

# No Time To Wait

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**BUDGET SUBMISSION 2023**

# There is a mental health and addiction crisis in Ontario.



Today in Ontario, as many as 2.9 million people — 20 per cent of our population — are struggling with their mental health and substance use. **The demand for mental health and substance use health supports has never been as high as it is right now.**

While some are fortunate enough to get access to publicly funded mental health and addiction supports through community-based organizations, specialty hospitals or pay for private care — many more are sitting on wait lists.

**Across our province  
people are waiting:**



days for  
**substance use  
health services,**



days for  
**mental health  
support**



days for  
**supportive  
housing**

Without timely access to the right supports, where and when they need it, **Ontarians are facing worsening health conditions.**

This leads to increased medical leaves from work, lost jobs, fractured relationships with families and support systems, repeated visits to emergency rooms, and in the worst of cases overdose or suicide. **The time for action is now.**

**We are calling on the Ontario government to increase baseline funding for the mental health and addictions sector by \$130 million annually to help ensure all Ontarians have access to high-quality, easily accessible support throughout their lifetime, where and when they need it, as envisioned in the Roadmap to Wellness.**

**We are also calling for the development of a staffing strategy for the mental health and addiction sector to address the low and inequitable wages, and supply of workers within the sector, that impact mental health, substance use health and addictions organization's ability to attract, recruit and retain staff.**

Ontario's mental health and addiction sector is in a state of crisis.

**There is no time to wait.**

The longer Ontarians are unable to get the community mental health and addiction supports they need, the greater their needs become, resulting in **even greater pressure on an already-strained health system in Ontario.**

As people wait to receive care, their conditions worsen, forcing them to rely on the only immediate supports available — from overwhelmed hospitals and emergency departments. To ensure that Ontarians have access to appropriate mental health and substance use health supports, we must intervene early, and enhance availability of services closest to home, by **investing in community mental health and substance use health services.**

Ontario’s community mental health and substance use health services support Ontarians in their recovery by providing a diverse set of community-based treatments including but not limited to: counselling, structured psychotherapy, case management, withdrawal management services, residential treatment, peer support, family support, harm reduction supports, and supportive housing.

These services are proven to help hundreds of thousands of Ontarians a year on their journey to recovery and better health. **Community mental health and addiction supports are proven to be a cost-effective and crucial way of providing care and supporting re-integration into daily life.**

