by the Forensic Psychiatric Commission, through the Mental Health Act.
- Treatment works. But many severely ill people are not able to access it. Some are literally dying of neglect. Furthermore, suicide rates among this population are alarmingly high. For example, 50% of all people with schizophrenia will attempt suicide; 12% to 15% will succeed.
- If we fail to advocate for the essential right to treatment under the Mental Health Act, this situation will worsen.

**THE PURPOSE OF THE BC MENTAL HEALTH ACT IS TO HELP SEVERELY ILL PEOPLE RECEIVE THE TREATMENT AND CARE THEY NEED AND DESERVE SO THAT THEY CAN REGAIN THEIR HEALTH.**



A REASON TO HOPE. THE MEANS TO COPE.  
BRITISH COLUMBIA SCHIZOPHRENIA SOCIETY

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<sup>1</sup>The medical term for this condition is *anosognosia*. It applies to numerous brain disorders.