



Addictions &
Mental Health
Ontario

Dépendances &
santé mentale
d'Ontario



Children's Mental Health Ontario
Santé mentale pour enfants Ontario



Canadian Mental
Health Association
Ontario

May 1, 2020

The Honourable Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building Room 281, Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier Ford,

With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, there is a clear spike in crisis call referrals hitting child, youth and adult mental health and addiction service providers. And previous wait lists, wait times and staff shortages are growing even further. It's evident that a new wave of the COVID-19 pandemic has arrived in the form of a mental health and addictions crisis.

With Mental Health Week (May 4-10) around the corner we would like to take this opportunity to re-engage with you about the issues critical to our sector and thank you for measures your government has taken to date. Most recently, we appreciate the inclusion of mental health and addiction workers in the list of frontline staff who will receive pandemic pay. This is a very welcome step. However, more steps need to be taken to address the mental health and addictions crisis.

Community-based mental health and addictions providers need the Ontario government to take action and implement the addiction and mental health strategy now. We cannot afford to wait. Our sector requires long-term sustainable funding to increase resources and support as well as an immediate investment of \$100 million to respond to COVID-19.

It is critical for government to think of mental health care and addiction services as a priority in its response to COVID-19. Investments and action to support helplines and crisis services are a welcome and important short-term solution to address growing demands. However, it's not enough. Canadians will also need longer-term and more intensive clinical services and supports. Our members need funding urgently for staffing, infection control measures, long-term therapy and counseling to help prevent suicide and ensure Ontarians achieve their recovery goals.

Health Canada, using conservative data based on SARS, estimates that over 11 million Canadians will experience increased levels of stress during the COVID-19 outbreak, and over 2 million Canadians will show signs of traumatic stress. According to ConnexOntario, the mental health, addictions and problem gambling helpline, Ontario has seen a significant increase in calls related to anxiety disorders -- up almost 20 per cent over the past month. We have also seen an increase in deaths due to overdose across the province. Prior to COVID-19, 12 per cent of all children or youth calling into Kids Help Phone were being referred to community agencies such as child and youth mental health centres. With a tripling of crisis calls, the referrals are translating right now to a demand for increased support.

This increased demand is putting pressure on a sector already stretched thin. For example, prior to COVID-19, 28,000 children and youth were waiting in some cases over two years for treatment. We are urging you and the government to prioritize mental health and addiction care as you are plan preparedness measures in the rest of the health care system. This means urgent investments to meet existing and growing mental health and addiction needs of Ontario's children, youth, adults and families.

Mental health and addiction services have been deemed an essential service. These supports remain available to Ontarians during this challenging time. We need to make sure that when people reach out for help, the help is there. Getting the help needed over the long-term is a matter of life and death.

Sincerely,



Adrienne Spafford, CEO, Addictions and Mental Health Ontario



Kim Moran, CEO, Children's Mental Health Ontario



Camille Quenneville, CEO, Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario

- cc. The Honourable Christine Elliott, Minister of Health
 The Honourable Michael Tibollo, Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addiction
 Rana Shamon, Director, Health Policy
 Laurel Brazill, Director, Stakeholder Relations
 Ashley Babcock, Senior Policy Advisor
 Allan MacDermid, Chief of Staff
 Kara Johnson, Director of Stakeholders and Operations
 Matthew McGregor, Director of Policy