

Funding Principles for Child and Youth Mental Health

Vision

A funding framework that sustains an equitable, effective, and responsive system and that supports the continuum of mental health services for all children and youth from early intervention and prevention through to identification, assessment, and treatment.

Background

Ontario has a significantly high prevalence of child and youth mental health disorders and the numbers continue to grow. Currently, one in five children and youth under the age of 18 is affected. Even more alarming is the fact that 85% of these young people won't receive the treatment they need when they need it.¹ As a result, young people across the province are not reaching their full potential and are not coping in school, at home, or in their community. Untreated mental health issues are preventing young people from achieving high school graduation and becoming successful and productive adults.

The creation of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services in 2003 – with its special focus on all policy matters relating to young people – provided the opportunity to raise awareness about child and youth mental health. In 2006, the Ministry released its policy framework, 'A Shared Responsibility', after examining the issues and closely consulting with all relevant stakeholders. This paper incorporates and expands upon the principles contained in the policy framework.

The Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions' final report (August 2010) also focused attention on this issue. The Select Committee's public process allowed for a fair hearing on the importance of the community-based system of mental health services, and the subsequent recommendations fostered a thoughtful discussion on the way forward in mental health generally. The Committee's reports have informed this paper.

In 2008, the Auditor General of Ontario conducted value-for-money audits of the community-based child and youth mental health system, and issued follow-up reports in 2010. His 2008 Annual Report stated, in part: "There is little doubt that child and youth mental health agencies work in a difficult environment. Over the years, agencies have operated without the benefit 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." (127)



These reports provide insight into the challenges and the need for a sustainable funding system for child and youth mental health.

Child and youth mental health has been under-funded for decades. Between 1992 and 2011, there were only three occasions when base funding for agencies was increased. The inflation rate during this same time period has resulted in the system losing, in effect, an astounding 36.94% in service capacity.

Children's Mental Health Ontario's accreditation process, which is mandatory for membership in the Association, is a strength in the system. The accreditation standards ensure quality, consistency, and accountability in the treatment of children and youth with mental health problems. This accreditation process confirms the excellence of agency staff.

Guiding Principles for Child and Youth Mental Health Funding

The funding model that supports the community-based system of child and youth mental health agencies must reflect:

- the availability to every community of a core basket of child and youth mental health services
- the overall child and youth population in each community
- a historical measure of the demand for service
- the need to limit any waiting period for service
- the socio-demographic characteristics of communities
- the unique needs of Aboriginal communities in Ontario
- the issue of population sparsity and underlying service challenges in Northern Ontario
- the unique nature of rural communities and their population
- the requirement for French-language services
- the needs of rapidly growing and demographically changing communities
- the need for specialized regional and provincial services (generally for very high needs children and youth)
- the need for clarity of mandate among child and youth-serving sectors, the programs each provides, and the funding at their disposal
- the development of complementary interactions across sectors
- the provision of contingency funds for unexpected increases in case-loads in special circumstances
- a mechanism to adjust for these factors on an ongoing basis



Core Elements

Coordination

Community-based child and youth mental health agencies are the recognized leaders in serving the mental health needs of children and youth. Agencies believe in creating strong, coordinated services for the families they serve. A funding framework that supports and enhances partnerships among organizations working across and among sectors is needed and will require:

- New ways of thinking about partnerships
- Flexibility in referrals and admissions to service
- Better coordination of screening and assessment across sectors and among agencies
- Clarity of mandates to ensure that the most appropriate agency is serving a client's needs
- A methodology to determine when a hub model works best for a community and how to engage all partners
- The determination of whether a coordinated access mechanism would work well in individual communities and lead to more efficient service and shorter wait times

Flexibility

The funding formula should include a multi-year funding approach that will enable agencies to operationalize plans in three year cycles and, for example, move money to the next fiscal year based on service-delivery requirements and the most efficient use of resources.

Excellence

Evidence-informed practices are paramount in the treatment of child and youth mental health disorders. We must ensure that all clients are treated with the most up-to-date and appropriate interventions when they enter the child and youth mental health system.

