



September 13, 2012

The Honourable Leona Aglukkaq
Minister of Health and
Minister of the Canadian Northern
Economic Development Agency
Department of Health Canada
Brooke Claxton Building, Tunney's Pasture
Postal Locator: 0906C
Ottawa, ON K1A 0K9

The Honourable James M. Flaherty
Minister of Finance
Department of Finance Canada
140 O'Connor Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0G5

*Advancing
Psychology
for All*

*L'avancement
de la
psychologie
pour la
collectivité*

RE: Expanding the CanLearn program to include psychologists

Dear Minister Aglukkaq and Minister Flaherty,

The Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) was glad to learn that the Government of Canada will forgive a portion of Canada Student Loans for new family doctors, nurses, and nurse practitioners who agree to work in under-served rural and remote communities. This is a very important initiative which will hopefully go some way to redressing the unmet health needs of this population of Canadians.

We would like to point out that rural and northern Canadians also encounter a myriad of challenges when it comes to their mental health. Access to high quality, appropriate psychological services are also limited while the need for these services is enormous. Rural youth are four to six times more likely to die by suicide than their urban peers. It is estimated that in rural areas, the number of psychologists to population ratio is approximately 1: 28,500 whereas, on average, it is 1: 3,848 in urban areas. The mental health service providers who practice in rural communities often have very large caseloads and face large and diverse presenting problems among their patients for which they may not be adequately trained. Canadians residing in rural and remote areas often have to pay to travel great distances to get the specialized mental health care they need which often means leaving their families and support networks.

141, ave Laurier Ave West
Suite 702
Ottawa, (Ontario)
K1P 5J3
(613) 237-2144
1-888-472-0657
Fax: (613) 237-1674

E-mail/Courriel :
cpa@cpa.ca
www.cpa.ca

There are approximately 18,000 psychologists registered to practice in Canada. This makes psychologists the largest group of regulated and specialized mental health care providers in the country – outnumbering psychiatrists approximately four to one. Research has demonstrated that psychological treatments are among the most effective for common developmental, behavioural, and mental disorders, including anxiety and depression. Psychologists are core members of Canada’s mental health human resource. Expanding the CanLearn program to include psychologists would help improve the mental health care for the almost 9 million Canadians who live in rural and remote areas of the country.

Recruitment and retention of psychologists to work at the Federal level remains a pressing issue in the military, Correctional Services Canada and First Nation communities. In addition to including psychologists in the CanLearn program, the Federal government might also consider creating a federal residency training program for doctoral psychology students. Residents often stay to work in the jobs or jurisdictions where they train, yet in many jurisdictions there is a greater demand for residency positions than there is supply.

For example, the Rural and Northern Psychology Programme in Manitoba offers two residency positions and one post-doctoral residency position annually in rural and northern areas. These residents are placed in and supervised by staff psychologists working in rural and northern communities. Since the launch of this programme in 1996, the number of applications has increased tenfold and an increasing number of individuals are applying only to the rural and northern streams of the residency program. In the past 15 years, 53% of the rural and northern psychologists hired into this programme have been recruited through the residency programme. Further, 44% and 75% of the pre- and post-doctoral residents, respectively, work outside large urban centers immediately following their residency. This suggests that many new psychologists are interested in working in these communities.

Expanding the CanLearn program to include psychologists and creating federal residency positions would greatly improve access to mental health care in these underserved communities in need of psychological services. The Canadian Psychological Association would welcome any opportunity to discuss this important issue with you.

Yours sincerely,



Karen R. Cohen Ph.D., C. Psych.
Chief Executive Officer
Canadian Psychological Association



Judi L. Malone Ph. D.
Registered Psychologist
Chair, Section on Rural and Northern Psychology
Canadian Psychological Association

Cc: Colin Carrie, MP
Hon. Ted Menzies, MP
Shelly Glover, MP