

The Honourable Christine Elliott
Deputy Premier and Minister of Health
College Park 5th Floor
777 Bay Street
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

The Honourable Michael Tibollo
Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
Frost Building South 6th Floor
7 Queen's Park Crescent
Toronto, ON M7Z 1Y7

January 21, 2022

Dear Deputy Premier Elliott and Minister Tibollo,

Thank you for your ongoing support for community child and youth mental health care throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and through the recent Omicron surge.

Over the course of the pandemic there has, and continues to be, an increasing demand for community mental health services. Given the impacts of social isolation, school closures, family stress, the loss of consistent support systems, and disruptions in regular routines, our members across the province are seeing increased demand and often complexity of needs in the context of the pandemic.

These increased pressures come on top of a system that was already under-resourced and required additional capacity to keep up with demand for treatment and care. Throughout the pandemic, our members have worked tirelessly to keep up with the growing needs while navigating significant challenges recruiting and retaining staff and implementing new protocols to keep children, youth, and families of our agencies safe and protected.

During the Omicron wave, the healthcare system, including child and youth mental health agencies, are experiencing staff shortages. Prior to this wave, agencies were reporting significant vacancies driven by a mix of factors including challenges due to compensation disparities with other sectors.

Urgent support is needed from the government to stabilize our clinical staff and retain our workforce so that kids and families can continue to access critical-in person mental health services. We have identified three immediate actions to protect community child and youth mental health care:

- 1) **Offer program funding flexibility** to community-based child and youth mental health centres so they can allocate funding and resources to areas they need to keep services in operation. This includes allowing for funding flexibility with this year's funding into next fiscal to help agencies focus on immediate needs, including the health and safety of children, youth, families and staff.
- 2) **Ensure that frontline staff in the community-based child and youth mental health sector have priority and timely access to personal protective equipment (PPE) and testing** so that they can safely provide critical in-person mental health services where virtual services are not possible or ineffective

at treating more severe mental health issues. This includes providing consistency and clarity around eligibility criteria process for accessing PPE and testing.

- 3) **Immediately repeal and replace Bill 124** with more targeted legislation, so that community-based child and youth mental health centres can offer compensation packages that make it possible to attract and retain critical health human resources.

Beyond the pandemic, these actions, combined with new investments, will help address the staffing shortages so that we can meet the rising demand for child and youth mental health care.

We understand the challenges with which you are working, and we appreciate your leadership during this difficult time. We would be more than happy to meet with you and your team to discuss these issues further.

Sincerely,



Mary Kloosterman
Interim CEO, Children's Mental Health Ontario

cc: Melanie Kohn, Assistant Deputy Minister