



Ontario Shores

Centre for Mental Health Sciences

March 10, 2021

Minister Christine Elliott

Dear Minister Elliott,

Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences (Ontario Shores) shares concerns expressed by other mental health providers, that the closure of beds in Ontario's Youth Justice Centres without clear pathways to quality care will create a significant gap for youth who require specialized mental health services.

Changes related to underutilization of facilities is understandable, but this is a pivotal time for the Province to ensure this under-served group has clear pathways to access specialized mental health care.

The Province recognizes that part of the increase in mental health and addictions care is connected to youth. It is essential that youth with complex mental health needs are not lost among these changes and that this government recognizes the specialized needs of this population. Studies suggest that up to two-thirds of those in youth justice facilities have a diagnosable mental health disorder and many with multiple disorders. ¹

These recent changes seem to have been made without a deep understanding and planning for the mental health needs of young people in the youth justice system. The need for planning and critical thinking around mental health is echoed in Ontario's own Research Program and can be applied to this population.

“It is critical to understand what is happening across the mental health system. Understanding trends facilitates system planning. These indicators can serve as benchmarks for quality improvement and policy development.”

– Dr. Paul Kurdyak, Mental Health & Addictions Research Program Lead, ICES

¹ (Schubert and Mulvey 2014; Schubert, Mulvey, and Glasheen 2011)

It is also important to remind decision makers that like any other chronic illnesses, those with complex conditions require specialized supports and care. Without that in place, we are doing a disservice to young people who, despite an early trajectory with the legal system, can have a bright future.

Along with Kinark Child and Family Services, Ontario Shores is ready to work with government and the system to address this gap in service for Ontario's most marginalized young people.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Karim Mamdani".

Karim Mamdani
President and CEO
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cc: H. Watt