

Press Release
5th July 2012

International panel of experts issue the *Toronto Charter for Mental Health and Obesity*

TORONTO, July 5– Policy makers and health professionals have their work cut out for them when it comes to treating co-existing obesity and mental illness, if an international group of opinion leaders has their way.

In response to a worldwide epidemic of obesity and mental health disorders, the Canadian Obesity Network (CON-RCO) and the International Association for the Study of Obesity (IASO) in partnership with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) organized a *Hot Topic Conference on Obesity and Mental Health*, in Toronto, Canada June 26th-28th.

Although obesity and mental illness are major health issues that affect millions of Canadians, the links between them are not well understood. Excess weight, beyond its adverse physiological consequences, also affects self-esteem, body image and eating behaviours while promoting depression and anxiety. The opposite is also true – a disproportionate number of patients living with mental health challenges struggle with obesity, diabetes, heart disease and premature mortality, all of which are interrelated. Both illnesses are associated with significant bias and discrimination.

As part of the event, hundreds of participants ratified the *Toronto Charter for Mental Health and Obesity*, a detailed call to action for health system funders, researchers and health practitioners to deal with this emerging issue. The Charter lists specific calls to action for governments and health providers to reduce the global burden of obesity and mental illness, chief among them:

- Mandatory education for health professionals on how to treat obesity and co-morbid mental illness.
- Immediate affirmative action by policy makers and funders to prioritize research and mandatory evaluation of interventions.
- Conducting a cost-analysis of mental illness co-morbid with obesity
- Compiling standards for responsible media coverage of obesity management and healthy body image.

The full *Toronto Charter for Mental Health and Obesity* can be viewed and [downloaded here](#).

“Separately, mental illness and obesity are understood to be huge health challenges, and it’s an uphill battle for health systems to keep up with patients’ needs,” says Dr. Arya M. Sharma, scientific director for CON-RCO. “But taken together, the issue is greater than even the sum of its parts. The Charter was conceived as a discussion starter among stakeholders, and the first step towards real action.”

“The fields of obesity and mental health are intimately linked, of enormous public and personal health importance but both remain under-recognized, under-resourced and under-researched,” Professor Nick Finan, chair of the IASO’s Education and Management Task Force, said. “It is our hope that the Charter begins to change all of that.”

<30>

For more information on CON-RCO, or for assistance with obesity related stories, contact:
Dr. Arya M. Sharma, Scientific Director, Canadian Obesity Network
Tel: 780-863-1619
Email: sharma@obesitynetwork.ca

About the Canadian Obesity Network – Réseau canadien en obésité (CON-RCO)

CON-RCO was founded in 2006 to link the research, policy and practice communities to advance the development

and delivery of effective obesity prevention and treatment solutions. The network's core strategies focus on addressing the stigma associated with excess weight, changing the way policy makers and health professionals approach obesity, and improving access to prevention and treatment resources. Currently, more than 7,000 professionals in Canada are members of the network. CON-RCO is hosted by the University of Alberta, and is based at the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Edmonton, AB. www.obesitynetwork.ca