

October 12, 2022

The Honourable Carolyn Bennett, M.P., P.C.
Minister of Mental Health & Addictions, and Associate Minister of Health
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0K9

Re: Mental health and substance-use health sectors call for immediate creation of a Canada Mental Health Transfer

Dear Minister Bennett:

As members of the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH), Organizations for Health Action (HEAL), the Extended Healthcare Professionals Coalition (EHPC) and other organizations in intersecting sectors (see enclosed list of endorsing organizations) we are writing to express our collective concern about your government's delay in establishing a federal Canada Mental Health Transfer.

The lack of timely, equitable, accessible, inclusive, and affordable mental health and substance-use health care has long been a very serious problem in Canada. The federal government, along with its provincial and territorial partners, must play a central role to ensure Canadians receive the care they need, when they need it. To that end, **we ask that you take immediate steps to create a Canada Mental Health Transfer, allocating permanent, ongoing federal funding for mental health services starting in Budget 2023. This is consistent with the multi-year funding promised in your 2021 election platform.**

As you are aware, investments in mental health and substance use health care are inadequate in relation to other areas of health spending, representing less than 10% of overall healthcare budgets in Canada. The significant gaps in care mean that the health of Canadians continues to suffer.

Currently, our publicly funded mental health systems are financed through a combination of lump-sum transfer payments to the provinces and territories, small envelopes of short-term restricted funding, and charitable donations. As you know, health transfers to the provinces and territories are not tracked or directed to specific areas of care and so their impact on mental health and substance use health is largely unknown. We can no longer accept a patchwork approach that is unaccountable and does not improve system performance. Fixing the inequities in Canada's mental health and substance use health care systems will require targeted, long-term, and sustainable funding.

Implementing a Canada Mental Health Transfer will help provide accessible and affordable care and treatment for mental health issues. The Canada Mental Health Transfer has the potential to address barriers to care such as long wait times, cost, geography, culturally inappropriate care, and shortages in the mental healthcare workforce, all of which are well-documented.

The Canada Mental Health Transfer will also contribute to Canada's economic prosperity and help sustain our health care system by reducing mental health-related work absences, as well as shelter and criminal justice costs, and alleviating demands on our overburdened emergency departments.

MEMBERS

- Canadian Association of Social Workers
- Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention
- Canadian Consortium for Early Intervention in Psychosis
- Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association
- Canadian Federation of Mental Health Nurses
- Canadian Medical Association
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Canadian Psychiatric Association
- Canadian Psychological Association
- Community Addictions Peer Support Association
- Medical Psychotherapy Association of Canada
- National Initiative for Eating Disorders
- National Network for Mental Health
- Schizophrenia Society of Canada
- Psychosocial Rehabilitation Canada
- The College of Family Physicians Canada

The cost of mental illness to the Canadian economy is conservatively estimated at \$50 billion annually; that's in addition to the estimated \$40 billion annual economic cost of substance use. Governments and health planners must prioritize and address mental health and substance use health issues, and mental illnesses, given their enormous impact on the economy and on the demand for social, emergency, and criminal justice services.

The \$500 million announced by the federal government to support the provinces and territories in providing access to a full-range of evidence-based treatments for people who use substances is an important start. However, it falls far short of what is needed to address not only the opioid crisis, but the substance use health of the 78% of people living in Canada, over the age of 15, who use substances.

A Canada Mental Health Transfer is sound stewardship of taxpayer dollars because it provides a cost-effective and efficient mechanism for addressing care before crisis: preventing the onset of a mental health crisis and ensuring people get the right care at the right time.

Mental health is an integral part of health, and Canada cannot pride itself on a universal healthcare system that does not include universal mental healthcare. The development of national standards for mental health and substance use services cannot delay the introduction of the Canada Mental Health Transfer. Instead, these standards must go hand in hand with the creation of the Canada Mental Health Transfer, rather than the sequential approach that the government is currently taking.

There is much work to be done in implementing the Canada Mental Health Transfer, work that can and must be initiated before March 2023 when the standards are meant to be released. By allocating funding in the next Budget and initiating this work in 2023, the government will be in a better position to provide much-needed resources promptly to provincial and territorial partners for their respective mental health services. Canada is at a critical juncture in a mounting healthcare crisis, and we have grave concerns that delaying the Canada Mental Health Transfer will only exacerbate long-standing issues.

The mental health and well-being of current and future generations demands a better system. Delaying the Canada Mental Health Transfer will only exacerbate the negative impacts of our patchwork system on Canadians' mental health. **We are confident that your government can work collaboratively with other federal parties, and provincial and territorial partners, to establish the Canada Mental Health Transfer.** We, at the forefront of service delivery in mental health, mental illness, and substance use health, strongly advocate for the creation and full implementation of the Canada Mental Health Transfer. We are available to inform and support you, and work with the government, in reaching this important public healthcare milestone.

