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Invest in Our Future: CPA Urges Federal Parties to Make Children's Mental Health A National Priority

OTTAWA (October 1, 2008) – With more than a million children in this country living with mental disorders, Canada must mobilize the necessary resources and address this issue as one of the highest national priorities.

“If we fail our children, we forfeit the future,” said Dr. Catherine Lee, President of the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA).

The CPA today called on the federal parties, as part of the election campaign, to outline their plans for children's mental health, particularly with respect to school-based programs and services. The concerns are many. For example:

- Canada falls far behind many other industrial countries in addressing bullying and victimization in schools. For example, “Canada ranked a dismal 26th and 27th out of 35 countries on 13 year-old students' reports of bullying and victimization, respectively”.¹
- It is estimated that 1.2 million young people under the age of 20 have mental disorders.² Yet only 5 per cent of children with a diagnosable psychological problem receive any form of psychological care.³
- Without a concerted effort to help young people who have mental health problems, many will never reach their full potential. The mental health conditions that emerge in childhood will persist into adulthood, and the associated human and fiscal costs will be enormous. According to the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental

¹ <http://prevnet.ca/Bullying/BullyingStatistics/tabid/122/Default.aspx>
(Craig & Harel, 2004).

² Kirby MJL and Keon WJ. (2006). *Out of the Shadows at Last: Highlights and Recommendations of the Final Report on Mental Health, Mental Illness and Addiction*. Ottawa: Senate of Canada, Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology.

³ Canadian Psychological Association (2002). *Enhancing the Experience of Children and youth in today's Schools: The Role of Psychology in Canadian Schools*

Health (CAMIMH), “up to 10 per cent of the cost of crime can be attributed to inadequate mental health care for children and youth”.⁴

“Failure to provide an integrated, accessible system of children’s mental health care fails children, families and communities. The direct and lost productivity costs of mental disorders and addictions to the Canadian economy are estimated at \$33 billion annually.⁵” said Dr. Karen Cohen, Executive Director of the CPA.

The next government in Ottawa needs to work with the provinces in implementing an integrated program of significantly enhanced mental health services for children, including improved access in schools to trained psychologists.

“Sadly, right now, we seem to be headed in the opposite direction. We have an undersupply of school psychologists either because school boards are cutting back or because positions, which are not competitive with private practice, remain unfilled,” said Dr. Jennifer Frain, Chairperson of the Council of Professional Associations of Psychologists (CPAP). “This means some kids will never get access to the care they need because their families cannot afford it. With cuts in public institutions, like schools, psychologists are increasingly working in private practice where their services are not covered by public health insurance plans.”

A 2007 review of School Psychology in Canada cited a benchmark of one psychologist per 1,000 students⁶. We’re nowhere near that in Canada. Among nine Canadian jurisdictions reported on, the average ratio of psychologists to students was 1 to 5,161.

In October 2005, federal, provincial and territorial ministers of health endorsed nine Health Goals for Canada – the first of which states that *Canada is a country where our children reach their full potential, growing up happy, healthy, confident and secure*. CPA and CPAP want the governments to fulfill their commitment and realize this goal.

“The mental health and well being of our country’s children is not something we can ignore. We need political leadership, and we’re urging the federal parties to respond,” said Dr. Lee.

CPA and CPAP want to see the federal government get serious about this issue by: 1) dedicating federal transfer funding for mental health and specifically for children’s mental health; 2) working with the provinces to define and develop better models of prevention and service delivery in mental health; and 3) setting benchmarks for the reduction of bullying and violence in schools.

⁴Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health. (2006). *Framework for Action on Mental Illness and Mental Health*.

⁵Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health. (2006). *Framework for Action on Mental Illness and Mental Health*.

⁶Saklofske, D.H., Schwean, V.L., Bartell, R. et al. (2007). *School Psychology in Canada: Past, present, and future perspectives*. In T. Fagan & P. Wise (eds.). *School Psychology: Past, present, and future perspectives*. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

About the CPA

The Canadian Psychological Association was organized in 1939 to improve the health and welfare of all Canadians; promote excellence and innovation in psychological research, education, and practice; and promote the advancement, development, dissemination, and application of psychological knowledge.

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