The implementation and sustainability of an evidence-informed system costs money. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services must ensure that:

- resources are sufficient to allow agencies to implement appropriate evidence-informed practices;
- accreditation is supported with a service contract expectation that addresses evidence-informed practices;
- the Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health has both the financial and human resources capacity to assist agencies, through the provision of



training and ongoing support, to deliver evidence-informed practices and to maintain a culture of learning.

- funding support is provided for the development of new treatment approaches that use rigorous evaluation to gauge their effectiveness, including innovative programs and promising practices that are currently being delivered

Sustainability

Child and youth mental health agencies need stability in their financial resources to support their work. A designated core basket of services which is available to every community should form the basis of stable funding. Funding should then be enhanced based on local needs and population characteristics. Annual inflationary increases will assist in providing consistent service levels and prevent the erosion of service delivery.

As demonstrated in the Ministry's recent mapping exercise, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services currently provides funding to child and youth mental health agencies and an extensive number and variety of other organizations through the Child and Family Intervention line in its budget. Consolidating child and youth mental health funding in a distinct budget line that includes only those agencies that are accredited to provide child and youth mental health services would ensure clarity of responsibility and accountability for the provision of services to children and youth with mental health disorders.

Unique Needs in Northern, Rural, and Aboriginal Communities

Young people struggling with mental health issues in northern, rural, and remote Aboriginal communities often have the added burden of being unable to access services near their home. It is impossible to provide a full range of mental health services in small, remote communities. Funding that is based solely on population levels would further discriminate.

Funding must be provided to ensure that every community has an easy referral process into the system and access to telecommunication connections such as video-conferencing and telepsychiatry. The additional cost of providing services in multiple languages when required must also be taken into account.

High risk factors in northern communities such as the prevalence of drugs, poverty, high teenage pregnancy rates, shockingly high suicide rates on reserve, and the greater likelihood of involvement with the youth justice system in Aboriginal communities all lead to the desperate need for a core set of mental health services that is accessible and responsive to these youth, and that will decrease the human and financial costs of placement in expensive residential settings, often far from home.



The cyclical economy of remote and rural communities can produce trauma for families and cause or exacerbate mental health problems, and may create fluctuations in demand for mental health services. A funding formula must include sufficient flexibility to respond quickly to such changes.

Unique Needs of Population Dense Urban Communities

Population-dense urban communities contribute their own set of challenges to the creation of a funding model. In addition to the impact of their continuously increasing population, these cities are home to a large proportion of new immigrants, some of whom come from conflict zones around the world. Cultural differences, language difficulties, and lack of knowledge about how to navigate the system must be considered. Child and youth mental health agencies must be funded adequately to provide services in multiple languages as needed and to create and maintain linkages with ethno-specific organizations, faith communities, etc. in order to reach out to newcomer communities whose members might be unfamiliar with or very reluctant to use mental health services. Poverty is also a significant risk factor in large urban communities. All of these factors necessitate a unique set of funding criteria in urban areas.

Recommendations

1. That the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and Children’s Mental Health Ontario create a task force to develop an effective formula for funding child and youth mental health. The new model must move to a more predictable formula that truly reflects a variety of needs across the province and is responsive to ongoing changes.
2. That the Ministry of Children and Youth Services work in conjunction with its mental health partners within government to develop a sector-wide plan for the delivery of child and youth mental health services. The plan should include the provision of appropriate funding for the implementation and use of evidence-informed practices by accredited agencies and must focus on the most efficient and effective ways of offering programs and services to young people and their families in Ontario.
3. Children’s mental health funding falls within the Child and Family Intervention line of the budget of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. This is a generic budget line, and as such, allows for funding for a wide array of services. It is recommended that accredited child and youth mental health agencies receive funding from a dedicated budget line that clearly demarks the services provided to children and youth with mental health disorders.

ⁱ Offord DR, Boyle MH, Fleming JE, Monroe Blum H, Rae Grant N. Ontario Child Health Study: summary of selected results. *Can J Psychiatry* 1989;34:483–91.



APPENDIX A - Excerpts related to the provision of service to underserved populations

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