

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS ADVISORY COUNCIL – STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

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Question 1: What is the single most important recommendation Council could make to build the Recovery-Oriented Systems of Care and enhanced ecosystem of support, knowledge and service?

Short Response

Access and Innovative Funding. All Albertans who need should have access to a psychologist. Not everyone needs to access to a registered psychologist but, for those who do, this optimizes their treatment. This can be done with innovative funding solutions.

Access

Alberta has a medical -- rather than a health-care -- system. Psychological treatment decreases medical costs of care and improves treatment outcomes but also contributes to the psychological health and wellness of all Albertans. Yet, finances are the primary barrier to access as there are few publicly funded psychological services.

All Albertans who need, regardless of income, should have access to psychological services. AHS (in programs like the Community Mental Health Clinics), and Alberta Health (funding programs including Primary Care Networks) serves Albertans who may have the greatest number of issues specific to the social determinants of health (poverty, employment, addiction, cultural minority status) and who are less likely to be able to negotiate or access private services. Those Albertans with the greatest need deserve our highest quality of care. There is an urgent need to increase access to psychologists. Psychologists are key to interdisciplinary health delivery

In Alberta, there are sufficient psychologists – the issue is not availability, it is ability to access due to unnecessary financial barriers. Despite dedicated resources and professionals, the issues of access and service are inadequate.

Optimized Services

Essential to delivering those necessary services, is ensuring Albertans can access the quality of care required. Not everyone needs to access to a registered psychologist but, for those who do, this optimizes their treatment.

Systems of Care

Community support networks and sufficient family supports foster the psychological health and wellness of Albertans. Often mental health counselling (which includes psychoeducation and advice giving) is most beneficial. But there are times and conditions when this is insufficient.

When psychological assessment, diagnosis, or treatment is also needed this must be delivered by qualified professionals. Not all providers have sufficient training in assessment, diagnosis, or treatment. With an increased focus on trauma-informed health practices, there is required foundational knowledge of the psychological, neurological, biological, social, and spiritual impacts of trauma.

Psychological services also provide value for money. Psychologists provide services that really work. Registered psychologists are qualified to make a proper assessment, diagnosis, and to provide evidence-based treatment through years of rigorous education, training, and licensure. Most importantly, psychologists engage in outcome-informed practices. Research has demonstrated 80% of those treated have better outcomes than similar untreated people.

Proven Outcomes

Two Examples

AA is effective. But it does not work for everyone. There are evidence-based psychological treatments with similar effectiveness to AA. Both options are not available to all Albertans.

ADHD Symptoms -- Properly assessed by a psychologist, this may be ADHD requiring either medical intervention and/or cognitive and behavioral skill development OR this may be a social-emotional issue with symptoms that mimic an ADHD diagnosis. A trained health care professional able to diagnose appropriately can then tailor intervention in cost effective ways to suit the individual

Funding Innovation

Publicly funded mental health services are not funded on parity with physical health services based on the burden of disease. Many employee benefit plans have little / insufficient coverage for psychological services.

Research conducted over many years has shown that sufficient and effective psychological treatment provides significant benefits for around 75% to 80% of people treated. Unlike many medications, counselling, psychotherapy and psychological services delivered by qualified professionals do not have any side effects. The evidence also shows that they can have a lasting benefit and that they work well in tandem with pharmacological treatments.

Systems of Care

Research is clear – and this is evidenced by leading organizations. Manulife, SunLife, Starbucks, and even the Government of Canada have significantly increased their mental health extended health benefits for this reason.

Quebec Example

Quebec is providing equitable access to psychologists to improve public health (this was based on a demonstrated cost-savings of 20-30% of the cost of medical services). They require a physician referral for every 5-6 sessions (no cap) with high intensity referrals going only to psychologists and low intensity referrals going to counsellors and psychotherapists.

We can craft an Alberta solution. Quebec is leading the way, but an Alberta advantage would be to build on their initiative targeting our needs.

Innovative Funding Solutions

- Ensuring there are more registered psychologists within publicly funded health care systems
- Including the services of psychologists under Alberta Health Care directly or through means tested funding
- Not requiring medical referral to access psychological benefits. This requirement places a burden on the public health system and requires a general practitioner to make a mental health determination he or she may not have the time or skills to assess
- Make session and plan caps meaningful. Research into the efficacy and effectiveness of psychological treatment suggests that courses of treatment are 15 to 20 sessions.
- Require diagnosis, treatment plan, and outcome informed measures. This enables most effective tailoring and tracking of benefits and associated costs. Pharmaceutical costs often lack ceiling limits or clear outcome measures that are also preventative.

Access to psychologists for psychotherapy has significant cost-recovery and health outcomes. Psychological treatment decreases medical costs of care and improves treatment outcomes but also contributes to the psychological health and wellness of all Albertans

PAA is the voice of, and for, psychology in Alberta.

**Our mission is to advance the science-based profession of psychology
and to promote the well-being and potential of all Albertans.**

PAA collaborates with government, health care, and stakeholders in advocating for science-based public policies such as these recommendations specific to cannabis legislation in Alberta.