

Questionnaire Response: Ontario Mental Health and Addictions Alliance (OMHAA)

1. The cost of mental illness and addiction is estimated to be \$39 billion in Ontario. Meanwhile, access to mental health and addiction services is generally very poor and varies widely across the province. Assuming this is unacceptable to your party, what specific measures would your government take to ensure that people with mental illness and addictions across Ontario get the care they need?

The Ontario Liberal Party shares your concern about access to services for people with mental health and addictions challenges. That is why we have maintained a steadfast commitment to the issue since we formed government in 2003.

In June 2011, the Ontario Liberal government introduced the comprehensive mental health and addictions strategy, *Open Minds Healthy Minds*. If returned to government, a Kathleen Wynne administration will move quickly to re-introduce the 2014 Budget, which committed to implement the next phase in the strategy. The next phase would expand the focus to include improved transition between youth and adult services, further recognition of the importance of serving people with addictions, and across the board improvements for services to adults. New investments would start at \$65M in 2014-15, growing to about \$83M annually in 2016-17.

The next phase of the strategy will:

- Help to ensure Ontarians and their families have better access to quality services;
- Achieve better value for these investments, by linking funding directly to the quality care that is needed;
- Promote mental health and well-being for all Ontarians — investing in evidence-based prevention initiatives in the workplace, schools and communities;
- Ensure early identification and intervention — equipping service providers and clients to respond to symptoms and intervene early and appropriately;

- Expand housing and employment supports — providing stability and supports to empower people to manage in the community;
- Expand an integrated health and social service coordination model for people coping with mental illness and addictions; and
- Provide funding based on need and quality — delivering a new funding model that links population need, quality improvements and sector integration to service delivery.

Unfortunately, the opposition parties put all of this funding at risk by plunging the province into an unnecessary election. Ontario Liberals have not only committed to re-introduce the budget in its current form if we form the next government, but have also included these commitments in our Plan, released on May 25th. Sadly, the NDP -- who rejected the budget -- did not even mention the words "mental health" in their platform.

While there is always more to do, Ontario Liberals come armed with a track record of bringing both attention and resources to the mental health and addictions sector.

2. In 2011 the provincial government launched *Open Minds, Healthy Minds, Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy*. Would your government support the continued implementation of this strategy? What would your party do to ensure continued progress in this area?

Ontario Liberals are committed to improving services for mental health and addictions. Since 2003, funding for mental health and community services has increased by over \$400 million to a total of \$960 million. However, we recognize that improving services for mental health and addictions is not just a matter of throwing money at the problem, but needs to be backed up with a strategic approach to ensure we get value for the money invested.

That is why in June 2011, we released *Open Minds Healthy Minds*. This strategy, based on active engagement with a range of experts, researchers, and most importantly, those with lived experience, laid out a framework for improving mental health and addictions services in the province.

The first three years of the strategy took a specific focus on children and youth, and resulted in \$93 million in new investments, by the end of those three years. While the investments covered a number of areas, some highlights included:

- A specific focus on schools, by placing 144 mental health nurses in our school system, across the province.
- Providing culturally appropriate services to almost 4,000 Aboriginal kids, by hiring 80 new Aboriginal mental health and addictions workers.
- 260 new workers in community child and youth mental health agencies to provide access to services closer to home.
- Created 18 service collaboratives to support coordinated services for children, youth, and adults.

The Ontario Liberal government has also continued our investments across all parts of the system, through an increase of 94.7 per cent for community mental health and 58 per cent for addictions programs since 2003.

Having crafted and initiated implementation of the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy, Ontario Liberals are fully committed to its continued progress. That is why we didn't stop after the first three years. In our 2014 Budget, we listed and costed our new investments and priorities for the next phase of the Strategy. These investments were new investments specifically dedicated to the new priorities. If returned to government on June 12th, we will re-introduce the budget and move forward with the next phase of the Strategy.

3. Supports and services for people with mental illness and addiction often cross many different government ministries. How would your party ensure there is broad, government-wide leadership on mental health and addictions?

Since 2003, the Ontario Liberal Government has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to breaking down silos across a number of areas of focus. Two of our most proud achievements – the Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy – were both created and implemented through multi-ministerial committees and working groups. We recognize that addressing issues like mental health and addictions are not the responsibility of one sole Ministry, and success will not be achieved unless multiple ministries are involved. In the case of the mental health and addictions strategy, an Assistant Deputy Minister-Level Committee was tasked with overseeing the development of the

strategy, and that committee has continued work on the full implementation of the first three years of the strategy.

Going forward, this collaborative, inter-ministerial approach will be used. We recognize that mental health and addictions crosses a number of ministries, whether Children and Youth Services, Health, Education, Community and Social Services, or the Attorney General, and we are committed to working in that way moving forward.

Most of all, our government has always valued partnerships with people from outside of government. In the development of the mental health and addictions strategy, we relied on outside experts, and will continue to do so in the implementation of the next phase. Most importantly, we know that the role of those with lived experience is critical to understanding how the system works for people, and we rely on that advice as well.

4. Reducing hospitalization (and re-hospitalization) of people with mental illness requires access to affordable housing with supports. How will your party improve access to supportive housing?

Ontario Liberals have always been committed to supportive housing, both as a tool to improve social outcomes, but also to improve health outcomes. We know that having a reliable roof over one's head can be one of the key determinants of health, and that it lays the foundation for allowing someone to thrive. We are very proud of our Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy, which served to reduce barriers to affordable housing across the province.

Specifically, with regard to supportive housing for people with mental health and addictions, our commitment is evident. We have made significant investments in supportive housing, and as recently as 2010, invested \$16 million for 1,000 units of supportive housing for people with problematic substance use issues. In addition, the next phase of the mental health addictions strategy commits to investing in additional supportive housing through rent supplements and supportive services.

5. Is there anything else you would want Ontarians to know about your commitment to mental health and addictions services?

It's clear that Ontario Liberals are committed to improving outcomes for people with mental health and addictions. We know that it is not a simple,

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overnight solution. The best way to keep moving forward is to work in collaboration with our partners across all areas of the system, whether in housing, social services, or in health care.

Our record over the last 10 years demonstrates that we understand the complexities of the issue, and that we are willing to put the attention and the resources into doing something about it. In addition, we have laid out a plan to invest in it, and to continue on the path forward. We recognize that there is more to do, and that it is hard work, but we are fully committed to working on getting there.

It's truly unfortunate that one of the most progressive budgets in years, including explicit support for mental health and addictions, was defeated. In addition, the budget contained items that would have addressed the social determinants of health – those that often further complicate mental health and addictions issues. Our budget included a range of investments for those living in poverty: more support for affordable housing, increases in income supports, and a number of other good investments. Yet the NDP still chose to defeat it. In addition, the words mental health, addictions, social assistance, poverty, and housing literally do not appear in their platform. Not once.

We were pleased to see a reference to mental health in the PC platform. However, with Tim Hudak's commitment to fire 100,000 public sector employees, it's clear that it's an empty promise. You cannot improve the mental health and addictions system while also getting rid of the critical staff who provide the services. It just is not possible.

If given the opportunity, Ontario Liberals look forward to fully implementing our mental health and addictions strategy. It's too important an issue, to too many people, to do otherwise.