

# Schizophrenia Facts for Families



## Advocacy: Working for change

### more info:

For further information, please contact us at:

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*This information should not be used as a substitute for the advice of a professional.  
Consult a physician or a lawyer to discuss your individual facts and circumstances.*



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SOCIÉTÉ ONTARIENNE DE LA SCHIZOPHRÉNIE  
UNE SOURCE D'ESPOIR, DE SOUTIEN ET D'ENTRAÏDE.

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## Where can I get more information?

The Schizophrenia Society of Ontario is here to help. We're a family-based organization that understands what it's like to live with schizophrenia. Our objectives are to:

- > Provide family support and education
- > Promote public awareness and understanding
- > Advocate for better legislation and services for people with schizophrenia
- > Promote research into the causes, treatment and cure of schizophrenia

## "to alleviate the suffering caused by schizophrenia"



## What specific things can I do to help? (continued...)

- > Encourage local media to cover stories about people with schizophrenia.
- > Stay up-to-date on laws that affect people with mental illness. Express your point of view.
- > Learn about the housing situation in your community. There may be ways you can help.
- > Participate in fundraising efforts to support research.
- > Volunteer with your local hospital or mental health organization.
- > Form a link with related health or social service organizations.
- > Distribute books/pamphlets on schizophrenia to local organizations—libraries, schools, community centres, hospitals.
- > Educate and involve health professionals who are interested in helping.

# What is advocacy?

Advocacy means building support for a cause to bring about change. Being an advocate often means giving a voice to people who cannot speak for themselves.

If you've just learned that a family member has schizophrenia, you're probably beginning to see the need for advocacy and education.

If you have been dealing with schizophrenia in your family for a long time, chances are you're an experienced advocate. You've probably had to work to get help and support, find treatment services, and navigate government programs.

Successful advocates know the facts, have a clear goal, put everything in writing, and stay focused and determined. Schizophrenia is a disease that needs advocacy on a large scale in order to:

- > Help dispel myths and misunderstandings about the disease by raising public awareness.
- > Ensure that everyone with the disease has access to quality treatment services and medication.
- > Help ensure adequate funding for schizophrenia research and community supports.
- > Encourage politicians and bureaucrats to keep mental health issues high on the public agenda.

Many family members of people with schizophrenia feel like they have enough to do already without getting involved in advocacy. But if you decide you do want to get involved, it can be a satisfying and healing experience. This brochure will give you some ideas about how to get started.

## The facts: What you should know

- > 1 in 100 people will develop schizophrenia during their lifetime. In Canada, that's about 300,000 people.
- > Schizophrenia affects people in every ethno-cultural and economic group.
- > It most often strikes a person during their late teens or early 20s.
- > Schizophrenia is a brain disease – it is not the result of poor parenting or a weak character. No one can prevent schizophrenia.
- > It is hard to predict who will develop it but scientists are getting close to finding the genes for schizophrenia. That may eventually help them identify people with the disease before it actually causes harm.
- > The direct and indirect costs of schizophrenia in Canada are estimated at \$4.3 billion. Direct costs include hospitalizations and medications. Indirect costs include lost productivity and stress on caregivers.



## How do I get started?

- > First, learn as much as you can about schizophrenia. Take a family information course, read books, attend workshops and conferences.
- > Decide whether you want to work at the local, provincial and/or national level.
- > Decide how much time you want to devote.
- > Decide which issues are most relevant to you. For example housing, research, public awareness, access to treatment, or community services.

## I'm ready to get going... now what?

- > Talk about the illness to everyone who will listen.
- > Learn about the health care system and related services in your community.
- > Join community and government committees related to mental health care.
- > Support your local Schizophrenia Society of Ontario

## What specific things can I do to help?

- > Find out whether your local hospital has someone working on "family advocacy." If not, work to create a family advocacy group. You may be able to get a government grant to help.
- > Write letters to newspapers and other media about schizophrenia, particularly to help correct misinformation. Phone in to radio talk shows on mental health issues.
- > When you see positive efforts by media, police, or others in your community, write letters to thank them.
- > Visit or write to your MPP (Member of Provincial Parliament).
- > If you are bilingual, offer to translate information pamphlets into a second language.
- > Offer to speak to local community service organizations, religious groups, high schools, police trainees, and university/college students in law or health care. Where possible, invite consumers who are doing well to take part in presentations.



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