



REPORT TO: Co-Chairs and Members of Public Health and Social Services Committee

SUBJECT: Support for Increased Investment in Mental Health Services for Children and Youth in Ontario

RECOMMENDATION

That this report be received and that the Office of the Regional Chair be forwarded a copy of this report and a request be made that the contents of this report and its recommendations be considered for inclusion, when Council meets to determine priorities for Queen's Park Week.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Niagara Child and Youth Services (NCYS) is the primary provider of children's mental health treatment in Niagara.
- NCYS has requested the support of Community Services and Niagara Region to advocate for additional funding to the Province.
- Children's mental health funding has not increased in 15 years, has not kept pace with inflation nor adequately supports the increasing demand for services.
- In Niagara, over the past 5 years referrals for mental health services have increased by 10% each year.
- A recent report, "Niagara Children's Charter Enacted" released in November 2009 reported that between 2005-2009 provincial mental health funding is only adequate to cover approximately seven months of service each year.
- Research shows that the prevalence of mental health issues is two to three times greater for low income populations.
- Children's mental health funding needs to be stabilized through compensating inflationary adjustments in the next service year (2010/2011) and each subsequent year with a firm commitment to a long term strategy.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications to the corporation.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to inform Committee and Council of the current status of mental health services for children and youth in Niagara and to request that Niagara Regional Council support the efforts of Niagara Children and Youth Services' advocacy for adequate investment in mental health services for children and youth in Ontario.

BACKGROUND

In committee report COM 04-2008/PHD 04-2008, a joint report developed by Public Health and Community Services staff, provided an update on poverty, "A Legacy of Poverty". The report addressed cycles of poverty and the impact on child health in the Niagara region. Research shows that the prevalence of mental health issues is two to three times greater for low income populations.

The Ontario Auditor General's 2008 Report identified a diminished investment in mental health services for children and youth. A recent report, "Niagara Children's Charter Enacted" released in November 2009 reported that between 2005-2009 mental health funding is only adequate to cover approximately seven months of service each year. Children's mental health providers across the province have seen their resources for core services erode by 20% since 1992. Inflationary adjustments to their budgets have been provided only twice during that period, representing only an 8% increase while the real inflationary impact is 36%.

In Niagara, NCYS report that on average there has been a 10% increase in each of the past 5 years in referrals and that their funding allocations have not been in alignment with the needs of the community. The wait list for services continues to grow.

REPORT

Mitigating the effects and eliminating the root of mental health issues are key components of dealing with social determinants of poverty. Niagara has developed strategies to deal with social determinants of health impacting those living in poverty. The challenge in moving the community forward is that funding has not increased to address the increased need of mental health services for children and youth, and as a result Niagara's ability to reduce the depths of poverty will be impacted.

There are challenges to support children and youth mental health services, not only in Ontario, but specifically in Niagara. In 2009, NCYS provided mental health support services to approximately 5,000 children and youth in Niagara; however, there were approximately 14,500 clients who were unable to receive services. Although the wait list continued to increase, in 2009 NCYS were forced to lay-off 2 staff and reduce services due to the fiscal constraints.

Demand for mental health services in Niagara, and across the Province, continue to exceed the supply. Research into mental health services indicates the following:

- 20% of children and youth in Niagara have at least one mental health issue;
- 5% of children and youth experience depression before age 19;
- Depression is the leading cause of disability among adults;
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death, after accidents, in 15 – 19 year olds;
- In Ontario in 2003, the prevalence of mental health disorders among children who were permanent wards of Children's Aid Societies was 31.7% ;
- 30% of Niagara Child and Youth Services' clients have been involved with Family and Children's Services;
- Over 60% of youth in conflict with the law have diagnosable mental health and substance abuse problems; and
- 75% of children and youth with mental health disorders do not receive specialized treatment.

The importance of early childhood mental health is aligned with school readiness goals. Children who lack social and emotional skills may not succeed in school. Yet studies show that upwards of 10% of all kindergarten children show problematic behavior. Early identification and intervention is a key strategy, however, the increasing demand for services and historical funding issues continue to put pressure on the system of services.

At a minimum, children's mental health funding needs to be stabilized through compensating inflationary adjustments in the next service year (2010/2011) and each subsequent year if agencies are to remain viable. At the same time, a firm commitment is required to rebuild and adequately fund the children's mental health system over the next 5 - 10 years if Ontario is to prosper socially and economically.

