



Children's Mental Health Ontario
Santé mentale pour enfants Ontario

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Report of the President & CEO

Annual General Meeting – November 22, 2011

It has been quite a year. Not only for CMHO, but for the entire cause of mental health, and especially for child and youth mental health.

Some of what we have accomplished this year should not even have been possible in the current fiscal and political environment. In a year when the Government of Ontario is struggling with the biggest deficit in its history, we secured the largest infusion of new funding for child and youth mental health since our community-based system was created 40 years ago. And then, within weeks of Canadians and Ontarians overwhelmingly re-electing a federal government that's determined to criminalize people with mental illness, we secured a comprehensive and progressive mental health and addictions strategy for Ontario that's built around a vision of ensuring people "can recover and participate in welcoming, supportive communities". Better yet, the first three years of the strategy are focussed entirely on strengthening and transforming our child and youth mental health system.

None of what we've achieved this year could have happened without the collective and persistent action of the people in this room. Children's Mental Health Ontario – and by that I mean all of us – has been championing the right of children and youth to mental health and well-being in every corner of this province and for many, many years. Without doubt, we're much closer to that goal today than we were a year ago.

Of course, there are still funding issues to resolve and there will be many more challenges as system reform rolls out. But let's not miss this opportunity to celebrate what we've accomplished, and what it means to the children, youth and families we serve.

Within the last few years, children's mental health has moved from the deepest shadows to front-row prominence at Queen's Park, in the media, in our schools, and through much of our society. At CMHO, we see one indicator of this change in our website traffic, where visits are currently increasing at an annual rate of more than 25 percent – in fact last month some 18,000 people came to our website, a 56 percent increase from October 2010. And for the first time anyone can remember, mental health and addictions – and specifically child and youth mental health – got high-profile attention in the recent provincial election campaign. Our once-lonely voice calling for more services and a better system has now been joined by those of teachers, editorial writers, politicians, doctors, and community partners of all kinds. More people than ever are making the connection between our shortage of mental health

services and issues like bullying, suicide, academic performance, community safety, emergency room crowding and even economic productivity.

Within the past few months, the central role of community-based services in Ontario's child and youth mental health system has been re-affirmed by the government's decision to fund school-based workers and court-based workers through community agencies rather than place them in other systems. The value and importance of CMHO's accreditation has also been recognized by government for the first time in its decision to allocate almost all new funding to accredited service providers.

The government's commitment to increase funding over three years will add about 18 percent to the child and youth mental health budget by 2013. Fortunately, most of that money has already been added to agencies' budgets this year, before the latest rounds of bad economic news. The Finance Minister is to deliver his economic update tomorrow, but we already know from the Premier that we're in for at least five years of fiscal restraint, and that budgets are to be frozen – at best – for all ministries except Health and Education. One of our advocacy priorities this year is to ensure that the government honours its promise to provide an additional \$12 million funding next year and another \$5 million the year after. More immediately, we have already begun discussions with the new Minister, Dr. Hoskins, to get clearance that some of the new funding can be used for indirect costs such as supervision, travel, and overhead.

On this issue, as on several others, CMHO's advocacy will be guided by the recommendations in the four position statements that we developed with our members this year. One of the core elements identified in our statement on Funding Principles is 'flexibility' in the use of funds. To address longer-term funding, we will be pressing the government to act on that paper's central recommendation, which is to convene a task force to develop a funding formula that is needs-based, predictable, and responsive to change.

I expect, though, that our biggest and most urgent challenges during the next two to three years will relate not so much to funding as to the system transformation that's already underway. CMHO has several important roles to play during this time of uncertainty and change.

Our two core strategic goals are to support our members and to be a leader in reforming Ontario's child and youth mental health system. Our accreditation program is an activity that supports both goals. During the coming year, we will be continuing to advocate that the government require all its child and youth mental health service providers to be accredited, as our new position statement on Service Standards recommends. We believe that system-wide accreditation will both provide service standards that inspire continuous quality improvement, and lead to a rationalization of child and youth mental health funding in the agencies that have the most capacity to deliver positive outcomes. Beginning in 2013, we will be contracting with the new Canadian Centre for Accreditation to provide independent 3rd party accreditation to CMHO members, using the program standards that we have created with our members, and that we will continue to own and maintain. Although our members are justifiably proud of the excellence they demonstrate through our current in-house accreditation program, only a 3rd party process will have sufficient credibility to be adopted as a system-wide requirement by the government. In any event, accreditation will continue to be a condition of membership in CMHO for all organizations with child and youth mental health budgets of \$250,000 or higher.

The New Mentality is another program that both supports our members and advances system reform. Our youth engagement work both trains and supports young people to advocate on behalf of community-based services and also helps the entire system to become more youth-friendly. Of course, advocating for better funding is one of the most important ways we will continue to support our members. We will also continue to use our members' collective buying power to provide a variety of cost-effective shared services, such as employee benefits, liability insurance, a biennial salary survey, legal advice, and group buying discounts.

In the current environment of system transformation, we believe it's important to ensure that our members are kept current on developments at Queen's Park, in the field, and even beyond our borders. We do this in part by acting as an information hub through vehicles such as our bi-weekly newsletter, Fast Reports, and by constantly updating our website, including the resource-rich sections that are accessible only to CMHO members.

More than ever, we are also helping our members connect to one another, both to facilitate knowledge exchange and to support collective action. Quite simply, we believe that the leadership for system reform should come as much from the field, as from Queen's Park. That's the key reason why we are engaging our members in developing position statements about system reform. It's also why we have organized 11 regionally-based satellites, or groupings of CMHO members. Already the satellites are enabling agencies to work more closely together on such activities as raising awareness during Children's Mental Health Week, advocating to local MPPs, building coalitions with community partners, and contributing to CMHO's position statements. As we organize ourselves better, we are also better able to help re-organize the system.

Our longstanding email discussion groups such as those for executive directors, clinical leaders, and HR and finance managers have facilitated information and knowledge exchange for years. More recently, we have added a very popular clinical webcast series - another type of knowledge exchange activity that just completed its 2nd year. More than 440 staff from member agencies participated in 10 webcasts this year, including 7 that were delivered by leaders from CMHO member agencies. Knowledge exchange that enables our members to share best practices and successes with their colleagues is also at the heart of our re-vamped conference this year, where most of the 35 workshops are being led by CMHO member agencies.

There's so much going on, and so much more to do. I haven't even touched on our coalition work at the provincial level, or our new media relations and communications work, or our on-going data collection and analysis about wait times and service use. Please take a few moments to read through our 2011 Annual Report, where CMHO's story - what we do and why - is well-told.

Our bottom line is that we're working hard every day to deliver value to you, our members, and to ensure that community-based agencies have a leading voice in transforming the current system to one that can provide effective mental health services to Ontario's children, youth and families close to home, when they're needed.

I feel very fortunate to be working with so many committed and talented people from our membership across Ontario, and in our team at the CMHO office. Our staff - we're only 13 people - is amazing for

their dedication, skill, creativity, and long hours. I am especially grateful for the support and wisdom of Camille Quenneville and Joanne Johnston.

And speaking of wisdom, I have to close with a word of admiration and thanks to our Board of Directors. They are all outstanding volunteers, conscientious and prepared to grapple with the most challenging strategic and policy issues. Their leadership has been extraordinary this year, and much of the credit for that goes to our retiring, but never shy, Board chair, Bill Saul. This guy has vision and energy like few people I've ever encountered, and although I won't miss the 5 or 6 long emails that he sends every weekend, I will miss the great partnership that we've had these past two years.

My sincere thanks to you all.

Gordon Floyd