



September 2, 2020

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario

Dear Prime Minister:

I write to you on behalf of the Canadian Psychological Association, the national voice of the country's psychologists. As you may know, there are approximately 18,000 psychologists registered to practice in Canada and many more working as researchers and educators in universities and other public and private sectors.

As you know all too well, we are facing unprecedented challenges with the COVID-19 global pandemic; with a toll that is physical, psychological, social and economic. We would like to thank you for the leadership that has been provided by you and your government.

As you contemplate what key themes you will speak to when addressing Canadians in your upcoming Speech From the Throne, we would strongly encourage you consider two important and related ones.

First, COVID-19 is taking a toll on the mental health of Canadians. Eighty-four percent of Canadians surveyed by the Mental Health Commission of Canada reported that their mental health concerns have worsened since the onset of the pandemic. Chief concerns include isolation and loneliness, fears for the future, worries about the health and safety of loved ones, and anxiety. A Nanos survey done by the Canadian Centre for Substance Use and Addiction reported that one in five Canadians who reportedly have stayed at home more during the pandemic, also report that their alcohol use has increased in quantity and frequency.

The need for timely access to services for mental health and substance use problems has never been more acute. We believe there is a leadership role for the federal government, working with its provincial and territorial partners, to ensure that the people of Canada get the care they need. Canada needs a publicly-funded "Medicare" plan that delivers the care people need, from the health providers trained and licensed to deliver it. As is especially apparent when it comes to mental health and substance use services, we don't have one currently.

Second, the inequities faced by people from marginalized communities lead to disproportionate rates of COVID-19, and other pandemic-related consequences. A just Canada, but also a prosperous Canada, is one that is diverse and inclusive of all its people. As you have stated on many occasions, "diversity is our strength" – and we steadfastly agree. Now, more than ever, we need to strive for a society that delivers on foundational principles of justice and equality for all.

Your Speech From the Thorne will set the tone for the next session of Parliament, and given the times in which we live, will need to promote and protect our most valuable assets...people. The first wealth of our citizenry must always be our mental health and wellbeing.

The CPA stands ready to work with you and your colleagues to find sustainable solutions that keep Canadians mentally as well as physically healthy – our success as a country depends on it. Best wishes for a successful session in Parliament.

Sincerely,

Karen Cohen Ph.D., C. Psych
Chief Executive Officer