



Association canadienne  
pour la santé mentale  
Montréal

# Aging *in* *Good* Mental Health **A CARE PROVIDER'S GUIDE**



The **Aging in Good Mental Health, A Care Provider's Guide** is printed on Rolland Opaque 50 paper, containing 50% postconsumer waste fibers, is certified ÉcoLogo and made using biogas energy.



## FOREWORD

*Aging in Good Mental Health* is a guide published by the Canadian Mental Health Association – Montréal Branch. It is a reference and support tool designed for care providers, facilitators or volunteers working with seniors (hereafter called "care providers"), and for caregivers of elderly people. The guide encourages us to reflect on our attitudes, perceptions and prejudices toward older adults, and presents reference points to enhance understanding of aging and foster respectful communication. It also provides information that clarifies difficulties related to aging and those due to psychological distress or to more serious mental disorders or cognitive impairment. The guide explores concrete ways of improving our interactions with

seniors so that we can give them the best support possible and help them thrive.

**However, IN NO CASE does this guide replace advice from a recognized health professional (doctor, psychologist, social worker or other professional).**

Because we know that the well-being of older individuals and their families is important to you, do not hesitate to talk to a professional if you are dealing with complex situations or when you are in doubt.

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# What is mental health?

Each of us has an idea of the overall meaning of the expressions “mental health”, “feeling good about yourself” or “being happy”. According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, the main characteristics of good mental health are as follows:

- 1 Ability to enjoy life** – Can you live in the moment and appreciate the “now”? Are you able to learn from the past and plan for the future without dwelling on things you can't change or predict?
- 2 Resilience** – Are you able to bounce back from hard times? Can you manage the stress of a serious life event without losing your optimism and a sense of perspective?
- 3 Balance** – Are you able to juggle the many aspects of your life? Can you recognize when you might be devoting too much time to one aspect at the expense of others? Are you able to make changes to restore balance when necessary?
- 4 Self-actualization** – Are you aware of your strengths? Do you recognize and develop your strengths so that you can reach your full potential?
- 5 Flexibility** – Do you feel and express a range of emotions? When a problem arises, can you change your expectations—of life, others, yourself—to solve the problem and feel better?

# Role of care providers in mental health promotion and prevention of mental illness

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, mental health is “the capacity of each and all of us to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice, interconnections and personal dignity”<sup>1</sup>.

The definition of an older person in good mental health is one who can “feel and express emotions appropriately, reason soundly, have good relationships with other people, take their place in society, and exercise their power to decide”<sup>2</sup> [Translation].

A comprehensive approach to human beings based on individuals' potentials and multiple resources necessitates both promotion of personal and collective well-being, and prevention of mental health problems. Whether you are a community care provider or facilitator, health professional or volunteer, the following strategies will enable you to foster seniors' mental health:

## 1 Identify and focus on protective factors

Protective factors help reduce risks associated with mental illness and promote successful development of skills and coping models. These factors act as catalysts by increasing tenfold the strengths of people who must come to terms with difficulties in their environments and increase their resilience.

In this regard, seven key elements for aging well have been documented in the literature<sup>3</sup> and will be discussed more thoroughly in this guide:

- Maintaining an acceptable level of independence.
- Staying in control of events and taking responsibility for them.
- Maintaining good coping skills.
- Preserving good emotional relationships.
- Staying engaged in society.
- Having enough income.
- Giving meaning to one's life.

1 Government of Canada (Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada) (2006). *The Human Face of Mental Health and Mental Illness in Canada*, p. 2.

2 Champagne, R., P. Ladouceur, H. De Ravinel and J. Stryckman (1992). *La vieillesse : voie d'évitement... ou voie d'avenir*, Gaëtan Morin Éditeur, Montréal, p. 11.

3 Extracted from: De Ladoucette, O. (2011). *Le nouveau guide du bien vieillir*, Odile Jacob, Paris, p. 546.