We look forward to your timely response on this urgent matter. We can be reached at camimh.acmmsm@gmail.com.

Sincerely,



Ellen Cohen
CAMIMH Co-Chair



Kim Hollihan
CAMIMH Co-Chair

Enclosure

c.c.: The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada
The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Health
The Honourable Carla Qualtrough, Minister of Employment, Workforce and Disability Inclusion
The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Finance
The Honourable Mona Fortier, President of the Treasury Board
The Honourable Pierre Poilievre, Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada
Conservative MH Critic (TBC)
Yves-François Blanchet, Leader of the Bloc Québécois
Luc Thériault, Bloc Québécois health critic
Jagmeet Singh, Leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada
Gord Johns, NDP mental health critic
Amita Kuttner, Interim Leader of the Green Party of Canada

List of Endorsing Organizations

1. Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights
2. Alzheimer Society (3)
3. Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada (3)
4. BGC Canada
5. Canadian Association of Community Health Centres (3)
6. Canadian Association for Interventional Radiology (3)
7. Canadian Association of Medical Radiation Technologists (3)
8. Canadian Association of Midwives (3)
9. Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (2, 3)
10. Canadian Association of Optometrists (2, 3)
11. Canadian Association of Social Workers (1, 2, 3)
12. Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention (1)
13. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
14. Canadian Child Care Federation
15. Canadian Chiropractic Association (2, 3)
16. Canadian Consortium for Early Intervention in Psychosis (1)
17. Canadian College of Health Leaders (3)
18. Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (1, 3)
19. Canadian Dental Assistants Association (3)
20. Canadian Dental Association (2, 3)
21. Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (2, 3)
22. Canadian Federation of Mental Health Nurses (1)
23. Canadian Federation of Students
24. Canadian Health Workforce Network (3)
25. Canadian Massage Therapist Association (3)
26. Canadian Medical Association (1, 3)
27. Canadian Mental Health Association (1)
28. Canadian Nurses Association
29. Canadian Ophthalmological Society (3)
30. Canadian Orthopaedic Association (3)
31. Canadian Paediatric Society (3)
32. Canadian Perinatal Mental Health Collaboration
33. Canadian Pharmacists Association (2, 3)

34. Canadian Physiotherapy Association (2, 3)
35. Canadian Podiatric Medical Association (3)
36. Canadian Psychiatric Association (1, 3)
37. Canadian Psychological Association (1, 2, 3)
38. Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science (3)
39. Canadian Society of Nutritional Management (3)
40. Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists (3)
41. Canadian Support Workers Association (3)
42. Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
43. Children’s Healthcare Canada (3)
44. Community Addictions Peer Support Association (1)
45. Denturist Association of Canada (2, 3)
46. Dieticians of Canada (2, 3)
47. Frayme
48. HealthcareCAN (3)
49. Medical Psychotherapy Association of Canada (1)
50. National Initiative for Eating Disorders (1)
51. National Network for Mental Health (1)
52. Opticians Association of Canada (3)
53. Pallium Canada (3)
54. Paramedic Association of Canada (3)
55. ParticipACTION
56. Pediatric Chairs of Canada (3)
57. Psychosocial Rehabilitation Canada (1)
58. Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (3)
59. Schizophrenia Society of Canada (1)
60. Speech-Language & Audiology Canada (2, 3)
61. Stepped Care Solutions
62. The College of Family Physicians Canada (1, 3)
63. United Way Centraide Canada
64. Wisdom2Action
65. YWCA

- (1) CAMIMH Member
- (2) EHPC Member
- (3) HEAL member

CAMIMH is the national voice for mental health in Canada. We are a member-driven alliance of 16 mental health and substance use health groups comprised of health care providers and organizations. Our mission is to ensure Canadians with living and lived experience of mental illness and substance use, their families, and care providers have timely access to the care, support, and respect to which they are entitled and in parity with other health conditions. For more information, please go to www.CAMIMH.ca.

EHPC is comprised of 12 national professional health and social organizations with the shared aim of improving the health and welfare of all Canadians; promoting excellence and innovation in health research and practice; and promoting the advancement, development, dissemination and application of knowledge that advances health, social services and well-being of Canadians.

HEAL is a coalition of 41 national health organizations dedicated to improving the health of Canadians and the quality of care they receive. Our members are professional associations of regulated health care providers and organizations of health charities that provide a range of health care services across Canada. For more information, please go to www.healthaction.ca.