



Opinion

Mental health parity, a time whose idea has come

When it comes to funding, CAMIMH supports the Royal Society of Canada recommendation that the provinces and territories should increase funding for mental health and substance health services to at least 12 per cent of their health budgets.

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While the results of Election 44 suggest that we are no further ahead than where we were in 2019, some might be reminded of Yogi Berra's adage that "it's déjà vu all over again."

However, the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH)—an alliance of 13 national organizations representing people with mental illness experience, their families and caregivers, and health-care providers—was encouraged by what we think is a historic moment; where all sitting national political parties made significant funding commitments to improve access to mental health and substance use health programs, services and supports. This is clearly welcomed at a time when 42 per cent of Canadians believe the pandemic will have a lasting impact on their mental health (KPMG, 2021), and there are already long wait-times for care.

In a minority government, the importance cannot be overstated of a multi-party consensus on such a critical public policy issue where the federal government can and must do more to help those in need. It is also a reflection of the times we are living in, given the negative impact COVID-19 has had, particularly for

those with a mental health and/or substance use issues that worsened because of a pre-existing condition.

Given the parties' commitments, how can we ensure that the promised federal investments in mental health and substance use health will make a difference in Canadians' lives by expanding timely access

recommended that the federal government, similar to other developed economies, pass a new piece of legislation, A Mental Health and Substance Use Health Care For All Parity Act, that would provide a framework for the federal government to collaborate with and support the provinces and territories.

The proposed act would: (1) recognize that timely access to accessible and inclusive mental health and substance use health programs, services and supports are valued equally to physical health; (2) ensure the full array of publicly funded evidence-based mental health and substance use health services are available on an equitable basis; (3) invest in health promotion, prevention and education as well as the social determinants of health;

the transformation of their mental health and substance use health delivery systems. The act would also embrace a national set of health system performance indicators so that we can all learn from one another in a "race to the top" when it comes to innovation, improved access and health outcomes.

Post-pandemic, we anticipate that Canadians will need more mental health and substance use health programs, services and supports, not less. When it comes to funding, CAMIMH supports the Royal Society of Canada recommendation that the provinces and territories should increase funding for mental health and substance health services to at least 12 per cent of their health budgets.

The time to act is now. There can be no health without mental health.

CAMIMH looks forward to working with all levels of government and others to ensure that the people of Canada get the care they need, when they need it.

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CAMIMH recommends that the federal government, similar to other developed economies, pass a new piece of legislation, A Mental Health and Substance Use Health Care For All Parity Act, that would provide a framework for the federal government to collaborate with and support the provinces and territories. *Photograph courtesy of Pixabay*

to care and improving outcomes? For too long, mental health and substance use health programs, services and supports provided by psychologists, social workers, psychotherapists, counselling therapists and counsellors have not been covered by provincial and territorial health plan. This must change.

While the political will is clearly there, the question of how to do it remains.

In a recent report, "From Out of the Shadows and Into the Light ... Achieving Parity in Access to Care Among Mental Health, Substance Use and Physical Health," CAMIMH

(4) include clear accountabilities and meaningful national health system performance indicators; and (5) be linked to an appropriate and sustainable level of federal funding to the provinces and territories.

In effect, the act would define a set of mutual accountabilities where the federal government provides an appropriate and sustainable federal contribution (such as through a Canada Mental Health Transfer) and the provinces and territories meet the objectives of the act. At the same time, the provinces and territories should have the full flexibility they need to continue

therapy Association, and has been a member of CAMIMH for several years. Ellen Cohen is Co-Chair of CAMIMH and CEO of the National Network for Mental Health, which advocates, educates and offers expertise and resources to increase the health and well being of Canadians with lived experience of mental health issues. Glenn Brimacombe is CAMIMH Chair, Public Affairs Committee, and Director of Policy & Public Affairs at the Canadian Psychological Association, and past-CEO of two National Health Associations.

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