

**IN SEARCH OF A BREAKTHROUGH:  
Can International Business & Science Come Together  
To Advance Global Mental Health in the Global Brain Economy?**

**BRIEFING NOTE**

**Business and Science Forum  
Embassy of Canada  
October 6, 2016**

**Refer:**

[Esorel@gmail.com](mailto:Esorel@gmail.com)

[bill.wilkerson@mentalhealthinternational.ca](mailto:bill.wilkerson@mentalhealthinternational.ca)

**(1-905-885-1751)**

Can International Business and Science come together to advance global mental health in the global brain economy is the “challenge question” of our Business and Science Forum at the Canadian Embassy in Washington, DC on October 6, 2016. This is not a theoretical proposition. It is a pragmatic call for a solutions-oriented public-private global initiative to prevent the disabling and deadly effects of mental disorders including depression, anxiety and substance abuse which are concentrated in working and working age populations.

**TAPPING INTO IDEAS**

At the Business and Science Forum, we want to tap into the ideas, experiences and judgment of those attending this Forum. This ‘invitation-only’ event is intended to facilitate robust discussions and concrete thinking. Participants are invited to put forward proposals that might shape an unprecedented alliance between international business and science to achieve shared goals.

When we refer to international business, we mean the broader business community as employers with a significant and measurable stake in resolving the high rates of mental distress and disorder in working populations. Regarding the public sector, we think of governments as employers with vested interests in the health, including mental health, and in the productive capacity of their employees.

The question posed at the Forum reflects the proposition that government – and taxpayer dollars – cannot alone meet the challenge. There is evidence of this same proposition as it relates to other major issues, including climate change, where there is movement to engage the private sector in climate investments, in a “Green Economy”. In a similar fashion, this Forum will explore whether economic interests can form a basis for investing in global mental health. Major corporations and national economies already bear most of the costs associated with mental illness. Our question raises the prospect of private sector investments in what we might call the “Grey Economy” – the global brain-based economy now placing a heavy premium on brain-based skills to be marshalled on a coherent, strategic basis and argued as plausible, necessary and urgent.

## **THE FUTURE OF JOBS**

The globe's transition from an industrial to a brain economy – originally forecast by the late Peter Drucker 25 years ago – has accelerated. A new report by the World Economic Forum (WEF), 'The Future of Jobs', states that "creativity will become one of the top three skills that workers will need by 2020." Creativity is a cognitive function, a brain skill, and a principal target of the most disabling of all health problems afflicting working populations.

The WEF report goes on to itemize the top 10 skills that will be in greatest demand in a brain-based economy: "complex problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, people management, coordinating with others, emotional intelligence, judgment and decision-making, service orientation, negotiation and cognitive flexibility." Each of these skills requires healthy cognitive functions and each demonstrates that the minds, not the backs, of employees, will do the heavy lifting for business in the 21st century. In short, in a brain economy, human cognition is the ignition of productivity and innovation is a "deliverable" of mental health in the workplace.

## **GLOBAL BURDEN OF DISEASE: Impacting the Grey Economy**

Much of the original interest of corporations and business executives in workplace mental health – now quite active across the world - was triggered by the findings of the original 1996 'Global Burden of Disease Report' done for the WHO and World Bank. The study revealed that disability had overtaken mortality as the principal source of the burden of disease, with depression and anxiety disorders – concentrated heavily in working populations - named as top contributors. Since then, we have come to learn that:

- The demographic and age-related nature of brain-based mental disorders defies the conventional line of thinking that the "aging population" is the principal challenge facing health care systems. Even dementia has a starting point earlier in life;
- The average age of onset of brain-based mental disorders occurs in childhood, adolescence and young adulthood, often becoming a lifelong burden spread across whole generations, spanning the entire work life of millions;
- Mental disorders are the illness with the greatest impact on people of working age, according to the London School of Economics;
- The business and economic costs of mental disorders exceed the costs of clinical care and treatment (by far);
- The economic costs of work years lost and on-the-job downtime – driven by depression and anxiety - are now measured as a percentage of GDP. Indeed, the 2014 OECD study on "Making Mental Health Count: The Social and Economic Costs of Neglecting Mental Health", documents the economic burden of mental disorders and disability on the OECD countries' economies at 4-6% of their GDP.

Last April, the World Bank and World Health Organization came together, in Washington, DC, to declare a joint commitment to the advancement of global mental health and improvement of treatments for the hundreds of millions of people living with mental illness in the world today. This historic development coincides with continuing evidence that mental health care remains seriously underfunded and limited access to care persists. At the same time, the WHO released an analysis demonstrating a significant

return on investment tied to “scaling up” innovations in mental health care on both a population and economic basis.

This analysis parallels a study by the World Economic Forum and KPMG, the international consulting firm, demonstrating a vast range of “misalignments and disincentives” inhibiting the formation of coherent mental health strategies.

Meanwhile, particularly in Canada and Europe, work has been going on to broaden the basis – and thus the sources – of investments in the mental health of working populations and families based on economic interests. A report – ‘BREAKING THROUGH: BRAIN HEALTH IN A BRAIN ECONOMY’ – is available at [www.mentalhealthinternational.ca](http://www.mentalhealthinternational.ca).

### **BUSINESS AND SCIENCE TOGETHER: Framing the Opportunity**

This Forum is intended to provide for a high-level discussion of the merits of engaging the private sector as employers, and governments as employers, with the science community, researchers and health service providers to advance global mental health in the global brain economy. Global Mental Health, an integral part of TOTAL Health, as articulated by Dr. Sorel, provides a pragmatic, strategic framework within which to leverage the interests of business and science into coherent joint action.

Can business and science deliver a message to politicians, public policy-makers, regulators and the wider public as to the significance of mental health to sustainable economic growth and health care systems that deal with 21<sup>st</sup> problems? Business has a stake in this, for employees and for clients: taking action, not only by investing in brain skills but also by investing in brain health, will increase productivity (and hence competitiveness) and avoid loss. Science is making progress with new discoveries, new diagnostics and new treatments, but the benefits resulting from this work need to be extended more quickly to the wider population. Working together, business and science hold the key to unlocking the door to improving brain health in the changing global economy.

The question remains, however: is there the vision, the will and the strategies, to forge new alliances to meet human need and economic opportunity?

For questions, call Bill Wilkerson, Executive Chairman, Mental Health International  
– 1-905-885-1751 and (cell) 1-905-376-9692 - Country Code as needed - 011

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