

April 20, 2021

Hon. Christine Elliott, Minister of Health
Deputy Premier
Ministry of Health
5th Floor, 777 Bay St.
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3
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Dear Minister,

I am writing to you to request you act urgently to ensure the specialized provincial secure custody and detention program at Syl Apps Youth Centre is restored. This program provided specialized and individualized mental health treatment to youth when other youth justice providers found that their existing rehabilitation-focused supports failed to meet the needs of these very vulnerable youth. These youth need your help, and must not be relegated to, at best, ad hoc supports focussed on rehabilitation rather than evidence-based interventions that can treat their mental illness and reduce their likelihood to be involved in the justice system in the future, presenting significant risks to themselves and the public.

My understanding is that this program was funded by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services until its closure on March 1, and that mental health advocates are calling for the program to be transferred to the Ministry of Health, following the transfer of children's mental health to that Ministry. The youth require in-person and regular individualized treatment approaches by a team of specialized nurses, psychiatrists, social workers, and psychologists. They need their specialized treatment to follow them when they are released through careful discharge planning and effective referrals. They need much more than a weekly visit with a social worker, access to group programs and a monthly check in with a part-time psychologist. This can best be facilitated through the Ministry of Health.

As you may know, the Wellesley Institute works in research and policy to improve health and health equity through action on the social determinants of health. The mental health of these youth is a key predictor of future negative physical health results. Becoming justice-involved is also a key predictor of inequitable mental and physical health outcomes, as well as other social determinants of health, particularly poverty and homelessness. Canada's justice-involved population is vastly disproportionately Black and Indigenous – your efforts to improve outcomes for this population is important to anti-Black racism and reconciliation efforts.

Once again, I urge you to act urgently to ensure this program is restored so these children are given a chance to heal.

Sincerely,



Kwame McKenzie
Chief Executive Officer
Wellesley Institute

Cc: Hon. Michael A. Tibollo, Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
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Hon. Todd Smith, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
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