



OPSEU CHILD TREATMENT SECTOR

“Advocating for Workers Who Support Children and Families”

Honourable Dwight Duncan
Minister of Finance and Chair of Treasury Board/Management Board of Cabinet
C/o Budget Secretariat
Frost Building North 3rd Floor
95 Grosvenor Street
Toronto ON M7A 1Z1

January 22, 2008

Dear Minister Duncan,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the development of the 2008-09 Provincial Budget. OPSEU represents over 2800 members who provide front line Children’s Mental Health services in our communities. We believe we can offer you some perspective on the current challenges we face in providing timely and quality services to the province’s youngest and most vulnerable citizens and why funding of Children’s Mental Health Services should be a priority in the budget.

In response to your four questions:

1. Among the commitments from our campaign platform, which areas do you think should be the first priority as we look ahead to the 2008 Budget?

The platform focussed on 5 areas; that Ontario be: “Smarter”, “Stronger”, “Healthier”, “Greener” and a “Better Ontario for families”. We believe that to achieve these goals, these priorities must be integrated and that a ‘holistic’ approach be taken to achieve a “better Ontario”. We know that an individual’s mental and physical health status are linked to one’s ability to succeed in life whether that be in school, at the job or as a citizen. Martin Teicher (Scientific American, 2002) stated: “Maltreatment at an early age can have enduring negative effects on a child’s brain development and function. The aftermath...can appear as depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts or post-traumatic stress, or as aggression, impulsiveness, delinquency, hyperactivity or substance abuse.

It is now reported that one in five children in the province of Ontario struggle with diagnosable mental health problems. It has been proven time and again that early

intervention creates the best outcomes for these children and youth to move forward in their lives and become productive citizens. Despite this, Children's Mental Health Services remains a non-mandated service in the Province of Ontario and have traditionally been underfunded and seemingly undervalued by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services when compared to our mandated partners in the delivery of children's services. We remain highly vulnerable to funding cuts resulting in loss of programs, particularly during times of economic downturn (based on our past experience) which we believe, is counter intuitive to good social planning. As a result, the children's mental health system has increasingly struggled to attract qualified professionals to this necessary field of work due to non-competitive wages and lack of stability within the system.

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services released its Children's Mental Health Policy document "*A Shared Responsibility*" in November 2006. While it promotes "sharing responsibility" for the mental health well-being of children and youth, community based Children's Mental Health Agencies are not yet 'equal' partners at the funding table.

Therefore, to realize the platform priority: "A Better Ontario for Families", we request that the 2008 budget reflect the following:

- Prevent any further program/service cuts to Children's Mental Health services by stabilizing the 2008-09 core budgets in conjunction with the implementation phase of "*A Shared Responsibility*".
- That any 2007 year end deficits which would result in further layoffs and loss of community based Children's Mental Health programs be eliminated.
- That there be an infusion of salary equalization dollars to assist in stabilizing staff retention and recruitment challenges. Children's Mental Health cannot compete for qualified staff with the wage compensation packages offered in the Child Protection, Health and Education Sectors.
- That the continued challenge of the employer being able to implement Pay Equity plans without it resulting in layoffs be reviewed by the government for resolution.

2. What can the Ontario government do to continue to foster economic growth and job creation in the province?

Studies have shown that crime and violence cost Canadians \$120 billion/year (Heckman 2006) and that mental illness and behaviour problems cost a further \$100 billion per year (Gnam et al 2006). These societal "costs" do not at all contribute to healthy economic growth and job creation.

It is time for the Ontario Government to 'invest' in its future through job creation programs that support the mental and physical well being of its most vulnerable citizens.

It is necessary that the province make a financial investment in Children's Mental Health programs now to prevent mental health concerns from contributing to a further drain on the province's ability to be economically competitive in the global market in the years ahead.

In anticipation of a possible economic downturn this fiscal year, the timing of this investment for our collective future is critical.

3. Are there any programs or services the provincial government provides that are no longer needed?

Families who utilize community based children's mental health services come from all socio-economic backgrounds. However, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are disproportionately represented in the clinical population. We know that these families cannot afford the services of a private practitioner (Private Psychologist's hourly rate is quoted at \$120/hour, Social Worker \$70.00/hour) and few have Employee Assistance Programs to secure treatment for their child or adolescent. Publicly funded, community based, children's mental health services as well can provide early intervention programs and access to specialized services such as psychology and psychiatry in a more timely manner and through a holistic service approach. We believe that Children's Mental Health Services plays a significant and key role in the spectrum of Children's Services and that it should be a mandated service within the province of Ontario to ensure that there is equal and timely access for families.

4. The Ontario government has continued to call on the federal government to work on a manufacturing strategy and EI reform. Should Ontario continue to press its case for 'fairness for Ontario'? If so, how?

During this time of economic downturn "Fairness for Ontario" must not only include a Federal-Provincial manufacturing strategy and EI reform but equally as important, the Government of Ontario must demand that Children's Mental Health Services be prioritized within the current CST formula. Since the elimination of the Canada Assistance Program in 1995, it is estimated as of 2007, that the average per capita expenditure on Social Services has decreased from \$269/Canadian to \$146/Canadian, a 46% decrease.

It is estimated that since the mid 1990's, Community based Children's Mental Health Agencies have seen a reduction of approximately 30% of their capacity to deliver services due to funding freezes or cuts, coupled with inflation. We believe that the Federal Government needs to be held accountable in providing the Province with stable and predictable funding for Social Service Programs and that it restore federal funding to the 1994/95 levels. While the 2007 Federal budget indicated that it would address "predictability and stability" concerns through providing the provinces an outline of the Federal government's priorities and attaching increased funding for those priorities,

Children's Mental Health Services were not considered a federal priority under the CST funding adjustments announced in the 2007 budget.

Senator Kirby's Report "Out of the Shadows at Last" called Children's Mental Health the "orphans of the orphan". This cannot continue. The Provincial Centre of Excellence in its May 2006 "Checkpoint" Newsletter noted:

"Specifically, a holistic human resources plan needs to be developed. Such a plan would have a national-provincial agreement for a long-term approach, which includes the needs of the child and youth mental health and related sectors. It would further include provisions for human resource planning at the training, recruitment and retention levels throughout the system". (Provincial Centre of Excellence Checkpoint Newsletter May 2006)

Therefore, we request that the Provincial Government advocate for an allocation of Federal CST funding to support Children's Mental Health Services.

In conclusion, we leave you with a quote from J. Heckman, Nobel Prize Winner, Economics 2000; "We cannot afford to postpone investing in children until they become adults nor can we wait until they reach school – a time when it may be too late to intervene".

The mental health needs of Ontario's children and youth should be a priority in the provincial budget. The children and youth we serve cannot "wait in the shadows" any longer.

Respectfully Submitted,



Deborah Gordon
Chair
OPSEU Child Treatment Sector

Cc: Honourable Deb Mathews, Minister Children and Youth Services