



Ontario Coalition for  
Children AND Youth  
Mental Health

Let's put our heads together.

Coalition ontarienne  
pour la santé mentale des  
enfants ET des adolescents

Réfléchissons ensemble.

February 15, 2023

The Honorable Stephen Lecce  
Minister of Education

To: Minister Lecce

The Ontario Coalition for Children and Youth Mental Health wishes to thank you and your staff for your time and engagement regarding our recently released position paper [Let's Put our Heads Together: Coordinating our Efforts to Improve Mental Health and Well-being for Ontario's Children and Youth](#). This letter is a follow up to our meeting on February 9, 2023 to reinforce some key points that were raised in discussion and in response to questions that you posed.

1. **Re: investments and funding:** As stated in the meeting, currently there is an urgent priority to fund community-based mental health supports and services (e.g., for hiring, training, supervision, ongoing implementation support). Upstream investments in school mental health promotion, prevention, and early intervention are excellent but will only reach their potential if we have a robust system of supports for young people who need more intensive and costly treatments in community and hospital settings. At this time there is a critical need to increase availability of, and access to, these community-based mental health services. The Coalition looks to your leadership in working with your Minister colleagues, given the successes your sector has achieved in scalable and sustainable school mental health supports, to ensure a responsive system of care and supports across the province, accessible to all. The Coalition reinforced the confidence in and support for current education mental health investments to be maintained, fully funded, and sustained going forward.
2. **Re: system coordination:** One of the main themes for action in our position paper is to improve system coordination (across sectors and levels of care) so that we reduce fragmentation, clarify navigation, and ensure children and young people receive the right care at the right time, and in the right setting to best meet their needs. Coordination and access issues have led to an uneven access to care across our communities – and this is especially true for Black and Indigenous children and youth, newcomers, and those living in rural and remote areas of Ontario, particularly French speaking, and Northern communities, and those with existing mental health problems and disabilities. As noted in the paper, in order to ensure seamless coordination and identity-affirming care, the Ministry should promote the collection of identity-based data in a consistent way across sectors. As well, it is essential that intermediary organizations (e.g., the Knowledge Institute, School Mental Health Ontario) provide support and guidance to enable the use of a planned implementation science approach to guide change efforts.

3. **Re: student mental health literacy:** Thank you for sharing Burlington MPP Natalie Pierre’s motion regarding a mandatory mental health learning requirement for students.

*That, in the opinion of this House, the Ministry of Education should further expand mental health literacy in schools with the aim of educating and strengthening resiliency, developing practical tools, skills, and preventative knowledge to protect students and save lives, delivered directly and intentionally to all Ontario students as a mandatory learning requirement prior to graduation.*

As we note in the position paper, mental health literacy is an essential part of school mental health practice. That is why we have worked together over several years, with leadership from School Mental Health Ontario to (1) co-create a robust set of K-12 mental health literacy resources for staff and students, and (2) determine the best ways to bring this material forward so that it has an impact on every classroom, in every school across the province in a lasting and meaningful manner. Although many ideas and “one-off” types of programs are well-intentioned, historically they have not had the intended results, hence adhering to the principles of implementation science is key.

With an expanded focus on mental health literacy in schools with the aim of educating and strengthening resiliency, developing practical tools, skills, and preventative knowledge, there is an opportunity to leverage existing resources and supports to enhance systematic uptake of evidence-based, identity affirming learning across Ontario classrooms. Given the range of stakeholder voices available to inform further development and implementation, the Coalition would be very pleased to offer guidance and support to leverage and deepen this important work. We were unclear in the meeting as to the mandatory element being proposed, but please be aware that the Coalition does not support the introduction of a mental health graduation requirement for a variety of reasons.

As mentioned in our meeting, we commend the work done in schools and school boards over the past number of years to support child and youth mental health and well-being. In our 13 years together, the Coalition has consistently demonstrated its commitment to evidence-based approaches, implementation science and working in collaboration with the government. With its multi-sectoral network of organizations working within the child and youth mental health area, the Coalition is available to provide additional guidance and support to assist the government in its mental health and well-being efforts.

The Coalition looks forward to working with all sectors in the government to ensure that all children, young people, and their families receive a coordinated, integrated system of care.

Sincerely,



Purnima Sundar

Co-Chairs Ontario Coalition for Children and Youth Mental Health



Judith Nyman

cc: Nancy Naylor, Deputy Minister of Education

Clayton Latouche, Assistant Deputy Minister, Student Support and Field Services Division  
Claudine Munroe, Director, Special Education and Success for All Branch  
Dasha Androusenkov, Director of Stakeholder Relations