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Understanding 'the black dog'

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About 4,000 Canadians kill themselves every year due to depression and anxiety. Among those most vulnerable -- ages 15 to 24 -- Canada's suicide rate is the third highest in the world.

How do we begin addressing the problem? Canadians need to strip away the misconceptions. Someone suffering from a mental illness isn't necessarily loopy or violent. In many cases, he or she is simply suffering from an affliction such as depression or anxiety, which will disappear when properly treated.

At today's Global Business and Economic **Roundtable** on **Addiction** and Mental Health in Toronto, we will be discussing ways to make Canadians aware of the different categories of mental illness. Right now, mystery breeds fear, which in turn perpetuates stigma.

Young victims of mental illnesses are often so afraid to talk about their problem for fear of being labelled "crazy" that they go untreated. Moreover, many employers are loathe to recognize depression and anxiety as a medical problem

Likewise, victims of all ages are often afraid of being thought weak. But consider Winston Churchill: One of the greatest leaders of the 20th century would routinely take to his bed for days on end when he was "attacked by the black dog," as he referred to his depression. Yet no one would accuse Churchill of lacking in character.

Victims of mental illness need to be able to have open discussions with their doctors, family members and employers. We need to educate people. For too many sufferers, ignorance is proving fatal.

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