

# Children's Mental Health Ontario Pre-budget Submission 2023

Dear Minister Bethlenfalvy:

## STABILIZE. SUSTAIN. SYSTEM BUILD.

These are the three components of a proposed investment plan for Ontario's infant, child and youth mental health sector.

We believe every child and family should have timely, equitable access to the mental health care they need, at the right time and in the right place. Notwithstanding many innovative community-based initiatives, we are a system in crisis, and in some cases on the verge of collapse.

We require immediate **stabilization** to support the growing demand for services in Ontario.

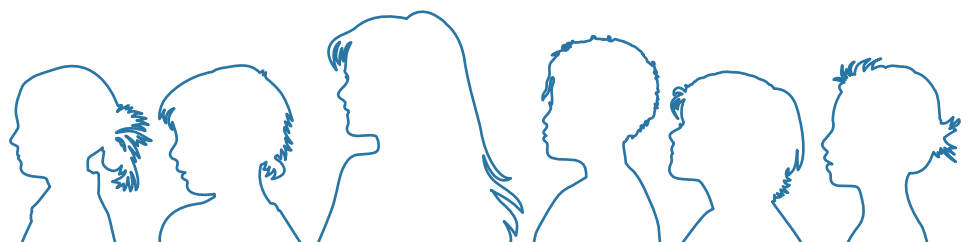
Once stabilized, we need support to **sustain** the community-based sector as part of an integrated system that meets the mental health needs of children, youth and their families.

And from there, we can **build a system** that supports timely, equitable and quality care for all.

CMHO represents Ontario's publicly funded child and youth mental health centres. We have nearly 100 member organizations operating in every region of the province, and our network agencies have over 4,000 professionals that help children, youth and families with government funded counselling and treatment. This includes targeted prevention, early intervention, short- and long-term counselling and therapy, and intensive services such as live in treatment.

On behalf of the community child and youth mental health sector, we are requesting a \$140 million base budget increase, growing over four years, to sustain and expand front-line services. We are requesting \$35 million upfront to stabilize our system, followed by \$35 million over each of the subsequent three years to sustain our services to build our system into the future.

28,000  
KIDS ON THE WAITLIST



## STABILIZE.

Our infant, child and youth mental health system, while historically underfunded, has shown incredible resilience in its ability to support Ontario's children and youth. Our members serve over 130,000 Ontarians each year and that number is growing.

But the community child and youth mental health care sector is facing a crisis, with significant workforce shortages, and at last count over 28,000 kids on the waitlist for care ([CMHO 2020 Wait Times Report](#)).

To meet this growing demand, we need immediate investments and the removal of barriers to stabilize our sector. The wage restrictions imposed by Bill 124 and the historic underfunding of child and youth mental health limits our sector's ability to attract and retain top talent—mental health professionals who provide specialized mental health care through inter-professional teams across the continuum of need and for those complex cases made worse by the pandemic.

We need investments to keep our expert workers. And we need to be able to pay them fair and equitable wages so that they don't leave our sector. Compensated appropriately, we are confident that they can manage current and future demands for services.

Simply put: We have an urgent need to stabilize our workforce to ensure kids get the services they need and deserve.

## SUSTAIN.

Community child and youth mental health requires an integrated, system of care approach to advance a coordinated and responsive system to meet the mental health needs of children and youth.

But fragmented investments and wage disparity with other sectors, like schools and hospitals, will further draw clinicians away from our sector where recruitment and retention are already a challenge. While schools can play a role in addressing some of the needs of children in the province, priority must be placed in community-based treatment and interventions so kids with serious and significant mental health needs get care they need at the right time, and in the right place, by the right professionals.

Applying a system of care approach is a critical part of building, improving, and sustaining an integrated child and youth mental health sector to meet the mental health needs of kids and their families. With the requested investments in years two and three, we can sustain the system and work more collaboratively across the sector to ensure that children get faster access to care.



## SYSTEM BUILD.

We envision an Ontario where all kids and young people get the mental health treatment they need within a high-performing system.

But we have significant wait times—an average of nine months across the province, and up to 2.5 years in the worst-case scenarios. This is unacceptable. Children and youth should be able to get the care they need in a timely manner.

Demand is only growing, made worse by the pandemic, and future investments in community child and youth mental health will ensure timely access for kids and further allow our sector to hire and retain workers to address growing waitlists.

Our requested investments over the four years will expand access to intensive treatment and specialized consultation services, offer more psychotherapy and counselling for children and youth, provide more family therapy and supports, and offer better and more timely crisis support. In addition, the investments will support more coordinated access, service coordination and emphasis on prevention. We need these investments to build the system up.

Bottom line: Kids who need help should be able to get it. No one should be on a lengthy waitlist for service. CMHO and our members want to work with you to stabilize the system, sustain it, and then continue to build it.

Minister, thank you for recognizing the urgent needs of our sector and how with your help we can improve outcomes for Ontario's infants, children, youth and families.

Sincerely,



Tatum Wilson  
CEO, Children's Mental Health Ontario

