

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

"Sandwich Generation" at-risk of serious mental health problems, Desjardins Financial Security National Survey on Canadian Health finds

Caring for parents while managing their own lives is leaving them stressed and stretched

Toronto (May 3, 2010) – As the Canadian population continues to age and live longer, many adult children are taking on the added responsibility of caring for elderly parents while managing their own family and professional obligations, a new trend that could have a significant impact on their mental health. Indeed, the Desjardins Financial Security National Survey on Canadian Health results show that they are highly stressed and their burden will increase over the next few years.

The survey defines the sandwich generation as adult children assisting their parents with their daily domestic and/or psychological needs (13 per cent of respondents) and/or financially supporting both parents and children simultaneously (7 per cent). Of those assisting their parents, 47 per cent said that it was a significant source of stress for them. When asked to describe the most stressful activities, the majority said managing the schedules of children and parents, taking parents to one or more health professional and psychologically supporting their parents through illness or disability.

"What this survey is showing us is that adult children are becoming ad-hoc caregivers for their parents without sufficient support. This is a new social phenomenon and it's only the tip of the iceberg," said Taylor Alexander, national CEO of the Canadian Mental Health Association.

"While many elderly parents are financially self-sufficient, some adult children will still be expected to provide assistance that requires more time and attention than money."

"The theme of the 2010 CMHA National Mental Health Week, 'Building your mental health: One support at a time', is particularly appropriate for this issue, as it's clear that many Canadians will need tools and resources to help them juggle the demands of caring for aging parents, growing kids and work responsibilities," said Alexander.

A third of respondents from the sandwich generation (34 per cent) went on to say that they expected that the needs of their parents would increase over the coming years. When further prompted, a third (34 per cent) suggested that the best solution would be to relocate parents to a home better suited to their parents' needs, such as an assisted living or nursing home. Others said that they would seek help from provincial health services (21 per cent) or ask family members for help (13 per cent).

Michele Nowski, director of disability income claims and disability management with Desjardins Financial Security is troubled by these findings. "Obviously, these Canadians are so overwhelmed that they may not know where to turn to ease their burdens," she said. "One important step is to have a frank conversation with your parents about their plans for the future. Making sure you're both on the same page will put you in a better position to handle difficult

situations as they arise. The next important step is to create your own mental health support network for added assistance when required. Employers can play an active role in this by offering their staff flexible work schedules and extended family-leave time as a way of helping reduce their employees' stress.”

You can measure your own stress level by taking the Mood Detector test on the National Mental Health Week Facebook page, and receive tips on how to enhance your own mental health by subscribing to the National Mental Health Week Twitter.

For more information on the Desjardins Financial Security National Survey results, visit www.healthiscool.ca.

About Desjardins Financial Security

Desjardins Financial Security, a subsidiary of Desjardins Group, the largest cooperative financial group in Canada, specializes in providing life insurance, health insurance and retirement savings products to individuals and groups. Every day, over five million Canadians rely on Desjardins Financial Security to ensure their financial well-being. Desjardins Financial Security employs some 3,800 people and administers over \$22.8 billion in assets from offices in several cities across the country, including Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Montréal, Québec, Lévis, Halifax and St. John's. For more information, visit our website at www.desjardinsfinancialsecurity.com.

About the Canadian Mental Health Association

The Canadian Mental Health Association National Office is a leading national voluntary organization within the mental health sector. For more than 90 years, it has existed to promote the mental health of all people in Canada and to serve mental health consumers, their families and friends through education, public awareness, research, advocacy and direct services. In addition to its National office, the CMHA has 11 provincial and territorial Divisions and some 135 Branches and Regions in communities across Canada.

To find more information about mental health, visit the National CMHA website at www.cmha.ca or your local branch at www.cmha-yr.on.ca.