

Statement - Senator Denise Batters

Bell Let's Talk Day – Mental Health

January 27, 2016

Honourable Senators, I rise today to celebrate Bell Let's Talk Day, a national initiative to support mental health in Canada. This is the day when Bell Canada donates 5 cents for every text, tweet, Facebook share, and mobile or long-distance phone call made on its network.

Bell has committed more than \$100 million to fund a variety of mental health initiatives across Canada.

Millions of Canadians struggle with mental illness, and even more are caregivers for their spouses, family members and friends who suffer with mental health issues. As you know, I unfortunately have firsthand experience with this. My husband, former Member of Parliament, Dave Batters, struggled with anxiety and depression. At that time, in 2008, the stigma around mental illness and suicide was even more pronounced than it is now.

Despite this, Dave courageously decided to make his struggle public in order to raise awareness about mental health issues. Tragically, Dave died by suicide in 2009. In the wake of that grief and sadness, I committed that I would carry on Dave's cause and "make it count" for other families struggling with these same issues.

Together with some of Dave's closest friends, I have held an annual golf tournament in Regina in memory of Dave. Our five Dave Batters Memorial Golf Tournaments have raised \$159,000 to date. We are looking forward to raising even more at the next one, to be held on September 12<sup>th</sup> this year.

All proceeds from these tournaments have funded a 30 second commercial which airs every year on Bell's CTV station throughout southern Saskatchewan. (You can find this ad on You Tube – just search "Dave Batters". I encourage all of you to share the link to this ad on your Facebook and Twitter pages.)

And, I am proud to announce that we are launching this year's ad campaign again today, in honour of Bell Let's Talk Day.

The commercial ends with this message: "You are not alone. There is help. Please reach out." This message is also conveyed through the Bell campaign. It is so important to reach out, whether you are someone struggling with mental illness, or whether you see someone you care about suffering. It can be as simple as a sincere, "Are you ok?", or letting a friend know you are thinking of them and available to them if they want to talk. Sometimes, it might mean having to ask someone you are worried about whether they might be considering harming themselves or ending their own life. Make that appeal to someone – it can seem so difficult and awkward, but believe me when I tell you, you're not asking them about something they haven't thought about before. And it just might save that person's life.

It is fitting that one of the largest mental health initiatives in this country is sponsored by Bell, because communication and connection to other people is at the heart of healing mental illness and dispelling stigma. I encourage you all to use Bell Let's Talk Day not only to raise awareness and money for the crucial cause of mental health, but as a means of true connection and healing.

Thank you.