

**Canadian Psychological Association  
Council of Provincial Associations of Psychologists  
Canadian Register of Health Service Providers in Psychology**

27 January, 2003

Dear First Minister:

**Re: The Revitalization of Medicare in Canada**

Canada's psychology associations call upon the First Ministers to put human behaviour at the heart of health and health care. Psychological problems and mental illness costs in Canada have been estimated to be \$14 billion (1998) per year. This is no doubt an underestimation. Prevalence data show that the majority of Canadians and their families will be affected at some time in their lives. The economic burden to Canadian business and industry is judged to be 14% per year of annual operating profits as estimated by the Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health. The World Health Organization considers mental health problems to be important health issues worldwide with little improvement in access to services over the past 100 years.

The First Ministers meeting on health is critical. Governments are poised to take further action to revitalize medicare in Canada. Health Ministers, supported by the findings of provincial and national health commissions, have called for important changes in the funding and provision of health services in Canada.

The provincial, territorial and national psychology associations, whose presidents are signatories to this letter, are contacting you concerning health care reform in Canada. The associations are fully supportive of many of the important recommendations found in these commission reports. For example, the medicare system needs adequate and stable funding. This funding must have multiyear planning horizons with no surprises and significant federal participation. Health services must be better integrated through improved inter-organization and interdisciplinary cooperation. Services that work need to be funded and those that don't need to be eliminated. We need to improve our ability to get the right patient to the right provider or service at the right time. There is much to be done.

It is time to take decisive action to strengthen what Canadians consider to be their most important social program, one that helps define what it means to be Canadian.

Mr. Romanow stated that mental health is an "orphan" in Canada's health care system. It is high time we took psychological problems and mental illness "out of the asylum and put them onto centre stage."

The cheque is still in the mail. Decades ago provinces and territories closed psychiatric hospitals promising to transfer significant funding to community services. For the most part, those services were never adequately funded and still do not meet the need nor the demand.

Psychology is concerned with how we think, feel and behave in our social and physical environments. That is, psychology is the study of the biological, cognitive, emotional, social, cultural and environmental determinants of behaviour.

It is obvious that human behaviour affects health and health outcomes across the continuum of care. This is demonstrated in effective wellness programs, injury and disease prevention, accurate diagnosis and cure, management of chronic disease and disability, rehabilitation and relapse prevention, and palliation. It is not hard to understand the essential contribution of human behaviour when considering examples such as diabetes prevention and management, serious childhood behaviour problems, adjustment to a spinal cord injury, heart attack prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and relapse interdiction, cancer treatment and adjustment to outcomes such as a mastectomy, dementia, stress and burnout, developmental disorders, depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, attention deficit disorder, and suicide. Behavioural issues in health are as important to children and seniors as they are to adults.

Research shows that the appropriate use of psychological services reduces suffering, inappropriate and expensive system utilization (e.g., emergency and inpatient services, physician services, pharmaceuticals), and downstream costs associated with untreated diseases and conditions while improving health outcomes. The appropriate integration of psychological and mental health services into the health care system has positive outcomes for patients, families and the bottom line.

Psychology works. Research demonstrates the effectiveness of psychological services across a wide range of diseases and conditions. Two recently published papers "The Cost-Effectiveness of Psychological Interventions" and "Costs and Cost-Offsets of Psychological Interventions: Data in Support of their Integration into a Universal Access Health Care System" are attached for your consideration. It is important to underline the utility of psychological services in wellness enhancement and prevention and in the management and treatment of physical diseases and conditions in addition to those that fall in the mental illness domain.

The timely attention to psychological problems, particularly in children, has been shown to reduce or eliminate difficulties that can affect the person's entire life. At a systems level, the utilization rates of health, criminal justice and educational special services are reduced.

Canadians need access to the right practitioner or service at the right time. All too often that is not the case. Access to psychological services occurs through both the public and private systems. Provinces and territories must improve access through an expansion of the public system and through programs that effectively engage private practitioners in the provision of services to those of middle and lower incomes. This flexibility of engagement is particularly important in rural and remote Canada.

Primary health care reform offers much promise. If these services are developed with the right interdisciplinary mix of professionals working in effective delivery systems, costs can be contained, choice enhanced and outcomes improved.

Health human resources are a major issue. Psychology, like other health professions, has an excess of demand over supply. Those responsible for health human resources planning must consider ways of supporting the expansion of psychology education and

training programs. This is an essential building block in helping to meet the supply problems. Psychology is not seeing a flight of professionals to the United States. The vast majority of Canadian graduates from Canadian universities practice in Canada. The Canadian Institute for Health Information reported in "Health Personnel in Canada" 2002, that psychology was the oldest health profession. What is needed is more government participation in funding graduate students in psychology.

We urge you to make psychological and mental health services a full partner in the basket of services offered to your citizens. The signatory organizations to this letter are expecting to work closely with health policy and services planners in your government to help develop the next evolution of Canada's effective and highly prized medicare system. The signatories in your jurisdiction will take the responsibility of contacting you to discuss ways of improving psychology's engagement in the important planning processes that are unfolding as we speak, planning processes that will shape the health care system for the next decade.

Yours truly,

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## PROVINCIAL AND NATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY ORGANIZATIONS

Canadian Psychological Association (CPA)  
Société canadienne de psychologie  
Council of Provincial Associations of Psychologists (CPAP)  
Conseil des sociétés provinciales de psychologues

- ◆ College of Alberta Psychologists
- ◆ Psychologists' Association of Alberta
- ◆ College of Psychologists of British Columbia
- ◆ British Columbia Psychological Association
- ◆ Psychological Association of Manitoba
- ◆ Manitoba Psychological Society
- ◆ College of Psychologists of New Brunswick  
Collège des psychologues du Nouveau-Brunswick
- ◆ Newfoundland Board of Examiners in Psychology

- ◆ Association of Newfoundland Psychologists
- ◆ Association of Psychologists of the NWT
- ◆ Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology
- ◆ Association of Psychologists of Nova Scotia
- ◆ College of Psychologists of Ontario
- ◆ Ontario Psychological Association
- ◆ PEI Psychologists Registration Board
- ◆ Psychological Association of PEI
- ◆ Ordre des psychologues du Québec
- ◆ Saskatchewan College of Psychologists
- ◆ Psychological Society of Saskatchewan
- Canadian Register of Health Service Providers in Psychology (CRHSPP)  
Répertoire canadien des psychologues offrant des services de santé

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