

January 19, 2018

The Honourable Dr. Eric Hoskins
Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
80 Grosvenor Street
10th Floor, Hepburn Block
Toronto Ontario M7A 2C4

**Investing today, shaping tomorrow: Post-secondary student mental health
*2018 Pre-budget Submission to the Ontario Government***

Dear Minister Hoskins:

As representatives of the post-secondary sector in Ontario, the College Student Alliance, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, Colleges Ontario, and the Council of Ontario Universities, are pleased to submit a joint recommendation concerning the mental health and wellbeing of our students for Budget 2018.

Ontario's colleges and universities provide students with education and professional development opportunities to pursue their professional careers. However, the role of post-secondary institutions today goes beyond higher learning and academics. Throughout Ontario, colleges and universities have made mental wellness a priority. Students on Ontario campuses have access to a suite of programs and services that have been developed to support their social and emotional development. Services range from mental health awareness events and stress alleviating activities, to counselling and specialized services for students who identify with a mental health disability.

Despite robust suites of on-campus mental health and wellbeing services that reflect student needs and the spectrum of mental health, colleges and universities are having challenges meeting service demands and are reporting a sharp increase in the number of students coping with mental illness, particularly anxiety and depression. This has led to escalating pressures for institutions whose core mandate is to provide higher education and training. Colleges and universities are not treatment centres. We cannot meet this challenge alone.

The Spring 2016 National College Health Assessment (NCHA), a national online survey that collects information on students' health behaviours, attitudes, and perceptions, indicated that depression, anxiety, and suicide attempts are increasing among Ontario's post-secondary students. The number of students with identified mental health disorders has more than doubled at Ontario post-secondary institutions over the past five years. Increased mental health demands, and the trajectory of post-secondary enrolment which has steadily increased over the last

decade,^{1,2} suggests that the number of students coping with mental illness and requiring supports will continue to grow.

As representatives of the province’s 45 colleges and universities and more than 220,000 students, we request that the government:

- 1. Increase spending on mental health and addictions to a minimum of 10 percent of the overall provincial health care budget.**
- 2. Adopt a “whole of community approach” where government ministries, post-secondary institutions, and health care and community organizations each play a specific role to strengthen post-secondary mental health supports and fill service gaps.**

As outlined in our joint report, [*In It Together: Taking Action on Student Mental Health*](#), an integrated, community-based system with strong partnerships between government, post-secondary institutions, student associations, health-care providers and community organizations, will ensure that students across the province have access to the mental health services they need, when they need them. A robust investment by the government is required in order to support the development, implementation and sustainment of an integrated, community-based mental health care system in Ontario.

The economic burden of mental illness in Canada is estimated to be at least \$50 billion per year.³ This includes costs related to health care, social services, income support, and lost productivity. A growing body of evidence demonstrates that promotion, prevention, and early intervention mental health initiatives show positive returns on investment by reducing demand for services in the health care system and also in other sectors, such as the criminal justice system.^{4,5,6}

- 3. Provide our institutions with a dedicated portion of the mental health and addictions budget on an annual basis for mental health and wellbeing services.**

The post-secondary sector is grateful for the government’s investments for mental health supports to date. However, the current funding is grossly insufficient to address the mental health challenges we face.

¹ Ontario Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development. Summary of Enrolments in Ontario Universities, 2007-08 - 2016-17.

² Ontario Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development. Funded college enrolment as FTEs from 2006-07 to 2015-16.

³ Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC). (2014). *Why investing in mental health will contribute to Canada’s economic prosperity and to the sustainability of our health care system*. Retrieved from <http://strategy.mentalhealthcommission.ca/pdf/case-for-investment-en.pdf>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ MHCC. (2013). *Making the Case for Investing in Mental Health in Canada*. Retrieved from https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/2016-06/Investing_in_Mental_Health_FINAL_Version_ENG.pdf

⁶ Roberts and Grimes (2011). *Return on investment: Mental health promotion and mental illness prevention*. A Canadian Policy Network / Canadian Institute for Health Information report. Ottawa: CIHI.

To ensure that colleges and universities have the capacity to strengthen and develop impactful supports to meet the growing demand of students, it is critical that we receive targeted and sustainable funding for mental health and wellbeing services that are most appropriately delivered on campus. An increased government investment will also help us strengthen our triage service role of directing students with serious or complex needs to the appropriate care of health and community service agencies that provide acute and long-term services for mental health.

Mental health funding targeted to post-secondary institutions will ensure that students have the skills and resources they need to thrive on their learning journey in post-secondary education, as well as in their personal and professional lives. As three quarters of mental health disorders first appear before the age of 25,⁷ Ontario colleges and universities are ideal environments for targeted mental health wellness services and programming.

Thank you for the mental health investments to date. We look forward to working with you to address the mental health demands on our campuses and insufficient funding for mental health supports. By working in partnership and engaging other stakeholders, we can demonstrate collective leadership in addressing post-secondary student mental health across the province.

Yours sincerely,



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⁷ Kessler, R.C., Berglund, P., Demler, O., Jin, R., Merikangas, K.R., & Walters, E.E. (2005). Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 62(6), 593-602.

- c: Mitzie Hunter, Minister, Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development
Charles Sousa, Minister, Ministry of Finance
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