

# Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the Upcoming Federal Budget



# Recommendations

- 1:** That the government establish a Canada Mental Health Transfer to expand the delivery of high-quality, accessible, and free mental health services.
- 2:** That the government allocate 30% of annual federal transfer payments under the Canada Mental Health Transfer towards the needs of those under the age of 25.
- 3:** That the government provide funding in the amount of \$25 million over five years to develop clinical practice guidelines to support evidence-based mental health care for children and youth.
- 4:** That the government provide funding in the amount of \$50 million over five years for multidisciplinary educational resources and training programs to increase competencies in paediatric mental health care.

# Introduction

**Mental health problems are common among children and youth. Yet while emotional, behavioural and psychosocial problems serious enough to disrupt functioning and development affect approximately 1.2 million children and youth in Canada, fewer than 20% receive appropriate treatment. (1)**

Children and youth who are recent immigrants or refugees, BIPOC, and/or who live in rural or remote communities are even less likely than their peers to receive appropriate mental health care and are more likely to use services like emergency rooms when in crisis. (2)

Even before the pandemic, children and youth often faced long waitlists and limited access to quality mental health care. Fragmented services and supports, insufficient accountability measures and inequitable access are common problems that have left many young people languishing for years with little improvement to well-being. The significant financial costs associated with accessing mental health care in Canada further exacerbates inequities in access, particularly for families with no or inadequate insurance coverage.

The direct and indirect effects of the pandemic have significantly eroded the mental health and wellness of many Canadians, with specific and unique impacts on children and youth. Children's hospitals across the country have reported increased—and in some cases unprecedented—numbers of youth presenting with anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, substance misuse and eating disorders. (3)

Early identification and intervention is critical. Timely and appropriate care can have life-long impacts on health and well-being, especially given that the majority of mental health disorders reported in young adults start in childhood and adolescence. (4)

Significant investment in publicly funded and evidence-based mental health programs, services and supports is urgently needed. Strengthening Canada's mental health care system and addressing persistent and discriminatory gaps in access will help young people recover from the impacts of the pandemic and support the health and development of future generations.

# A fully-funded mental health transfer

**To ensure that all children and youth in Canada can access quality mental health services, when and where they need it, the Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS) strongly supports the establishment of a fully-funded, permanent Canada Mental Health Transfer.**

This budget presents an important opportunity to move from words to action by fulfilling the commitment to: "establish a new federal transfer to provinces and territories – the Canada Mental Health Transfer – to assist jurisdictions to expand the delivery of high-quality, accessible, and free mental health services". (5)

Funding to make this commitment a reality must be prioritized in Budget 2023. The mental health and well-being of Canadians simply cannot afford to be overlooked and underfunded any longer.

To ensure that this mental health transfer is as impactful as possible, the CPS urges the federal government to allocate 30% of federal mental health transfer payments towards ensuring timely and equitable access to mental health care for those under the age of 25. This share recognizes their significant need, the unique barriers to accessing mental health care for children and adolescents, the importance of receiving timely care at a young age for life-long health and well-being, and their proportion of the population.

Those under the age of 25 have been uniquely impacted by the pandemic and the associated events of the last few years. (6) In addition to the stress and anxiety of living through a global pandemic, they have experienced disrupted access to in-person learning and identity-affirming activities, reduced academic and economic opportunities, and missed social connections, milestones and memories.

Improving access to timely, appropriate and affordable mental health care for youth in Canada must be prioritized across all levels of government. Targeted and reliable funding from the federal government to the provinces and territories would help to meet both immediate and long-term needs.

# Supporting evidence-based care

**To support evidence-based mental health care for children and youth, the federal government should fund the development of patient-centered stepped care clinical practice guidelines.**

The current paediatric mental health care system is inefficient, fragmented, costly and complex. By funding the development of patient-centered clinical guidelines, the government can reduce inequities in the access and delivery of services and supports across provinces and territories, and between urban/rural centres, while reducing unnecessary complexity and confusion.

Ensuring that these guidelines adopt a stepped care approach will reduce inefficiencies and increase improved outcomes by prioritizing the most effective and least resource-intensive treatments before “stepping up” to more intensive services according to the needs of the individual.

**To increase the skills, confidence and competencies of all those who help care for the mental health and well-being of children and youth, the federal government should fund the development and support the delivery of multidisciplinary educational resources and training programs.**

Children and youth across Canada have struggled to access quality, affordable and accessible paediatric mental health services for decades. Increased demand associated with the pandemic has brought a struggling system to its breaking point. Investment is needed to help meet this demand, clear backlogs and waitlists, and most importantly, reduce the number of youth who reach a point of crisis.

Strengthening the skills and abilities of all those who support the mental health and well-being of children and youth is essential. The development and delivery of evidence-based, multidisciplinary educational resources and training programs can raise the quality of mental health care nationwide.

# References

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