



**November 13, 2008**

**Dear Editor:**

**Toronto Sun – November 5, 2008**

<http://www.torontosun.com/news/canada/2008/11/05/7308676-sun.html>

**Re: Terror, mentally ill threaten Games**

All too often, the media use sensational language and images that perpetuate stereotypes about mental illness, promote fear, and leads to misinformed conclusions. Such language and representation contributes to the lack of understanding about mental illness, and increases stigma.

Sensationalistic news stories and headlines, such as the above, suggest a strong connection between mental illness and violence. But, most people who are violent do not suffer from mental illnesses and vice versa.

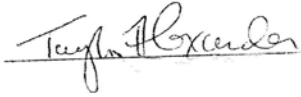
Quote: *“As for the risk posed by mentally unstable people, the reports suggest while some have a propensity for violence, most are disruptive.”* In fact, research shows that people with major mental illness are 2.5 times more likely to be the victims of violence than other members of society. The assumption that every mental illness carries the potential for violence has been proven wrong in many studies. Instead, the strongest predictor of violence and criminal behaviour is not major mental illness, but past history of violence and criminality. Other factors such as age, gender, substance abuse and educational level, among others, contribute much more to violence than mental disorders. The factors which increase the risk of violence are the same whether a person has a mental illness or not.

Quote: *“Canada is facing the threat of terrorist attacks, disruption from mentally disturbed people and corruption from organized criminals...”* This sentence implies a strong connection between terrorists, persons with mental illness and organized criminals. Such stereotypes reinforce unwarranted fears of persons with mental illness because the media is the public’s main source of such information. Studies have shown that exposure to even one shocking media image of violent mental illness (in a movie or an article) increases the expectation that persons labeled as mentally ill are likely to harm others and therefore, makes the media consumer more fearful of all people with mental illness.

As a result, the public tends to view persons with mental illness as a uniform, dangerous and “different” group in society. This view creates powerful barriers to communication and understanding. It’s no wonder that persons with mental

illness often feel hurt, sad and angry when barraged by messages of being flawed, dangerous, and scorned.

Our society must reduce, and where possible, eliminate the stigma and discrimination experienced by persons with mental illness. CMHA is firmly convinced that people often can and do recover from mental illness if provided with appropriate supports, including those that promote inclusion, wellness and hope that tomorrow will be better than today.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Taylor Alexander". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

**Dr. Taylor Alexander**  
**CEO, CMHA, National Office**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lorne Zon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

**Lorne Zon**  
**CEO, CMHA, Ontario Division**