



NOT BEING  
ABLE TO  
SLEEP IS NO  
BADGE OF  
HONOR.

# Breaking the Silence on Sleep Debt

## The Underserved and Overlooked Impact of Suffering with Chronic Insomnia

*"Sleep affects everything, I cannot lead a normal life."*



Mood Disorders Society of Canada  
Société pour les troubles de l'humeur du Canada



### 5 Key Learnings

By engaging directly with a small group of courageous and forthcoming individuals living with chronic insomnia we learned about their experiences.

- 1 The brunt of chronic insomnia is substantial with **prolonged suffering** and **physical, psychological, emotional, employment and social consequences**. The level of disability resulting from repeated sleepless nights is striking and costly for the **individual, workplace, and broader society**.
- 2 **Chronic insomnia is underrecognized** and **poor sleep is normalized** among Canadians diminishing the importance of sleeping soundly to recover and rejuvenate physically and mentally.
- 3 It is very common for people suffering with persistent sleeplessness to **delay seeking help, for fear of being judged** or surmising there is nothing that can be done. Sleep issues tend to "simmer" on the "back burner" particularly for **women in perimenopause and menopause** who may believe they "should be able to handle it on their own."
- 4 Health care professional **hesitance, dismissiveness and misinformation** about chronic insomnia recognition and management leads to delays in care for those individuals who seek treatment and support, referenced people living with chronic insomnia.
- 5 The **well-being and productivity** of people living with chronic insomnia are **significantly impacted**, impairing 'on the job' focus, cognitive function, energy, and mental health, potentially exacerbating depression, anxiety, or other mental illnesses.

### Definition

Chronic insomnia is a condition that **affects one in six Canadians** and appears to be on the rise. Chronic Insomnia is characterized by difficulty falling or staying asleep and occurs at least three nights per week for at least three months.



### Navigating the Way Forward

Five key calls to action that are vital for shaping a society that recognizes the importance of quality sleep and the impact persistent sleeplessness has on families, workplaces, and communities.

*"I took a long time before seeking help, I had to hit rock bottom before getting help."*



Chronic insomnia is substantial with prolonged suffering and physical, emotional, employment and social consequences. Poor sleep affects next day function and should be taken seriously by healthcare professionals and employers. It should be recognized as a distinct medical condition that needs to be addressed.

Address feelings of isolation and inadequacy by meeting people living with insomnia 'where they are at' with compassion and support. Bolster awareness and acceptance of people's unique sleep needs, consequences of disrupted sleep and divergent lifestyles to make insomnia visible and relatable.

The path to insomnia diagnosis and care requires perseverance and resilience. Plagued by delays and dismissal, people experiencing persistent sleeplessness are hesitant to seek support and often feel helpless in the face of judgement and clinical reticence. Boosting sleep training among primary care providers could be the first step in ensuring a capable and accessible patient referral pathway to treatment and support.

A 'one size fits all' approach is not adequate. Considering diverse unmet needs enables care providers, families, and peers to tailor sleep strategies, treatment and support to the unique symptoms and consequences of each individual. We call on decision-makers to ensure people experiencing chronic insomnia have evidence-informed options to treat and manage their condition.

Chronic insomnia can be lonely and dark. People living with sleeplessness need to know they are not alone, there is hope. Connecting people impacted by chronic insomnia through peer support, education and resources can lift spirits, unearth solutions, and enable a better night's sleep.

*"Could you imagine the type of person you could be if you got enough sleep?"*