

The Honourable Christine Elliott  
Minister of Health  
777 Bay Street, 5th Floor  
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2J3

The Honourable Michael Tibollo  
Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions  
777 Bay Street, 5th Floor  
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2J3

The Honourable Todd Smith  
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services  
80 Grosvenor Street, Hepburn Block, 6th Floor  
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1E9

April 14, 2021

Dear Minister Elliott, Minister Tibollo and Minister Smith,

The decision to eliminate on-site mental health services in the youth justice system for seriously ill young people at Syl Apps Youth Centre (SAYC) will result in poorer outcomes for this population already at risk of mental health crisis admissions to hospitals, placing increased pressure on stretched pediatric acute care health services. Accordingly, we are writing to request that admissions to SAYC be immediately re-opened and these programs be transferred to the administration of the Ministry of Health. This will allow an integrated approach to meeting the mental health needs of this population that seeks to avoid unnecessary hospital admissions.

International evidence is clear that up to 90% of youth in the youth justice system will have one mental health disorder, and 25% have acute and complex mental illness requiring specialized treatment.

For clarity, SickKids Telemental Health Program has a specific component dedicated to the youth justice system, at a provincial level. The program's mandate is to provide child and youth mental health specialist (predominantly psychiatrists) consultation to "primary care" service providers, including physicians, nurse practitioners, social workers, probation officers and other front-line staff across the province. To be clear, the program itself does not provide treatment, instead, it is intended to build competence and confidence with local, on site primary care providers via a suite of direct, indirect, and professional development services. The service is meant to enhance local care, regardless of the community or program, to help address knowledge and skill gaps; however, **the program cannot be considered a replacement for the mental health treatment needs or the milieus that is often critical for such high-risk youth.**

Children and youth in the youth justice system deserve the same access to clinical mental health treatment as those outside the youth system. If Syl Apps Youth Centre is closed, justice involved youth with complex mental illness will no longer have access to the treatment matched to their level of need. When they fail to get the help they need, they are at very high risk of landing in hospitals – including at SickKids and CHEO – in crisis. Longer-term, these untreated or under-treated mental health and addiction issues will have a lifelong impact on the health

outcomes of these youth and create higher costs for social, justice and health care systems. Given the current pandemic and the amplification of mental health needs across all sectors, this is now of even greater concern.

Serious mental health issues are on the rise among youth, and hospitals are under immense pressure with rising hospitalizations for children and youth with eating disorders, suicidality and substance use. We urge you to immediately re-open admissions and transfer this specialized mental health program to the Ministry of Health. Our teams would be pleased to support the Ministries' decision to implement this transfer.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ronald Cohn  
President and CEO of The Hospital for Sick Children

Alex Munter  
President and Chief Executive Officer, Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario

cc. Heather Watt, Chief of Staff, Minister of Health  
Vijay Chauhan, Chief of Staff, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services  
Allan MacDermid, Chief of Staff, Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions  
Janet Menard, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services  
David Mitchell, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services  
Helen Angus, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health  
Melanie Fraser, Associate Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health  
Melanie Kohn, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health  
Kimberly Moran, CEO, Children's Mental Health Ontario