**The Cost Benefit of Community Care**

COST PER DAY

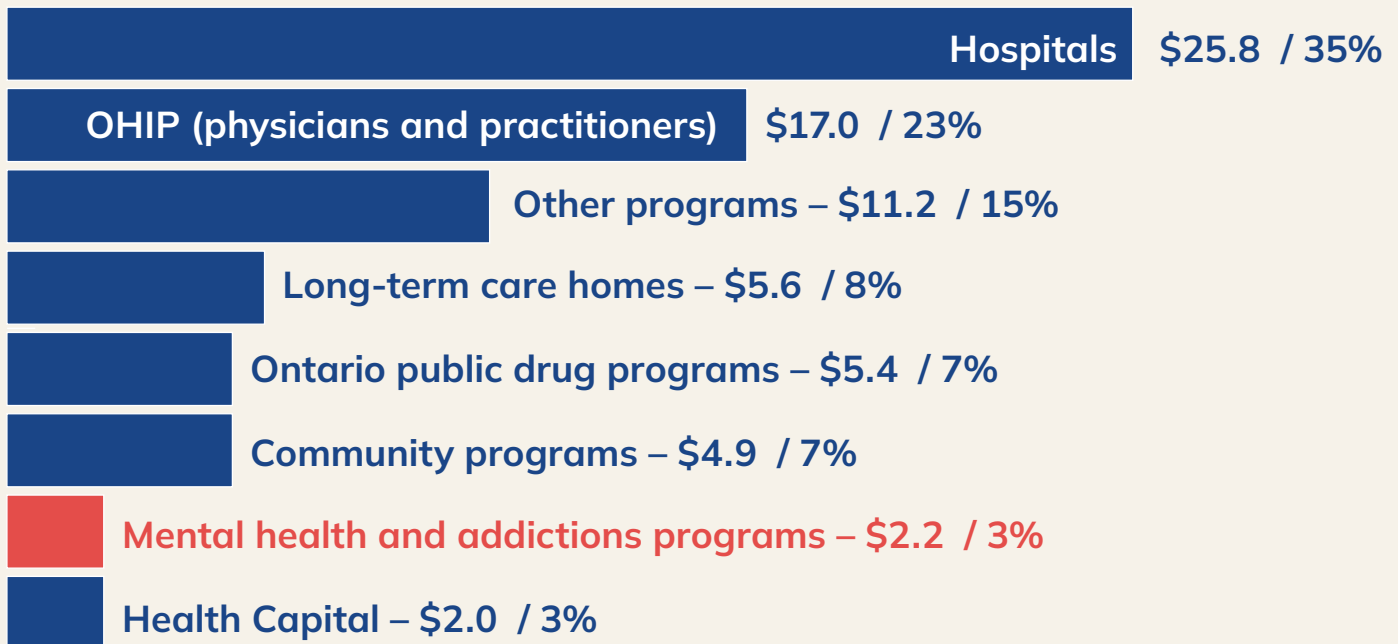


However, community based providers are struggling to keep up with the rising costs of providing care. Community-based providers are unable to sustain current levels of service on budgets that **have not seen an increase in a decade**, let alone expand services to the increasing number of Ontarians who need them.

And while \$13 billion is spent annually on health care outcomes associated with substance use across Canada, most costs are not on health services for people with acute “addictions;” rather on the health impacts of substance use outside a substance use disorder diagnosis. An additional \$20 billion is lost annually on productivity: absenteeism, on-the-job accidents, premature death, short- and long-term disability, and impaired job performance.