Submitted by:

Approved by:

Brian Hutchings
Commissioner, Community Services

Mike Trojan
Chief Administrative Officer

This report was prepared by Darlene Edgar, and Janice Horner, Managers Children's Services, and reviewed by Kathryn O'Hagan-Todd, Director, Children's Services and Katie Macoretta Manager, Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities.



January 5, 2010

Mr. Brian Hutchings
Commissioner of Community Services
Regional Municipality of Niagara
P.O. Box 1042
Thorold, ON L2V 4T7

Dear Mr. Hutchings:

Mental health services for children and youth in our community, and across the province, are in serious decline. We are writing to seek your support, as an influential community member, in calling on the Ontario government to redress this situation.

Children's mental health providers across the province have seen their resources for core services erode by 28% since 1992. Inflationary adjustments to their budgets have been provided only twice during that period totaling 8%, while inflation has climbed 36%. The Ontario Auditor General's 2008 Report showed a diminished investment in mental health for children and youth.

This isn't a **politically partisan issue**. All three major parties have failed to address the issue. Children's Mental Health agencies across Ontario have cut operating costs to the bone to respond to a lack of inflationary increases over the years. Dedicated staff have continued to do their very best despite the situation, but the entire system is now in crisis. Wait times are growing, children are suffering, parents are frustrated, angry and worried, and our health, education and justice systems are all experiencing the fallout.

The St. Catharines Standard addressed this issue in an article that was published December 8, 2009 entitled, **No time to cut back kids' mental health programs: officials**. The same newspaper also carried an editorial dated December 10, 2009, called **This is a disturbing trend that must be reversed**. Both of these publications are attached for your reference and convenience.

This is why we have contacted you. The efforts of agencies, parents and advocacy groups alike have so far failed to move the government to action. So now we are casting our net wider. People in influential positions such as yours have witnessed the impact of under funding firsthand, in both human and financial terms. We are hoping that you can help us convince the government to take this issue seriously and start repairing the damage.



1 in 5 children have a mental health need

Head Office
3340 Schmon Parkway
Thorold, ON
L2V 4Y6

t. 905.688.6850
toll free 1.800.563.0122
f. 905.688.9951

Merrittville Site
1604 Merrittville Hwy.
R.R. #2, Welland, ON
L3B 5N5

t. 905.384.9551
f. 905.384.9144

Crisis Services
1.800.263.4944

www.ncys.ca

We know that times are financially difficult; we are not looking for a huge infusion of new funding at this time. Specifically, children's mental health funding needs to be stabilized before more agencies move to insolvency. This requires a compensating inflationary adjustment in the next service year (2010/2011), and each subsequent year. This will only stabilize children's mental health agencies, not expand their services, while creating equity between children's mental health agencies and many other sectors such as provincial employees, nurses, teachers, doctors, hospitals, community colleges, universities, police, paramedics, jail guards, fire fighters, etc which have consistently received inflationary increases every year. Second, a firm commitment is required to rebuild the children's mental health system over the next 5 to 10 years.

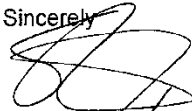
The Ontario Government has published and is working toward the implementation of a strategic framework for children's services. They should be applauded for that effort; it is needed and long overdue. However, that is a ten-year project and they need to be reminded that the system they are planning to transform is at significant risk and needs action **now**.

So, how can you help? People like myself, who are concerned for children's mental health in our community and across the province, are writing influential people in our communities. We are asking you to write to the Premier of Ontario, and copy the Minister of Children & Youth Services, during the week of **January 18th – 22nd, 2010**. It is our goal to have the Premier receive hundreds of letters from concerned community leaders, all raising their voices in protest of the neglect of mental health services for children. Please send a copy of your letter to your MPP's. As well, seeing that Niagara's press is concerned about this issue, you may consider copying them.

The attached background sheet contains some information that may help you prepare your letter, but the more personal observations and comments you can include, the better. If we can provide you with any further information, please do not hesitate in contacting our Executive Director, Ellis Katsof, for assistance (905-688-6850, ext.104).

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and thank you for helping our cause in whatever way you can.

Sincerely



Steven L. Nagy
NCYS Board President

Attach