

NOW MORE THAN EVER, #KIDSCANTWAIT FOR MENTAL HEALTH CARE

The Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy
Minister of Finance
c/o Budget Secretariat
Frost Building North, 3rd Floor
95 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1Z1

February 10, 2022

Dear Minister Bethlenfalvy:

An entire generation of kids is at risk if kids don't receive the mental health care they so urgently need. With new data and research showing that children's mental health has significantly deteriorated because of the pandemic, we are at a crisis point.

Prior to the pandemic, we calculated 28,000 Ontario children and youth were on waitlists, and for those with serious and intensive needs, those wait times could be 2.5 years. Children were going to the hospital because they couldn't get care in the community.

Now, providers of child and youth mental health care have observed increased client complexity and acuity through the pandemic. Leading international and Ontario researchers have warned that children and youth are experiencing significant mental health deterioration and for those that had mental health and addiction issues before the pandemic, the issue is worse. The effects are even more profound for low-income families, children and youth with disabilities, and for racialized, marginalized and vulnerable families.

The pandemic has exacerbated what we already knew—that kids are in crisis.

Opportunity for the Government

The government's recent investments have helped our members to respond to needs and develop innovative models to provide more families with timely access to service. However, challenges remain. Investments are urgently needed to ensure the system is equipped to manage increases in demand for mental health care. These investments can change the lives of children and families who have suffered even more so during the pandemic.

Our ask:

New investments of \$131 million annually to expand front line services. These will help will reduce wait times for counselling and therapy and help Ontario families access the critical mental health services they need. Additionally, these investments will help build and expand treatment intensive services and specialized consultation services for children with serious needs and will help to integrate family in the context of services. Further, they will allow our sector to scale 24/7 crisis support services to ensure kids and families don't have to go to the emergency department for care.

Ensure better access by removing barriers to care, including wage restrictions. Kids can't get care, and waitlists continue to grow, if they aren't met with available professionals to care for them. We have an urgent need to stabilize our workforce and ensure kids get the care they need and deserve. Wage restrictions imposed by Bill 124 don't allow our sector to attract and retain top talent—expert clinicians who can care for complex cases made worse by the pandemic. Fragmented investments in other sectors, like schools, will further draw clinicians away from our sector where recruitment and retention are already challenges. Schools have an important role to play in the continuum of care, yet priority must be placed in community-based treatment and interventions so kids with serious and significant mental health needs get care.

We know Ontario families have been pushed to their absolute limits. Every child should have timely access to the mental health care they need, at the right time and in the right place. Investing in child and youth mental health care in a community setting will ensure timely access for kids with acute and intensive needs and further allow us to hire and retain workers to address growing waitlists. New investments must prioritize and advance high quality, equitable and accessible mental health care for Ontario's infants, children, youth and families. Your government's investment can help to change the lives of many kids and families and course correct.

Sincerely,



Mary Kloosterman
CEO, Children's Mental Health Ontario