## Mental health and addictions is less than 3% of health care spending

2021–22 Ministry of Health spending plan by program area, \$ billions



# The Challenge

Mental health and substance use challenges **are on the rise.**

**1 in 2 people**

have – or have had – a  
mental illness

**1 in 5 people**

struggle with their mental  
health in any given year  
and by the age of 40

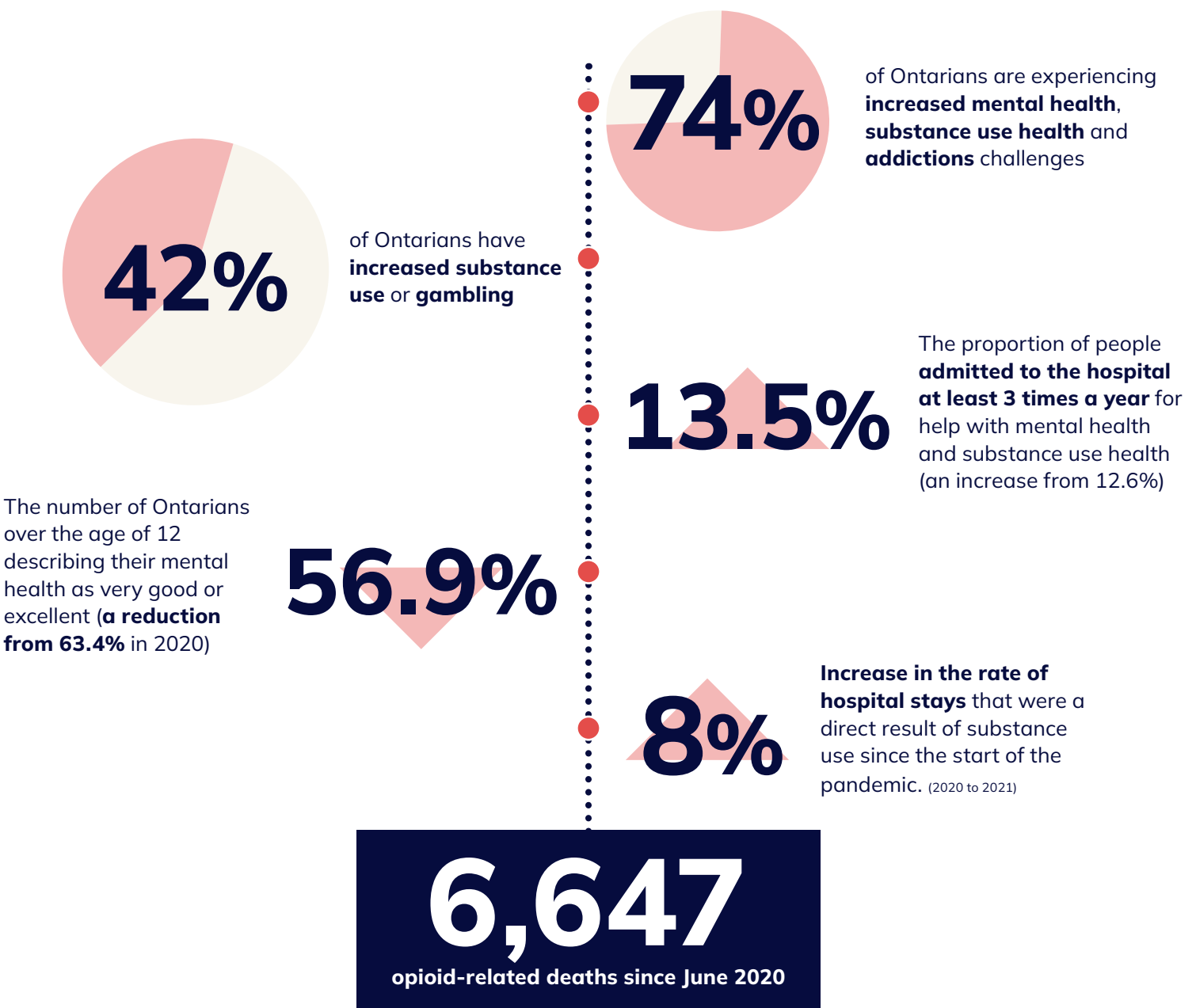
**1 in 5 people**

will meet the criteria for  
addiction in their lifetime

There were more than  
**1,200 opioid deaths**  
in the first half of 2022

# The pandemic has made these challenges worse.

Since the outset of COVID-19, these challenges have been exacerbated and the demand for supports and services has escalated, as has the complexity of clients who are receiving or on waitlists for services.





# Without an increase in wages staff will continue to leave the sector.

In addition to the burden of unmanageable costs, the mental health and addiction sector is experiencing **significant challenges retaining and recruiting new staff due to lack of competitive wages and benefits.**

Without funding for organizations to address immediate HHR challenges while supporting the sustainability and expansion of services, **Ontarians will continue to turn to emergency departments for support** when they could be receiving more appropriate and effective care from a community mental health and addictions provider.

Low salaries in the mental health, substance use health and addictions sector are leading to higher staff turnover, understaffing, burnout and longer wait times for clients.

An AMHO analysis of recent job postings found, on average, a 30% pay gap for addiction counsellors, addiction therapists, therapists, support workers, psychotherapists, case managers, and overnight attendants.

It also showed a 20% pay gap for registered nurses in community settings compared to those in hospitals. For social workers, the gap was over 35%. While working in the mental health sector requires experience and training, many mental health and addiction workers make only \$17 per hour.

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## The Average Salary for Registered Nurses by Sector

### Hospital

\$46.75/hour

### Long-term Care

\$44.14/hour

### Home and Community

\$36.98/hour



# The Solution



**AMHO is calling on the Ontario government to provide community organizations delivering mental health and addictions services with a **base funding increase of 8%** — or **approximately \$130 million annually** — to address critical capacity challenges within the sector.**

With the progress made on the Roadmap to Wellness and work already underway with the Mental Health and Addictions Centre of Excellence, there is an opportunity to better measure and report on service volumes and client outcomes including against three priority areas as outlined by providers: **reducing wait lists, solving human resource challenges** and **addressing rising costs and inflationary pressures**.

