



Children's Mental Health Ontario Santé mentale pour enfants Ontario

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STATEMENT RE: ONTARIO'S 2010 BUDGET

Children and youth with mental health needs have once again been left out of the Ontario government's budget plans. **Although the 2010 Ontario budget tabled today provides another 6% funding boost for most health services, child and youth mental health spending has been frozen for the third year in a row.** At the same time, demand for services has increased during the recession as families and their children struggle with the pressures of lost jobs and economic uncertainty.

Children's Mental Health Ontario had asked for a 3 percent base funding increase in transfer payments to child and youth mental health agencies in order to avoid staff layoffs and program cutbacks that will affect thousands of children and families. **Forty-six percent of the association's members, who provide about two-thirds of all community-based mental health services for Ontario's children and youth, had to cut programs during the past year, eliminating a range of counselling and support services for approximately 1,000 children and youth.** Two-thirds of the agencies had to lay-off staff in 2009-10 and almost one-third expect to end the year with deficits.

The government's failure to provide even cost-of-living increases in today's budget will lead to more layoffs and more cutbacks in programs that treat children and youth who are depressed or anxious or exhibiting problem behaviours, as well as in services that support their parents and families. Without any increase to their base funding from the provincial government, **fifty-four percent of Children's Mental Health Ontario's member agencies anticipate further program cuts this year**, resulting in less residential care, fewer in-home services, less help for teens with both addiction and mental health challenges, and less help for families.

Almost one in five children and youth in Ontario has a diagnosable mental health disorder, but only one in four of those are currently able to access effective treatment. **The average waiting time for children and youth seeking mental health services is approximately 10 weeks – far longer than the wait times for most physical health services.** Canadians and Ontarians have told pollsters repeatedly that they oppose two-tier health care, yet that is exactly the result of Ontario's unequal and unfair funding of child and youth mental health services.

Child and youth mental health treatment works – outcome evaluations show that two-thirds of those treated in Ontario's community-based agencies show clinically meaningful improvement, and one-half are entirely free of significant symptoms at the end of treatment. Early and effective treatment helps to improve student success, reduce school dropout rates, reduce community violence, reduce the need for child protection services, and reduce the incidence of chronic, lifelong mental illness. **Any government that hopes to get its health costs under control needs to invest in children's mental health to avoid the frequent doctor and emergency room visits, the long hospital stays, the on-going drug costs and the many physical health complications that are common among mentally ill adults.** Some 70% of all mental illnesses first appear before the age of 20 when early intervention and treatment has the best hope of success.

Ontario's failure – again – to invest in our children's mental health is a false economy, and a tragedy for the children, youth and families who will lose services.

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