

CANADIAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION



SOCIÉTÉ
CANADIENNE
DE PSYCHOLOGIE

**CPA Submission to Standing Committee on Finance (FINA)
Pre-Budget Consultations 2012**

Online Question #1: Economic Recovery and Growth

Given the current climate of federal and global fiscal restraint, what specific federal measures do you feel are needed for a sustained economic recovery and enhanced economic growth in Canada?

In any given year, one in five people in Canada is living with a mental health problem with estimated costs to the economy of 51 billion dollars annually. The vast majority of sampled employers rank mental health conditions among the top three causes of short and long term disability and over 10 million dollars is spent on absence claims annually. Employers who improve mental health among their workforces realize significant improvements in productivity, recruitment and retention, operational success, disability and absenteeism and conflict reduction. Canada's success, and especially its economic success, depends on the mental well-being of its workforce.

Psychological treatments and interventions are among the most effective treatments for common mental disorders. Psychologists are the largest, regulated and specialized mental health care providers in Canada; outnumbering psychiatrists by about 4:1. However, the services of psychologists are not funded by provincial health insurance plans, which make them inaccessible to many Canadians with modest incomes or no insurance. Although there are some publically funded services available in Canada, these are often in short supply, wait lists are long and the criteria to access these services can be restrictive.

Other countries, the United Kingdom, Australia and Norway have launched mental health initiatives, which include covering the services of psychologists through the public health systems, particularly primary care. These initiatives are proving both cost and clinically effective and even reduce costs. For its part, the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) is commissioning the development of a business model for Canada that will propose mechanisms through which psychological services can be made more accessible to Canadians who need them. This document will be available for consideration in fall of 2012.

SOLUTION:

1. **Set up an innovation fund** to assist provinces and territories in developing a sustainable mental health infrastructure across Canada that will help improve access to psychological services. One way to do this would be to incorporate psychologists into primary care teams.

Online Question #2: Job Creation

As Canadian companies face pressures resulting from such factors as uncertainty about the U.S. economic recovery, a sovereign debt crisis in Europe, and competition from a number of developed and developing countries, what specific federal actions do you believe should be taken to promote job creation in Canada, including that which occurs as a result of enhanced internal and international trade?

The recruitment and retention of psychologists to work at the Federal level remains a pressing issue. In May 2012, the Ottawa Citizen released an internal report stating that mental health services in the military is in crisis; soldiers wait four months before a psychologist is available to them. General Natynczyk made an appeal for psychologists to help the Canadian Forces deliver the care needed by soldiers who experience post-traumatic stress, depression, or are at risk of suicide.

Increasing demands for mental health services also continue to pose significant challenges for Correctional Services Canada where access to psychological services in most penitentiaries remains inadequate. The latest internal CSC data suggest that upon incarceration, 38% of the male offenders need psychological assessment. For women, this figure is even higher at 50%. These are, in all likelihood, lower than actual figures, as mental illness is typically under-reported.

Simply put, there are not enough professionals working in federal institutions to meet the increased mental health needs of its systems. These recruitment and retention challenges are related to salary but also to training.

SOLUTIONS:

- 1. Creating federal internship placements for psychologists:** To help meet the mental health human resource needs at the Federal level, Canada needs to do a better job at training and retaining psychologists. Interns often stay to work in the jobs or jurisdictions where they intern, yet in many provinces there is a greater demand for internship positions in Canada than supply. We need to create more internship positions. The Federal paid internship program could host three or more students who undertake three or four month rotations at different federal agencies such as Department of Defence, Correctional Services Canada, and Veterans Affairs.
- 2. Forgiving Loans for new psychologists in under-served and/or rural and remote areas:** Strengthening health care in Canada's rural and remote communities by forgiving \$8,000 per year to a maximum of \$40,000 of Canada Student Loans for new psychologists who practice in areas of need inclusive of rural or remote communities, First Nations and Inuit populations, Veterans Affairs, National Defence and criminal justice.

On-line Question #3: Demographic Change

What specific federal measures do you think should be implemented to help the country address the consequences of, and challenges associated with, the aging of the Canadian population and of skills shortages?

The aging of the Canadian populations brings special challenges to public policy as well as services and supports. Larger cohorts of older populations living longer in health, and inevitably with illness will require service providers of all types to respond. In particular, it is important that Canada's health providers have the depth and breadth of expertise and resource necessary to meeting the biological, psychological and social needs of older adults. Like the Canadian population in general, health care providers themselves are aging and will face skill challenges and shortages of their own.

