



Children's Mental Health Ontario
Santé mentale pour enfants Ontario

What Others are Saying About the Need for Funding for Child and Youth Mental Health Services...

The Review of the Roots of Youth Violence
The Hon. Roy McMurtry & Dr. Alvin Curling
Released on November 14, 2008

"Children's Mental Health: This issue affects many aspects of the roots: the stability of families and the ability of parents to work and parent, how youth develop with their peers, how they do in school, how they interact with the justice system and their life chances overall. We believe that one or more associations with expertise in youth mental health should be retained immediately to prepare a plan for universal, community-based access to mental health services for children and youth for the earliest possible implementation. They should also prepare plans for all interim investments that are feasible within the limits of the available professional expertise in Ontario. In a province with a health budget of \$40 billion and a youth incarceration budget of \$163 million, we believe that the \$200 million estimate of the cost of providing universal mental health services is manageable within this government's mandate" (p. 380)

This is the only recommendation in the entire report that calls for a specific dollar value investment, and a timeline to have the investment made before the end of the current mandate of this government.

Breaking the Cycle: Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy
The Hon. Deb Matthews, Chair, Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction

"In order for any child to do their best, their physical health is important, but their mental health is equally vital." (p. 11)

The Strategy's recommendations are informed by the strong research evidence that demonstrates a correlation between mental illness and poverty. In particular, a recent report commissioned by the Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health in Ottawa reviewed evidence of this correlation:

"There is a strong association between poverty and child and youth mental health problems. The odds of a child or youth from a family living in poverty having a mental health problem are three times that of a child from a family that is not living in poverty...."

"A number of variables have been identified as mediators of the relationship between poverty and child and youth mental health outcomes. Children who grow up in poverty are frequently exposed to trauma that may mediate the relationship between poverty and mental health problems...."

"When the measurement of psychiatric disorder is specified more precisely, almost all types of child and youth psychiatric disorders are elevated in children and youth from impoverished families whether disadvantage is measured at the family or neighbourhood level...."(Linking Poverty and Mental Health – A Lifespan View; Lipman, E. & Boyle, M.)

2008 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario
Jim McCarter
Tabled in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario on December 8, 2008

"There is little doubt that child and youth mental health agencies work in a difficult environment. Over the years, agencies have operated without the benefits of a legislated mandate and mandatory funding for their services. In addition, there has been little ministry direction as to what kinds of services should be provided and what the acceptable standards are for the services that are provided, including requirements for access to those services and performance measures. As a result, over the years, agencies have operated with considerable autonomy, which has resulted in a patchwork of services for children with mental health needs both locally and across the province."

"In addition, the agencies advised us that, since there have been little or no annual funding increases for their core programs – including their administrative activities – over the last 10 years, they have had considerable difficulty in maintaining their core services and to do so have often had to “rob Peter to pay Paul” – that is, use funding other than for the purpose for which it was originally intended."

"It is also estimated that only one in six children and youth with a mental health disorder receives some form of mental health service. This is attributable in part.....to the fact that the need for mental health services outpaces the sector's capacity to respond."

"The potential consequences of not meeting a child's mental health needs include poor academic achievement, conflict with the law, substance abuse, and inability to live independently or hold a job. Many of these problems continue into adulthood and often affect the next generation."

"Unlike the Ministry's other two main service streams for children and youth....child and youth mental health services are not mandated by legislation, but rather are promulgated through the awareness of professionals and advocates who recognize the mental health needs of children and youth and their families' struggle with mental health disorders. As a result, children's mental health services can be provided only up to the system's existing capacity, which is determined largely by the amount and allocation of ministry funding rather than need."

Toronto Star
Jim Coyle
Wednesday, December 10, 2008

"Staggering costs of mental illness

Well, now we know.

Now we know why the McGuinty government made the unusually accommodating move last week of accepting an opposition member's resolution to strike a select committee to develop a provincial mental health strategy.

The Liberal government plainly knew the auditor general's annual report was to be delivered Monday. It knew Jim McCarter and his number crunchers had been looking into child and youth mental health agencies, community mental health and addiction programs.

It probably had a good idea that McCarter would conclude – as he so thunderingly did – that far from having a coherent mental health strategy, the province really doesn't have a clue.

In fact, the two biggest numbers cited in his report were not those that made headlines. They should have. They were huge. And they dwarfed any losses associated with uncollected tobacco revenue or suspicious absenteeism by jail guards.

McCarter said alcohol and drug abuse alone are estimated to cost the province \$8 billion annually in health care, law enforcement, motor vehicle accidents, crime and indirect costs resulting from lost productivity. Meanwhile, the estimated total economic cost attributable to mental illness was about \$22 billion a year, he said.

There was the cold-blooded calculation that every \$1 spent to treat mental illness and addiction saves a potential \$7 in costs, he said. Beyond that, however, was the responsibility to alleviate human suffering that is "difficult to price."

"Addressing the needs of people with mental illness is a pressing issue for Ontario's health-care system and society as a whole."

McCarter told reporters that his focus this year was "on the whole area of people who are less able to help themselves."

What he found was "a patchwork of services," a government that doesn't have a good handle on the level of services, their adequacy or consistency from region to region. What he was told by those in the field is that "we're really struggling just to maintain our core level of services."

The Local Health Integration Networks, charged with overseeing such care, have been "challenged," he observed politely.

When it comes to child and youth mental health, with disorders increasing in frequency and severity, "there has been little ministry direction as to what kind of services should be provided and what the acceptable standards are."

McCarter's indictment was comprehensive and devastating.

The vast majority of Ontarians needing addiction treatment did not receive it, he said. There is a critical shortage of supportive housing units in Ontario, with wait times ranging from one to six years. "Housing is a key determinant of health and, as such, is a critical component in an effective community mental health system."

Yesterday, Premier Dalton McGuinty's response to McCarter's report, with its chronicle of human suffering and administrative failure, was the usual aloof digression that suggests an increasing disconnect from the real-world challenges of the province.

Once to reporters, and again in the Legislature, he spoke of how difficult it is for those accustomed to life at "the 30,000-foot level" to really know and monitor what goes on down there on the ground.

Later, the high-flying premier boasted to reporters about how his government is taking "a fine-tooth comb" and doing "due diligence" on the recent pitch by auto makers for provincial support.

It must have relieved the auditor general to learn that McGuinty was actually in possession of such a comb and claimed such a flinty eye for details.

For there had been little sign of their use, his report found, down on the ground where those "less able to help themselves" live, and where the corporate jets of the high flyers rarely land.

Jim Coyle's provincial affairs column appears Monday, Wednesday and Friday."