



March 4, 2021

The Honourable Todd Smith, MPP
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services

The Honourable Christine Elliott, MPP
Deputy Premier and Minister of Health

Dear Ministers Smith and Elliott:

On behalf of Ontario's Child and Youth Mental Health Lead Agency Consortium (LAC), I am writing to express LAC members' strong concern regarding the government's recent decision to close the specialized provincial secure mental health treatment program for youth in the youth justice system at Syl Apps Youth Centre.

Experts are very clear that the rates of mental health issues in Ontario's youth justice population are very high – as high as 90 percent. Within that population, there is a sub-population of youth who are very ill and very high-risk. Experts note this subpopulation to be as large as 25 percent.

These very high-risk youth are chronically suicidal, and sometimes psychotic. They have major mental illness and they harm themselves and others. They require a full spectrum of evidence-based interventions, including frequently complex psychopharmaceutical treatment. These are the youth who cannot be effectively supported in 'mainstream' youth justice facilities. They cannot be effectively supported in our community programs. Neither are adequately resourced to address these needs. LAC members see the stark realities for these marginalized youth every day in the communities we represent.

These youth need what Syl Apps Youth Centre is uniquely able to provide — treatment in a secure environment by highly trained clinicians who understand treatment of acute and chronic intensive youth mental illness and co-occurring criminogenic risk. They will require ongoing treatment as adults and need to be transitioned effectively from the youth to adult systems. These are the youth that Syl Apps serves.

If the program at Syl Apps Youth Centre is closed and no new treatment pathways are built for these youth, the outcomes for this population of youth is potentially very dire. An exceptionally adverse impact on all of our communities and on the community child and mental health system will follow, straining an already under-resourced system as it attempts to respond without required capacity. We also note that many multi-service community child and youth mental health providers have also received notice that their mainstream youth justice programs will close, which will further strain their organizational capacity to effectively deliver needed CYMH services.

The Lead Agency Consortium is calling on both of you to give leadership to the development of new treatment pathways for youth in the youth justice system, so these highly marginalized and at-risk youth

receive the specialized treatment they require, within the context of the developing child and youth and lifespan mental health and addictions system.

Regards,



Karen Ingebrigtsen
Co-chair



Linda Dugas
Co-chair



Patrick Dion
Executive Director

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