

CANADIAN  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION



SOCIÉTÉ  
CANADIENNE  
DE PSYCHOLOGIE

**CANADIAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION SUBMISSION:  
HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE  
(AUGUST 2016)**

The Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) is the national association for the science, practice, and education of psychology in Canada. With over 7,000 members and affiliates, the CPA is Canada's largest association of psychologists.

The CPA is pleased to provide the following recommendations to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance, covering two broad areas: 1) improving access to psychological services and 2) supporting psychological research.

**IMPROVE ACCESS TO PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES**

One in five Canadians will experience a mental health problem in a given year – the most common of which are depression and anxiety – costing the Canadian economy \$51 billion annually. Only about one-third of those in need will seek and receive care.

Psychological treatments are among the most effective and least expensive treatments for common mental disorders, and 20-30% of health care costs are averted when patients receive psychological care. Despite this, psychological services are not covered by provincial and territorial health plans. They are paid out of pocket or through private insurance, and those who cannot afford to pay end up on long wait lists, get less than optimally effective care, or do not get help at all.

The federal government has an important role to play in helping Canadians get access to the mental healthcare they need. Mentally healthy citizens are imperative to productive businesses and prosperous communities.

**Creating Mental Healthcare Infrastructure**

The role of the federal government includes collaborating with provinces/territories to improve access to needed mental healthcare by targeting health transfers and creating better parity in public funding of mental and physical healthcare.

The federal government must ensure that access to psychological services is a priority of the new Health Accord. Funds could be used by the provinces/territories to develop innovative and sustainable models to deliver mental

health care, such as the United Kingdom's Improved Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) program. CPA commissioned a report on this topic in which several models to enhance access to psychological care have been developed and costed out; a leading one of these is the UK's IAPT program. CPA's report has been shared with the Federal Minister of Health and can be found at [http://www.cpa.ca/docs/File/Position/An\\_Imperative\\_for\\_Change.pdf](http://www.cpa.ca/docs/File/Position/An_Imperative_for_Change.pdf)

### **Respecting Scope of Practice**

The current policies and regulations of many regional health authorities place the burden of responsibility for initiating mental healthcare on Canada's physicians by limiting what psychologists are permitted to do in publicly-funded institutions. Psychologists are highly-trained and regulated mental healthcare providers whose provincial/territorial licenses ensure that they are competent in assessing, diagnosing, and treating mental disorders. Despite these qualifications, psychologists can rarely admit patients to mental health services, certify patients for admission when judged at risk of harm to self or others, or refer patients to other health care providers within public institutions.

These policies and regulations create unnecessary bottlenecks in accessing care. The federal government should work with provinces/territories to ensure that policy, regulation, and legislation (e.g. Canada Health Act) support psychologists practicing to the scope afforded them through licensure. As an employer, the federal government should also remove the requirement of its health insurance plan that employees obtain a physician referral to access psychological services; a requirement that limits access to care. Psychology is a regulated profession; psychologists' scope of practice does not require medical referral or oversight.

### **Improving Care in Jurisdictions of Authority**

The federal government is responsible for administering healthcare to a number of groups including indigenous peoples, active and veteran members of the military, and refugees.

The Non-Insured Health Benefits Program delivered through Health Canada's First Nations and Inuit Health Branch includes psychological care. In 2015, the CPA made many recommendations to strengthen this program, which included coverage for psychological assessment and treatment, respecting fee schedules for psychological service delivery set by the provincial associations of psychology, and working with the CPA to enhance health providers' cultural competence.

The Interim Federal Health Program, under the federal government's jurisdiction, provides refugees with psychotherapy, counselling or psychology counselling for up to 10 sessions. While the existence of this plan is to be applauded, it can be strengthened by: removing the physician referral requirement; increasing the number of sessions necessary for successful treatment from 10 to 15-20; and consistently funding the services of interpreters across Canada's jurisdictions to deliver care to refugees who do not speak English or French.

### **Eliminating Tax on Psychological Services**

The federal government could also play a role in improving access to care by eliminating the tax on psychological services. This goods and services tax was introduced in budget 2013 when the federal government amended what is, and is not, considered a health service.

While some psychological services are considered health services, others are not. For example, psychologists are currently required to charge tax for assessments used to determine eligibility for benefits through public programs (e.g. CPP-D) and through private insurance. Given psychological services are not covered by our public health insurance system, taxing them increases already significant barriers to accessing care. It is the CPA's position that all psychological services should be considered a qualifying health care supply and should be exempt from tax.

#### **Recommendations to Improve Access to Psychological Services:**

1. Make access to psychological services a priority of the new Health Accord.
2. Target funding to assist the provinces/territories in developing sustainable mental healthcare systems.
3. Ensure that federal policies are congruent with the scope of practice afforded to psychologists through regulation and remove physician referral requirements in all federal health plans.
4. Offer 15 to 20 sessions of coverage that includes both assessment and treatment under all programs through which the federal government delivers psychological services.
5. Deem all psychological assessments a qualifying health care supply under the Excise Tax Act and make them exempt from sales tax.

