

Advocating for Increased Access to Psychological Services for all Ontarians

An Introduction to the Ontario Psychological Association (OPA)

Founded in 1947, the OPA is a volunteer professional organization that represents psychology in Ontario. OPA members are clinicians, academics, researchers and students. An important goal of the OPA is to help to promote access to psychological services that are essential to the mental and physical well-being of Ontarians. The OPA accomplishes this goal by:

- Promoting psychological research and its practical application;
- Protecting the standards of training and best practices in psychology; and,
- Encouraging co-operation between members of the psychological profession and other providers of mental health services.

Some activities of the OPA include educating the public about mental health, working with the government to address issues that impact both the public and the profession, offering professional development opportunities to our members and other mental health providers, and providing a referral service to those seeking psychological services.

Vision: *That every Ontarian has equitable access to mental healthcare services and that there is full integration of the mental health providers in every community.*

Key Initiatives of the OPA

The OPA plays a vital role in advocating for legislation, government policies, activities, and initiatives that bear directly on the well-being of the individuals that are served so well by our members, as well as on psychological practice. The OPA was one of the first organizations in the province to recognize that Health Links would have great difficulties in addressing the needs of 5% of the population that utilize 80% of the healthcare resources in the community unless adequate mental health care for these high resource patients was provided. Data has now confirmed that a large proportion of this population have severe persistent mental illness or multiple comorbidities with a mental illness and/or a dementia overlay. To assist Health Links and, in particular, to support the rollout of the Mental Health Strategy, the OPA developed an integration plan with specific initiatives set forth in OPA's proposal, "*Private-Public Integration Roadmap*" include:

1. **Psychological practitioners in Primary Care:** Psychologists* can assess, diagnose, develop care plans, and triage to the most appropriate treatment provider in the private or public sector depending on available funding and level of care required. Every FHT, CHC and NP-Clinic should receive funds to hire Psychologists as triage agents and treatment providers, and to outreach to family medicine practices in their region to ensure continuity of care.
2. **Public funding for specific psychological services:** Increased funding will help identify mental health issues and plan proactively to address needs before significant problems arise and become more time-consuming and costly to address. Specifically, government needs to fund:
 - An assessment for every four year-old to identify behavioural problems
 - A psychoeducational assessment for every eight year-old to identify learning problems
 - A neuropsychological assessment for every 70 year-old to identify risk for dementia and other mental illnesses and addictions
 - Up to six sessions of psychological treatment of PTSD for military and first-responders to address the need for a suicide prevention strategy and would be more cost-effective than paying for sick time or long-term disability.

3. **Grant prescriptive authority for psychotropic medication** to doctoral-level psychologists as per our November 2012 submission to the MOHLTC to increase access, reduce wait times, and enhance patient safety
4. **Grant hospital admission and discharge privileges** to ensure Ontarians with significant mental health issues receive the care they need, when they need it
5. **Grant the right to execute Form 1s** for involuntary psychiatric admissions to ensure timely intervention and reduce risk of harm

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*The term “Psychologist” in this document refers both to doctoral-level Psychologists and masters-level “Psychological Associates”. For information on the extensive training required to become a registered Psychologist or Psychological Associate, please see: www.cpo.on.ca