Dear Hon. Bill Morneau,

I am contacting you on behalf of the Ontario Association of Mental Health Professionals, a not-for-profit association representing close to 3,000 mental health professionals across Ontario. In the past, we have corresponded around various issues of concern and I thank you for your interest and thoughtful responses. At this challenging time, I am writing to you for some additional clarification on CERB, a matter of concern to our membership and, we believe ultimately, to the public.

As this pandemic sweeps the country our membership of mental health professionals is now deemed to be providing an essential service. Almost all are also restricted to operating virtually or telephonically to help flatten the curve. We are fully supportive of these actions yet find there has been an unintended ripple effect as they try to maintain their practices, adopt new technologies and support those in their communities.

The advent of Covid-19 and the need for physical distance, means some therapy services which are less viable virtually can no longer be offered while in other cases the client or patient is not able or ready to do so. We are finding that many clients lack the necessary technology, a private or safe space in which to speak, the funds to pay or, as we hear from many, they are simply overwhelmed and too frightened to attend right now. The result of this disruption has been as unprecedented as this pandemic and members are reporting case work dropping by a range of anywhere from 60 – 95%. The impact of this on peoples’ mental health is unfathomable and for the provider, financially not sustainable, especially for a small independent practitioner.

This morning I spoke with Blake, a member of your staff, to ask about the terms and conditions regarding eligibility for the CERB program. I was heartened to know that the self-employed are to be included yet concerned about a few points, that require further clarification. Below are some of what I believe to be the most pressing questions being asked by those we support:

- I was told that to be eligible the party must have had an income of at least $5000 during 2019. Is this gross or net? Does this mean that those who wish to apply must first complete their 2019 taxes?
- It was also explained that anyone wanting to apply must be able to demonstrate that in the four weeks prior to applying they experienced 14 consecutive days of NO income. Are these 14 days consecutive business days (3 weeks) or consecutive calendar days?
• Regardless of how the 14 days are calculated, this formula means that a therapist who provides support to one or perhaps two clients during this period would, for 1-2 hours of work, forfeit their ability to apply to CERB. I would hope that in recognizing this as an unintended consequence of the program restrictions you might find a way to re-frame or adjust this requirement. The result of leaving this as it is stated means that therapists who have lost most of their income will need to choose between maintaining support for a few or safeguarding their own wellbeing.

• Additionally, a large majority of our self-employed and regulated health care professionals are therapists who like their regulated counterparts in four other provinces are charged with providing mental health services while being required to add HST. At this time of tremendous need for all and at the suggestion of the government of Ontario we would ask this unnecessary barrier to access be dropped.

We anticipate the need to support isolated individuals will increase in coming months and we firmly believe we have an essential role to play here. Private practitioners across Ontario and the Country are trained, available to help and more than willing to partner with the government to reduce the strain and to support our recovery as the psychosocial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic take an emotional toll on all of us.

Thank you so much for taking the time to review and respond to our concerns and I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Dennison
DCS., RP (cert)
OAMHP
President, OAMHP

CC
Hon. Chrystia Freeland
Deputy Prime Minister and Chair of Cabinet Committee on COVID-19 Response
Hon. Melanie Joly, Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages
Hon. Mary Ng, Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade
Jeremy Broadhurst, Chief of Staff to the Deputy Prime Minister
Elder Marques, Chief of Staff to the Minister of Finance
Rick Theis, Policy Advisor to the Prime Minister