



## IMPROVING ACCESS TO SPECIALIST CARE: CANADIAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION RELEASES ROADMAP TO INCREASE ACCESS TO PSYCHOLOGISTS IN HEALTH SERVICES

**May 21, 2026 (Ottawa)** – As Canadians continue to struggle with high rates of mental illness and shortages of specialists such as psychologists, the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) has released a report *Increasing Access, Reducing Costs and Improving Outcomes: maximizing psychologists' contributions to Canada's publicly funded health care systems*.

Despite strong evidence supporting the effectiveness of psychological care, only a small proportion of the thousands of psychologists in Canada practice within our publicly funded health care systems, leaving many Canadians without access to their expertise. In response to these pressures, the report outlines five key strategies to help close critical gaps in access and ensure that those in need receive timely, cost-effective, evidence-based psychological care.

“Psychologists are essential healthcare providers that must be an integral part of any contemporary, high functioning and cost-effective public health care system in Canada,” said Dr. Steven Smith, CPA President. Psychologists are one of the few regulated health professionals in Canada with broad and independent authority to diagnose and treat mental health disorders, including addictions, across all jurisdictions. They specialize in psychological therapies and assessments for many common mental health and health conditions; these interventions not only significantly improve health outcomes and reduce disability but also lower overall health system costs.

Psychologists are uniquely trained for a number of diverse roles and provide clinical expertise across the full spectrum of care – from early intervention in primary care and community settings to highly specialized care for complex and severe mental and physical conditions in hospital settings.

Psychologists work with children, youth, adults, seniors and families to diagnose and treat mental health concerns including depression, anxiety and psychosis, and neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism. They are also vital in managing many complex medical conditions such as stroke, inflammatory bowel disease, and cardiovascular disease, as well as treating common presentations such as chronic pain and sleep disorders. Most importantly, they play a critical role in building system capacity, strengthening interdisciplinary teams and cost-effective care models, and improving system-wide outcomes across integrated health systems.

“To better meet the health and mental health needs of the population, health care systems need to become more responsive – retaining the expertise and experience of psychologists in hospitals, primary care and community-based settings, increasing the number of positions and recruiting psychologists into these settings, and training more of these regulated mental health specialists,” said Dr. Lesley Graff and Dr. Sean Kidd, co-chairs of the CPA Task Force that prepared the report.

Graff, a clinical psychologist at Winnipeg’s Health Sciences Centre, and Kidd, a clinical psychologist at Toronto’s Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, have seen firsthand the devastating effects when individuals are unable to access needed psychological care.

While governments across the country are working to improve publicly funded access to mental health and psychological services, there remains significant public concern that current resources are inadequate. More investment is needed to expand delivery models and the supply of mental health providers. The CPA urgently calls on decision makers to accelerate the pace of system innovation, which must include engaging and expanding the number of psychologists within our publicly funded health care systems.

The report highlights the following for decision makers – including provincial and territorial governments, health authorities, hospitals, and primary care and community-based organizations:

- Leverage the value psychologists bring to publicly funded health services by enabling them to practice to their full scope and by engaging psychologists as leaders who strengthen interdisciplinary teams.
- Improve practice conditions and infrastructure to retain psychologists within publicly funded health systems, including through competitive compensation, to ensure that evidence-based psychological interventions achieve their full clinical outcomes and cost-saving potential.
- Increase the supply of psychologists practicing in publicly funded health care systems by expanding funded positions and strengthening training capacity to support long-term workforce sustainability.
- Identify opportunities to use psychological research to drive quality improvement, improve access, support cost-effective outcomes and strengthen accountability.

The report identifies a role for the federal government to collaborate with the provinces and territories to expand professional training infrastructure expansion in response to current and projected psychologist shortages.

In addition, the report highlights the role of the CPA and provincial and territorial psychological associations in increasing awareness of the contributions psychologists make within health services and in engaging decision makers on system improvements.

The CPA welcomes the opportunity to meet with governments and health system leaders and looks forward to supporting the provincial and territorial psychological associations as they advance policy discussions and actions across the country.

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#### About the Canadian Psychological Association

The Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) is the national voice for the science, practice, and education of psychology in the service of the health and welfare of Canadians. The CPA is Canada’s largest association for psychology and represents psychologists in public and private practice, university educators and researchers, as well as students. Psychologists are the country’s largest group of regulated and specialized mental health providers, making our profession a key resource for the mental health treatment Canadians need. The CPA is the national accrediting body for professional training programs of psychology in all provinces and territories. Learn more at [www.cpa.ca](http://www.cpa.ca).

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