SOLUTIONS:

- 1. Create a Health Human Resources data collection system:** Augment and where necessary resource data collection systems that will allow us to collect information on the health practitioners and researchers across the country. By understanding the demographic characteristics, expertise and activity of researchers and practitioners we can identify gaps in resource and plan to meet future research and practice needs.
- 2. Facilitate knowledge translation:** Bring researchers and policy makers together to discuss results, best practices and innovations when it comes to needs, services, and supports in response to an aging populations.
- 3. Ensure core research funding for Granting Councils and funding for students:** Canada must be seen as an international education destination that will foster research innovation and skills development among new researchers in Canada and from abroad. We need to ensure there is sufficient core funding for the granting agencies, that core funding recognizes the role of psychological factors in all research related to the social sciences, health and neurosciences, and that there are sufficient funds, whether in the form of internships or travel grants, for students to pursue scholarly activity such as attending conferences, networking, and presenting research findings. Recent tradition has seen granting council funding targeted to industry partnerships. A similar approach can be taken by targeting funding to the issues and needs of an aging population and need for skilled resource. Research of these issues spans the physical, biomedical as well as humanities and social sciences.

On-line Question #4: Productivity

With labour market challenges arising in part as a result of the aging of Canada's population and an ongoing focus on the actions needed for competitiveness, what specific federal initiatives are needed in order to increase productivity in Canada?

The incidence and prevalence of mental health issues among Canadians are acute and have significant impact on the workplace. The federal government, as a large employer itself, can do much to innovate and lead by example when it comes to psychological health in the workplace. According to recent media reports, on any given day, 19,000 public servants are on sick leave and last year Federal employees were absent an average of 12.5 days. In 2011, the disability plan, administered by Sun Life took in 3,875 new claims, more than 47% of which were for mental health conditions — led by depression and anxiety. Research has demonstrated that psychological treatments are among the most effective treatments for common mental disorders such as depression and anxiety. They are considered the treatment of choice for anxiety disorders and significantly reduce the risk of relapse for depression.

SOLUTIONS:

- 1. Revisit the extended health care insurance plans for federal public employees.** The caps on individual services offered within the insurance basket do not correspond to current need. Consider setting a cap on the designated basket of services and permitting employees' health care needs to drive access to service. CPA would be very glad to work with government to envision a more clinically and cost effective mechanism to respond to the mental health needs of its employees.
- 2. Remove the current requirement that an employee of the federal public service must get a referral from a medical doctor before qualifying for reimbursement for psychological services.** Other insurance plans do not have this gatekeeper requirement – one that creates bottlenecks and unnecessary delays in getting treatment to people in need.
- 3. Institute mandatory management training** whereby dealing with mental health issues in staff is part of the curriculum.
- 4. Improve psychological safety in the workplace:** According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC), billions of dollars are spent by Canadian employers annually on mental injuries directly attributable to the workplace. The MHCC has recently released a report on Psychological Safety in the Workplace – one which the federal government might consider adapting to its use as an employer.

On-line Question #5: Other Challenges

With some Canadian individuals, businesses and communities facing particular challenges at this time, in your view, who is facing the most challenges, what are the challenges that are being faced and what specific federal actions are needed to address these challenges?

With the launch of the Mental Health Commission, the federal government has acknowledged the pressing and unaddressed mental health needs of Canada's communities. Given that up to 70% of mental issues present before young adulthood and that these problems are best addressed when recognized and responded to early, funding and support needs to be invested in mental health promotion and illness prevention. Given that public health is a federal responsibility, there is considerable opportunity for the federal government to resource and administer programs and initiatives that support the mental well-being of Canadians. As the MHCC reminds us, there are segments of the Canadian population who have particular mental health needs and for whom the barriers to effective psychological treatment are significant. These include children and youth, the military, older adults, and people with chronic diseases. In addition to the recommendations made elsewhere in this submission about access to service, workplace mental health and the needs of older adults, we suggest the following.

SOLUTIONS:

- 1. Develop a mental health surveillance strategy:** Canada recently released its first mental health strategy. In implementing its service and support recommendations, it is imperative that we also develop a mental health surveillance strategy that will enable us to collect data on the mental health status of people receiving private and non-private mental health care and the care they receive. CPA had been pleased to receive contribution agreements from the Public Health Agency in the past in order to collect information about the practice and demographic characteristics of psychologists and the clinical and demographic characteristics of the people to whom they provide service. This information is critical to understanding and responding to mental health needs.
- 2. Develop and resource a mental health research network** that will help in the development of best practice guidelines in mental health and serve a knowledge transfer and translation function for service providers and the general public. Such a network should encompass all manners of psychosocial, neuroscience, and clinical research, and include data/knowledge from people with lived experience, from diverse cultures, and in high-risk situations (e.g. correctional facilities, military, long-term care facilities).
- 3. Invest in research and services for children and youth:** Children, youth and young adults are keys to a healthier Canada. Data shows that about 50% of adult mental health problems and disorders have their genesis before the age of 12 and up to 70% before the age of 24. Modest investments 'upstream' in children, youth and their families will bring the most returns.