



Addictions &  
Mental Health  
Ontario

Dépendances &  
santé mentale  
d'Ontario

Standing Committee on Finance  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Canada

August 4, 2017

**Re: Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2018 Budget**

Dear Standing Committee on Finance,

Addictions and Mental Health Ontario (AMHO) represents over 220 addiction and mental health organizations in Ontario. As the collective voice of our members, we provide leadership and engage partners to build a comprehensive and accessible system of addiction and mental health care, and improve the well-being of individuals, families and communities in Ontario.

Our members see firsthand the impact of mental illness and addiction on productivity and our communities. Each week, 500,000 Canadians will miss work due to a mental health or addiction issue, and the Conference Board of Canada has estimated that untreated mental illness and addiction costs the Canadian economy upwards of \$50 billion a year.

Yet, despite the known deleterious impact of poor mental health on all aspects of society, Canada spends less than 7% of healthcare resources on mental health and addiction. In contrast, the UK spends 13%, and other comparable jurisdictions spend a minimum of 9 to 10%. Investments in mental health and addiction services are investments into a healthier population, a healthier workforce, and a more prosperous society. In fact, every \$1 invested in mental health and addiction is estimated to avoid \$10 in health and justice costs.

The Government of Canada has demonstrated commitment to improved mental health and addiction services. AMHO applauds the comprehensive approach to mental health and addiction in the 2017 Budget. These investments span numerous ministries, and are targeted towards populations with unique needs, such as youth, First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, people in corrections facilities, and veterans. The government has also demonstrated a commitment on key, pressing issues, such as the opioid crisis and public education on cannabis. AMHO commends the government for recognizing the vital importance of the social determinants of health, with affordable housing being the single largest commitment in the budget.

Addictions and Mental Health Ontario (AMHO) is pleased to put forward the following recommendations that will build on the government's Budget 2017 investments and increase Canadian's productivity in the workplace and the community.

### **Invest in our communities**

Addictions and Mental Health Ontario (AMHO) is pleased to see Ontario will be receiving \$1.9 billion in targeted investments in mental health over the next ten years from the federal government. This investment is a critical start to redress the inequities and addiction and mental health care, and improve access for those looking for help. We recommend that these investments in mental health and addiction services are made where they will have the greatest impact: in the community.

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) has noted that decision makers "have ample evidence on how to bend the total cost curve. Investments in evidence-based programs that focus on early and timely intervention can go a long way to prevent or mitigate the impact of mental illnesses over the life course." Community-based services such as assertive community treatment programs and crisis resolution teams have proven to be cost-effective alternatives to inpatient care with high rates of client satisfaction. The Mental Health Commission has demonstrated the cost-effectiveness of permanent housing with supports for those with serious and persistent mental health conditions.

Community mental health and addiction services are well placed to reach a broad range of individuals, and have the expertise and experience necessary to help people with mental health and addiction issues. One proven intervention, for example, is to offer counselling sessions to clients who are diverted from hospital emergency services. This program is economically viable in two respects: it results in health care savings and it successfully promotes earlier return to work.

AMHO would also like assurances that investments through the health transfer will help people access addiction services, as well as mental health services. In fact, mental health problems and addictions are often concurrent. People with a mental illness are twice as likely to have a substance use problem compared to the general population. At least 20% of people with a mental illness have a co-occurring substance use problem. In order for services to truly address client needs, mental health funding increases must also bolster services that target addiction.

### **Partner with Indigenous Communities on mental health and addiction**

AMHO strongly urges the federal government to adopt a sustained strategy to address Indigenous mental health and addiction needs. We believe this cannot be successful unless Indigenous peoples have greater control over the treatments and supports that address their needs. Just last month a group of health professionals in Northwestern Ontario expressed their frustration about the absence of a long-term, thoughtful approach to addressing the mental health crisis in many Indigenous Communities. Last month we were also encouraged by the

agreement reached by the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) and the federal and provincial governments that provides for greater Aboriginal control of health care planning and delivery.

### **Prevent the opioid crisis from continuing to worsen in Ontario**

Over the past weekend, Toronto police issued a public safety alert after more than 20 reported overdose incidents and four deaths related to overdose occurred between Thursday July, 27 and Sunday, July 28. The suspected cause is fentanyl-laced heroin.

The opioid crisis is impacting communities across Ontario, and greater action is required. To date, the province has taken important measures to such as increasing monitoring and surveillance, and increasing access to naloxone, an overdose-reversing medication. What's required now is investments in treatment and services that will help people with opioid use disorder improve their lives.

The evidence is clear: with proper services and supports, people can and do recover from opioid use disorder. But accessing treatment and services is becoming increasingly challenging. In some parts of Ontario, people are facing wait times of a year for residential addiction treatment.

The federal government has an opportunity to support Ontario to put measures in place at an earlier stage in the crisis, to avoid it becoming as drastic as in British Columbia, and has precedent of providing such an investment in other provinces.

### **Target investments from the National Housing Fund into supportive housing for those with mental health and addiction issues**

Supportive Housing is crucial to those living with mental illness and addictions. The evidence shows it's a critical determinant of people's ability to recover and live productive lives, as well as an essential part of transitioning Ontarians from hospital to more independent living in the community.

There is a well-known gap in supportive housing – which we know achieves better outcomes for Canadians, reduces the use of health and emergency services, and is essential to meeting the government's goals of a more productive society.

In Toronto alone, there are now over 10,000 people waiting an average of 5 years for one of the city's 5000 units of mental health supportive housing. This waiting list has grown by 2000 people in the past 2 years.

AMHO and our partners have identified a need for a minimum of 30,000 additional supportive housing units over the next ten years to address the significant wait times and barriers to access in Ontario. Through the National Housing Fund, the federal government has an opportunity to greatly improve access to housing and supports, which will help people lead higher quality, independent lives in the community.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the Standing Committee on Finance's pre-budget consultations. AMHO and our 220 members look forward to working with you to create a more productive, healthy and prosperous society. If you have any questions or would like further information, please do not hesitate to follow up with me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gail Czukar". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Gail Czukar, CEO  
Addictions and Mental Health Ontario