



February 3, 2021

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A2

The Honourable Francois Legault
Chair, Council of the Federation
Premier of Québec
360 Albert Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1R 7X7

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau/Premier Legault:

I write to you on behalf of the country's psychologists who are members of the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA), the national voice of the profession. As you know all too well, the COVID-19 pandemic brings us unprecedented challenges. In these unchartered times, we would like to thank you for the leadership your governments have shown.

As you continue to collectively discuss the federal government's share of provincial and territorial health budgets, we urge you to consider additional public investment in mental health care services. The mental health needs of Canadians are urgent and increasing. Forty percent of Canadians recently surveyed said that their mental health had worsened since the COVID-19 outbreak, a figure which increases to sixty-one percent for those with a pre-existing mental health issue (CMHA, 2020).ⁱ

While the morbidity and mortality of COVID-19 are significant for far too many Canadians, the mental health impacts affect far more. The pandemic is taking an increasing toll on the mental health of Canadians who are facing prolonged isolation and increasing depression, anxiety, suicidal crises, domestic crises and violence, and substance use.

The CPA believes there is a critical role for the federal government, working collaboratively with the provinces and territories, to ensure that a growing number of those in need have timely access to mental health services and treatments. While we recognize important investments have been made by all levels of government, more needs to be done so Canadians get access to the support they need, when they need it.

For too long, timely access to mental health services has been an orphan of Medicare. Based on the most recently available public information, all governments should invest a greater proportion of their health budgets in mental health services.ⁱⁱ This comes at a time where there is overwhelming public support for expanded public funding for mental health care.ⁱⁱⁱ

With each successive COVID wave, we expect the demand for access to mental health services to grow. With variants of the virus looming, and the limitations of vaccine supply, the pandemic is likely to make its presence felt throughout 2021. The economic, psychological and social impacts of living through a prolonged pandemic will persist long after vaccination and population immunity. As many governments have recognized, Canadians have long faced barriers to accessing needed mental health care. COVID-19 will drive up demand and overwhelm our existing system capacity.

Now more than ever, we must invest and protect our most valuable assets...people. Our first wealth must be our mental health. Throughout the pandemic, the CPA has developed many fact sheets, pod casts and webinars to support not just our members, but also the public-at-large, in coping with the psychological burdens of a pandemic. As you may know, we have also organized hundreds of psychologists across the country to provide *pro bono* psychological services to Canada's health care providers working on the front lines. We have also developed and delivered interactive webinars on coping and resilience to the staff of other not-for-profit health associations.

Psychologists are the country's largest group of specialized and regulated mental health care providers. We stand ready to work with all governments to find innovative and sustainable solutions that keep Canadians mentally as well as physically healthy – our success as a country depends on it.

Best wishes for a successful conclusion to your discussions. If you would like to discuss these issues further, I can be reached at 1-888-472-0657 ext. 323, or executiveoffice@cpa.ca.

Sincerely,



K.R. Cohen, Ph. D., C. Psych
Chief Executive Officer

Copies to: Premiers of Canada

ⁱ Canadian Mental Health Association. Mental Health Impacts of COVID-19: Wave 2. December 2020.

ⁱⁱ The Royal Society of Canada recently recommended it should be at a minimum of 12% to address the unmet mental health needs arising from COVID-19 (Easing the Disruption of COVID-19: Supporting the Mental Health of the People of Canada. October 2020).

ⁱⁱⁱ Nanos Research. 94% of Canadians think that provincial and territorial governments' health plans should cover mental health care. June 2019.