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For immediate release

**50 million North Americans will suffer mental illness this year;  
Only one in 10 will get the right treatment;  
Men and women in their prime working years most afflicted**

***Note to Editors and Reporters:** The Roundtable is affiliated with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health which is an affiliate of the University of Toronto and the World Health Organization. Mr. Wilkerson serves on the Corporate Advisory Committee for the Harvard Medical School inquiry into productivity and mental illness*

SAN ANTONIO, Texas (April 23, 2003) – “Fifty-six million Americans and Canadians will suffer from a mental illness in 2003 but only 10 per cent or less will be diagnosed and treated properly,” says Bill Wilkerson, founder of the Toronto-based Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health.

Mr. Wilkerson will include this information in a speech he is giving at the Employee Assistance Society of North America this Friday. Speaking candidly, Wilkerson will tell his audience that publicly-financed health care in Canada and the privately-funded system in the U.S. “have both failed the mentally ill.”

“Comparative arguments as to which system of health care is superior are as empty as a politician’s promise,” Wilkerson says. “Both have neglected the field of mental health for generations.”

The tragedy of this neglect is deepened by the fact that proper treatment is available,” Wilkerson says. “Additionally, the success rate in treating depression and anxiety, the most common serious disorders, is 80 per cent or higher.”

Depression is the leading cause of disability in North America. According to the Roundtable's most recent estimates, the economic cost of medically diagnosed mental health disorders and addictions, including conditions such as burnout, in Canada and the U.S. now exceeds \$308 billion a year.

“Social stigma and misinformation, even in the medical profession, combined with severe under-funding and glaringly fragmented services are the main reasons so few get treatment when they need it,” Mr. Wilkerson says.

Recently, Mr. Wilkerson wrote letters on behalf of employees who had been terminated from the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS) and the Richmond (Virginia) Police Department. “In the worker's request for a fair hearing,” Wilkerson adds, “both their credibility was put into question and their claims not acted upon simply because they suffered depression, and in the one case, by Canadian Human Rights Commission investigators themselves.”

“This suggests a misunderstanding of the nature of the disorder, bringing into question the manner in which their employee rights were dealt with,” says Wilkerson.

Mental illness is “by definition” a business issue because it affects men and women in their prime working years. Wilkerson plans to inform his audience, the average age of onset of depression and anxiety in both Canada and the U.S. is earlier than other countries.

The conditions associated with depression and anxiety seriously hinder the productive capacity of the people who constitute the heart of the labor force. As a result of the low rates of detection and treatment of these mental health disorders, the cost “bulks up” in the form of disability, productivity impairments and on the job downtime, among those Wilkerson calls “the walking wounded”.

Most employees suffering from these disorders try to work through them and do not seek help for fear of losing their job or being shunned at work.