#### **SUPPORTING PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH**

Canada's capacity to innovate and compete internationally, and in turn, thrive economically, is dependent on numerous factors, including:

- the ways in which research is funded, reviewed, and awarded;
- availability of stable funding to support research infrastructure; and
- support for psychology students/graduates.

Psychological research has broad and significant application to the well-being of individual Canadians, businesses, and communities, creating an understanding of people, human problems, and the many environments in which we live. Psychological science is paramount to our nation's success, having relevance to societal well-being, health, technology, innovation, productivity, and the economy.

#### **Funding for Psychological Research**

Psychology is a discipline whose research cross-cuts and meets the mandate of each of the three granting councils, yet often struggles to find a home in them. This can be attributed, in part, to the recent instability of the granting councils in terms of how research is funded, reviewed, and awarded. Recent years have seen:

- An inequity in the distribution of funds each granting council receives – SSHRC has seen the largest reduction in funds since 2007 and received the least amount of funding increases, despite the fact that social scientists represent over half of Canada's researchers.
- Funding investments targeted or directed towards specific programs – While targeted research can address specific issues, there is a place for fundamental psychological research with both short and long timelines that defines, validates, challenges, and resolves important questions and leads to significant advances.

- A steady fall in the success rates and/or grant levels for the granting councils – decreased funding levels and, in some cases, flawed review systems have resulted in many highly rated researchers being turned down for grants each year.

The CPA recognizes the government's 2016/17 investment in fundamental research to the tri-councils, particularly to SSHRC. Should this government continue with yearly 3% funding increases for the next three years, by 2020 the granting councils' funding levels should be restored to 2007 levels; however, to keep pace with competitor countries, greater investments are needed.

### **Support for Research Infrastructure**

Stabilized operating funds for universities, government departments, and various data collection agencies is also needed to maintain research infrastructure, support data management, and continue to conduct psychological research used to: enhance the health and well-being of Canadians, ensure the success of the organizations and communities in which they live, and support a strong science culture upon which the development of good policy and programming is based.

The CPA recognizes the investments made in research infrastructure to cover the indirect costs associated with conducting research, as evidenced by funds allotted to the Canada Foundation for Innovation and to universities doing federally-supported research; however, more stabilized funding is needed. It is important to support the ongoing operational and maintenance requirements of existing psychology research labs, and ensure that the tri-councils have funds available for the timely funding of smaller-scale equipment and equipment needed to pursue rapidly emerging research directions.

It is also important to provide sustained support for research in non-academic settings, such as Statistics Canada. Data and research that are collected and conducted over a long term in a standardized manner from a representative sample can be meaningfully used by psychology researchers, as well as government, industry, business, not-for-profits, municipalities, and communities to inform policy, direct innovation, influence economic and social prosperity, examine socio-economic issues, and improve health.

The cancellation of two particular surveys – the University and College Academic Staff System and the Survey of Earned Doctorates – has left significant gaps in our ability to track the number and demographic distribution of academics in Canada, psychologists among them. As a result, we don't know how many people graduate each year in Canada with a master's or doctoral psychology degree; how many are working in Canada; where they work; or if we have enough to meet the current teaching, research, and health service needs of Canadians. The cancellation of other surveys (e.g. National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, Youth in Transition Survey) has also left gaps in our ability to track child and youth development. Both the public and policy-makers would benefit from establishing a Scientific Office to oversee the use of scientific evidence in policy-making.

### **Supporting Psychology Students/Graduates**

The CPA recognizes the government's support for students in the form of additional grant funding, loan repayment, and tax credits. It also recognizes previous investments for industrial-based post-doctoral research partnerships and internships for not-for-profit organizations. However, continued investments in graduate

scholarships, internships, fellowships, and co-operative placements across disciplines and settings are needed. Supporting graduate-level teaching, research, and real-world experience will encourage Canadians to pursue graduate-level education and build a foundation for economic and social development.

Expanding programs such as CanLearn, allowing psychologists who work in rural or remote communities to earn up to \$40,000 in Canada Student Loan forgiveness over a maximum of five years (\$8,000 per year), would help psychologists as individuals and business owners to help the communities in which they provide services and encourage youth in these areas to pursue psychology as a career. It is estimated that in rural areas, the number of psychologists to population ratio is ~1: 28,500 compared to 1: 3,848 in urban areas.

Psychology students/graduates and the government alike would benefit from a strategy to recruit and train psychologists to work in federal departments. This could be done by creating a federal residency program to enable doctoral students in psychology to complete practical training in departments where there is need, such as Correctional Service Canada, the Department of National Defence, and Veterans Affairs Canada.

***Recommendations to Support Psychological Research:***

1. Increase, in a more equitable manner, the base budgets for the granting councils to the levels seen in 2007 and provide stabilized funding for operating and infrastructure support [Cost: 5% increase/year for each of the next 3 years (total cost ~ \$150 million/year)].
2. Provide funding for Statistics Canada to re-instate the above-noted discontinued surveys.
3. Create a Scientific Office to oversee the use of scientific evidence in policy-making.
4. Continue investing in students through graduate scholarships, internships, fellowships, and co-operative placements in all fields/sectors of psychological science.

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*The CPA thanks the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance  
for welcoming input as part of its pre-budget consultation.  
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