With more adequate and predictable funding, organizations can address immediate need for stabilization of the sector and at the same time, support expansion of services with appropriate staffing levels, in order to address wait lists.

This is critical to building a truly comprehensive and connected mental health, substance use health and addictions system in Ontario — where everyone, no matter who they are, where they live, or how much money they have, has access to the care they need when they need it.

# The investment of \$130 million annually would support organizational needs across **three priority areas:**

## **1. Addressing wait lists for services.**

- Our members are reporting longer wait times for services than ever before.
- Wait times for some services such as supportive housing are as long as 8 years in Ottawa. On average, as of December 2022, our members reported wait times of 317 days for services in a supportive housing setting, 128 days for mental health services, and 27 days for substance use services.
- AMHO member organizations need funding support in order to increase access to services with the highest demand and address wait times based on local needs, including hiring new staff to expand care access.

## **2. Solving human resources challenges.**

- One of the biggest operational challenges our members face is the inability to offer competitive wages and benefits to recruit and retain skilled workers.
- A baseline funding increase will allow our members to pay a more competitive wage to retain and permanently hire for staff positions that would help improve delivery of services and reduce wait lists.

## **3. Addressing the inflationary costs for services, food, and housing.**

- Lack of access to housing and homelessness is one of the biggest challenges facing those struggling with their mental health or substance use health. We know that without a roof over a person's head and food to eat, wellness and recovery are not possible.
- With inflation at approximately 7% this year alone and many community mental health, substance use health and addictions organizations not receiving a base funding increase in 10 years, sustainability of many service providers is in peril, especially for smaller organizations.
- A baseline funding increase will allow our members to keep up with the rising cost of services, food, and housing that they provide to clients, instead of having to close programs or lay off staff.

# Staffing Strategy for the Mental Health and Addictions Sector

We are calling on the Ontario government to establish a **Health Human Resources Strategy** for the province that includes the mental health and addictions sector. This strategy should include working towards wage equity across the system by raising wages within the sector, mapping critical staffing gaps, planning for future service and staffing needs as well as new strategies to better train, recruit and retain more specialized mental health, substance use health and addictions specialized workers in the province.

## Driving Results

To help demonstrate the value of the funding increase, community mental health and addictions organizations can **report back to the Ministry of Health and Ontario Health Mental Health and Addiction Centre of Excellence on progress** made toward achieving outcomes tied to the three funding priorities — reducing wait lists, solving staffing challenges and addressing cost pressures — on an annual basis.

# It is critical that we address the ongoing mental health and substance use crisis in Ontario.

As more Ontarians look for help than ever before, we must ensure care is there for every individual who needs it, when they need it most. **The lives and livelihoods of millions of Ontarians depend on it.**

When over 20% of Ontario's population is facing a mental health, substance use health and/or addictions challenges, services must be readily available and properly funded in order to serve them.

We cannot allow people to continue to suffer, with their health worsening, waiting for services and at risk of death or overdose. Our sector is working tirelessly to find efficiencies in order to support every individual who needs it, but **it is not possible to absorb the current rate of rising costs and growing demand without an increased investment.**

Community mental health, substance use health and addictions providers are a critical part of the health care system in Ontario. We play a vital role in

providing accessible, community-based support to individuals experiencing mental health, substance use health and addictions challenges and supporting local health systems.

But with limited funding, we are not able to meet the increasing demand for services, leading to **long wait times, inadequate support**, and ultimately, **poorer health outcomes for those in need**. Investing in the community mental health and addictions sector doesn't just ease the burden of the province's opioid and mental health crisis, it provides relief for the rest of the health care sector, preventing hospital admissions and saving lives.

By investing \$130 million in the community mental health and addictions sector, **Ontario's government can make a big leap to keeping people safe, healthy, and alive.**

But without government support, we simply cannot make this difference. **Ontarians need help now.**

## There is no time to wait.



[amho.ca](http://amho.ca)

AMHO is a membership based non-for-profit organization focused on building a comprehensive and connected and mental health system in Ontario.

Together we represent nearly 200 organizations across Ontario and more than 50,000 health care workers.