



22 February 2016

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0A2
Canada

Regarding: An open letter to address the opportunity to challenge the stigma of mental illness, raise awareness of recovery and inspire hope

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

I am writing in relation to the recent request made to you by Keith Mahar to initiate an investigation into activities involving the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). Specifically, I wish to address how such an investigation has the potential to effectively challenge the stigma of mental illness, raise awareness of mental health recovery and inspire hope for people with mental illness and their families.

Mr. Mahar was diagnosed with bipolar disorder nearly twenty years ago while originally campaigning against the company subsidy scheme central to his allegations of long-term systemic corruption at the CRTC. Prior to Mr. Mahar's diagnosis, his opposition to the scheme resulted in questions in the House of Commons to then Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, and he was designated as a public interest litigant in *Mahar v Rogers Cablesystems Ltd.*, a precedent-setting legal case that still influences decisions on costs in public interest litigation cases in Canada and internationally.

Mr. Mahar's story of experiencing severe mental illness in Canada and mental health recovery in Australia was published last year in *Coming Out Proud To Erase the Stigma of Mental Illness*, a collection of stories and essays by people with lived experience of mental illness and recovery. Former U.S. First Lady Rosalynn Carter described it as "a seminal work that confronts stigma head on". In his chapter, Mr. Mahar reports that mental illness interrupted his campaign to address the CRTC scheme and that he has returned to finish the campaign, as documented on his website www.onemedialaw.com.

Stigma continues to be one of the largest barriers to mental health recovery and it has been the focus of my research for nearly two decades. We know that stigma interferes with a person's ability to obtain work, housing and medical care. Stigma also dissuades people from seeking mental health care. Moreover, a significant percentage of people with mental illness accept false negative stereotypes as legitimate and internalize them,

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a highly destructive process called self-stigma, which stops people from even trying to improve the quality of their lives and leads to poor recovery outcomes.

Research has shown that erasing stigma is best accomplished through contact between people with a “hidden” condition, like mental illness, and the rest of the population. Towards this end, through the National Consortium on Stigma and Empowerment, our group developed Honest, Open, Proud, a program available free of charge online to help fellow citizens with mental illness decide whether and how to strategically disclose their mental health experiences (www.HOPprogram.org).

Social role models can play an important function in mental health recovery by enhancing the self-efficacy of other individuals, thereby increasing their motivation to try to overcome their own challenges. Similarly, people with a lived experience of mental illness and recovery are in a position to reduce self-stigma and its damaging consequences. In addition to being the Australian leader of Honest, Open, Proud, Mr. Mahar is a qualified social worker employed in a recovery-oriented mental health program funded by the Australian Government.

If you choose to initiate an investigation into the company subsidy scheme as requested by Mr. Mahar, there inevitably will be media coverage of his public interest campaign to address this issue, including his personal experience of severe mental illness and recovery. Knowledge of Mr. Mahar’s story will serve to challenge the stigma of mental illness, raise awareness of recovery, and inspire hope for people with mental health problems and their families.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P W Corrigan'.

Patrick W. Corrigan