

MEDIA RELEASE

Psychiatrists ask for government help to deal with youth mental health emergency in Alberta

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ALBERTA – Executive members of the Alberta Psychiatric Association (APA) and the Alberta Medical Association’s (AMA) sections of General and Child/Adolescent Psychiatry have asked for government help to address the crisis Alberta is facing in child and adolescent mental health. In short, psychiatrists have asked government to invest in the future of the province by significantly increasing funding to child and youth mental health care services.

Dr. Kathryn Fitch, APA President said, “Although precautions taken throughout the pandemic, such as school closures, have been necessary and likely lifesaving, measures are also needed to address the corresponding cost to the emotional, mental, developmental and physical well-being of our youth. Although children and youth may not be the immediate face of this pandemic, they are undeniably the face of its future.”

The APA recognizes the important work that government has done in this area already. Resources like, [Working together to support mental health in Alberta schools](#) demonstrate government support and astutely point out the importance of mental health to learning and the critical role that schools play in this process. To build on this, though, psychiatrists say we must tackle the reality that the status quo is far from a seamless, integrated system. “Collaboration and planning across many stakeholders is needed to promote early identification and timely initial treatment of students who require mental health supports. Adequate funding is also needed to support ongoing recovery and relapse prevention,” says Fitch.

Dr. Sterling Sparshu, APA Section of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry President said, “We must not be under the illusion that the trauma and uncertainty wrought by this pandemic and the damage it has done to the mental health of children and youth will spontaneously resolve itself. Nor should we believe that the needs of impacted youth can be met within the existing health care system.” Sparshu says that Alberta has seen a steady rise in demand for mental health services over the decade leading up to the pandemic, and this demand was already not matched by health care investment.

While the pandemic has taken a toll on everyone, psychiatrists say it has also shone a light on the importance of mental health. It has provided a unique opportunity to meaningfully change the dialogue, the system and the future prospects of many of the most vulnerable young people living in this province.

An adequately funded cross-ministry approach is required to break down silos and create a spectrum of services for youth that provides them with the help they need, when and where they need it. Through the APA and the AMA, psychiatrists look forward to working with government toward a full continuum

of mental health supports including health promotion, illness prevention, early intervention and treatment, where each person is paired with the level of resources they require.

The Alberta Psychiatric Association is a not-for-profit professional organization representing the Psychiatrists of Alberta. The Alberta Psychiatric Association has stood for more than fifty years as an advocate for its psychiatrist members, providing leadership and support for their role in the provision of quality mental health care in Alberta by promoting effective professional relationships and influencing health policy and clinical practice.

The Alberta Psychiatric Association is allied with the Alberta Medical Association (AMA), sharing executive membership with the Sections of General Psychiatry and Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, which represent over 500 members of the AMA who practice psychiatric medicine. Psychiatrists play a critical role in advocating for patients and our health care system.

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