May 14, 2020

The Honourable Michael Tibollo
Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions

Dear Hon. Michael Tibollo,

I am contacting you on behalf of the Ontario Association of Mental Health Professionals, a not-for-profit association representing 3,000+ mental health professionals across Ontario. Prior to the current pandemic, we met around various issues of concern and I thank you for your interest and thoughtful responses. I did by the way follow suit with your recommendations which proved quite helpful.

It has long been argued that the ‘ECHO’ pandemic in mental health starting with COVID-19 will be far reaching and the impact of this on peoples’ mental health unfathomable. Initially we found in our sector that many clients lacked the necessary technology, a private or safe space in which to speak, the funds to pay and/or were overwhelmed and too frightened to seek help.

As time passes the resultant disruption of peoples’ lives continues and increasingly, we see many reaching a crisis point. They are now beginning to look for mental health supports. We are grateful that the provincial government has introduced some virtual options freely available to the public large and yet for many these tools alone will not be the answer.

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

One small step that could be taken in Ontario right now to help address this need would be to follow the example set by the Federal Public Service in recent months. On April 24th, 2020 in direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic the government issued a temporarily change to the Public Service Health Care Plan (PSHCP). Included in this notice, ‘Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) – Temporary measures: Public Service Health Care Plan (PSHCP)’, the government temporarily added psychotherapists to their benefits plan as accepted mental health practitioners. A month earlier they had added social workers. (see attached)
The province employs approximately 155,000 workers and with this very small change the government will help they and their families to more readily access mental health care during these precarious times.

Thank you so much for taking the time to review and respond to our concerns. If you have any questions, I would be pleased to meet with you at your earliest convenience (virtually of course) and I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

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