

May 7, 2020

**Re: Pandemic pay and urgent inclusion of all front-line staff providing in-person care, treatment and supports in child and youth mental health**

Dear Premier Ford, Minister Bethlenfalvy, Minister Elliott and Minister Tibollo:

On behalf of Ontario's child and youth mental health centres, thank you for your leadership to ensure Ontario's front-line staff are supported and recognized for the critical work they are doing, at increased risk to themselves and families, to ensure vulnerable Ontarians, such as children and youth, can continue to receive care and treatment through the pandemic. It is our firm belief that all front-line staff working in-person and face-to-face in child and youth mental health programs should be included in the pandemic pay.

While our sector appreciates this support, we are deeply concerned that many critical, front-line staff may not ultimately be eligible for temporary pandemic pay based on the announcements made to date. Our dedicated staff work directly with clients every day, in high risk congregate settings, and are essential to ensuring that our vulnerable children receive the care they need. These workers ensure that these children do not need to be in hospital. For front-line staff in child and youth mental health care, the pandemic pay increase represents a 15%-25% increase in compensation. They are some of the lowest paid workers in the healthcare system. This is very meaningful for them. A lack of clarity and potential exclusion of some front-line staff is causing serious morale problems at a time when we need cohesion and solidarity most. Most critically, vulnerable children and youth are at significant risk if there are labour disruptions that jeopardize their care and treatment.

Our direct front line staff include child and youth workers, social workers, psychologists, speech and language pathologists and other staff. All of our front line staff must be included in pandemic pay. Our front line supervisors and program managers also provide direct front line care to children. Further, for most of our members, program success and stability relies on frontline workers who choose to take on the added service responsibilities of frontline supervisors by way of accepting "acting" supervisor shifts for both planned and ad-hoc vacancies. One can see the disincentive of taking on even more responsibility while being paid substantially less in such a scenario.

In addition, almost all of our members are multi-service agencies and receive funding from across multiple government ministries. It is critical that there is equitable eligibility for workers across ministries. A social worker in the youth justice system funded by MCCSS works alongside a social worker in the MOH funded children's live-in/residential treatment settings. They must be equally eligible.

It has been almost two full weeks since this announcement has been made. Child and youth mental health centres have been doing everything they can at this time to avoid disruptions, but there is only so much they can do to buy time for the government to bring the clarity needed and that we have been asking for since April 27. There is a serious, imminent risk of labour disruption that could quickly spread across the sector and the province and result in vulnerable children being left without needed staff.

We urge your government to fully and immediately address this very serious morale problem. Vulnerable children and youth are at risk if this is not addressed immediately. The government has an opportunity to officially recognize the efforts of all front-line staff in child and youth programs providing in-person care and

supports. Should that not occur, given the significant morale concerns and practical realities outlined above, agencies will have no choice but to implement pandemic pay based on our recommendations to government. Under the commitment made by the Government of Ontario that the province will fund all necessary costs related to the COVID-19 pandemic response, it is our expectation that the province will fund any and all COVID-19 related payments to any front-line employee, regardless as to whether those employees were originally identified as eligible by the government.



Kimberly Moran  
CEO  
Children's Mental Health Ontario

cc. The Honourable Todd Smith, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services  
The Honourable Jill Dunlop, Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues  
Rana Shamoan, Director of Policy, Office of the Premier  
Karl Baldauf, Chief of Staff, Treasury Board  
Laurel Brazill, Director of Stakeholder Relations, Health  
Alan McDermid, Chief of Staff, Mental Health and Addictions  
Sarah Letersky, Chief of Staff, Children, Community and Social Services