

Addressing the Inequities in the Mental Health Sector

Psychology Aid Ontario (PAO) was developed by the Ontario Psychological Association (OPA) to provide timely and equitable access to psychological services for the most vulnerable amongst us. The word “equitable” does not have the same meaning as “equal”. It means that those most in need have first access to the highest quality psychological services possible. *“Taking Stock: A Report on the Quality of Mental Health and Addiction Services in Ontario - Health Quality Ontario and the Institute of Evaluative Science”* reveals that access to mental health and addiction services varies across the province, and the quality of services that are provided are inconsistent. Many Ontarians with a mental disorder endure long wait times for treatment or do not have access to needed services such as those provided in the private sector by our members. This is especially true for those with low incomes, residents in rural areas and new Canadians. As Senator Michael Kirby states in reference to our two-tiered mental health system: “This rich pay”. The middle class scrape enough money together to get some needed services but the poor languish on long wait-lists, ping-ponging from one service to another and doing without the care they need and deserve.

Psychological Aid was conceived as a way to address these inequities in the mental health sector. It was conceived of as an opportunity to relieve the untold suffering of children, adolescents and their family members - and all Ontarians that suffer due to a lack of access to evidence-based psychological interventions (*See Issue Brief: The Evidence*). As the need for Psychological Aid Ontario became an obvious imperative, the PAO Proof of Concept proposal took on the form of four separate components:

Component One: Patients with mental disorders on long wait-lists in the public sector due to funding barriers in our two-tiered healthcare system, especially children, adolescents and their families.

The target population is children, adolescents and their family members and all others existing below the poverty line with mental disorders, or at high risk for mental disorders due to psychological traumas. The complex patient populations that PAO was developed to serve, require timely access to comprehensive psychological, psycho-educational, psycho-vocational and/or neuro-psychological assessments leading to accurate diagnoses and effective care planning. Care planning includes the identification of the inter-professional team members that can best deliver optimum evidence-based treatment modalities and other social and legal supports. PAO is anchored in an integration process to re-engage psychologists in the private practice with the public sector to address funding barriers to psychological service. The key deliverables are expected to include, but are not limited to, reduced symptomatology, improved quality of life and effective community functioning.

PAO recognizes the knowledge and skills of psychologists as scientist-clinicians, educators and coaches, while building on the competencies of other mental health providers to establish as cost-effective a program as possible. The model that we are proposing places the psychologist in the role of identifying the inter-professional team that each patient and family members will require for acute and ongoing mental healthcare. Based on the “**behavioural home**”, the focus is on collaborative relationships between the psychologist and the patient’s family physician and/or psychiatrist. In the case of individuals whose main requirements are psychosocial, the relationship may be primarily with

primary care and community-based mental health service providers. Telepsychology will ensure expertise is available throughout these five communities and especially in our rural, northern communities and First Nations' communities. (See Issue Brief: *The Behavioural Home*)

Component Two: Homeless individuals and Ontarians disabled by mental disorders seeking supports from the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) or Developmental Services Ontario (DSO)

The clinical work of neuropsychologist, Dr. Sylvain Roy, with the homeless population within a primary health setting, the shelter system and Centre for Addictions and Mental Health (CAMH) provided insights into complex interplay between physical and mental disorders, poverty and their ability to remain housed. The second component builds upon the first component and is aimed at supporting **chronically homeless and disabled individuals** who are engaged in programs supported by the Ministries of Community and Social Services (MCSS's) and Treasury Board Secretariat's Homeless and Poverty Reduction Strategies. This component will include a province-wide rollout of the lessons learned from the Inner City FHT's "**Bridges to Home**" project. This enhanced "Home First" project focuses on a comprehensive physical and cognitive assessment to identify the rehabilitation and other supports that homeless and/or disabled individuals need in order to live in dignity, off the streets and out of the shelter system. It is focused on supporting MCSS's Ontario Disability Support Program's medical reviews and DSO applications. The current system of frequent reviews of individuals with complex chronic mental disorders is traumatic for the disability recipient and costly for government. Funding from a reduction in needless medical reviews will free up funds to provide better access to services. (See Issue Brief: *Poverty and Mental Health*)

Component Three: Defendants and litigants with mental disorders served by Legal Aid Ontario and the victims of sexual violence, domestic abuse or other violent crimes in our Ontario courts.

The third component, building upon the previous one, relates to the **PAO's Police and Justice Service Model** and is intended to meet the needs of individuals intersecting with the police services and justice system (litigants with mental disorders and victims of major crimes). This component complements the directions set by the Ministries of Community Safety and Correctional Services, the Ministry of Labour and Legal Aid Ontario's Mental Health Strategy. It includes the use of telepsychology to provide psychologists on standby to make our streets and courtrooms safer, as well as positions for psychologists in Ontario's courthouses. This component will ensure that individual's with mental disorders have the supports they need to provide proper instructions to their lawyers and are supported to have a fair hearing in court. It was also developed to ensure that court processes do not cause further trauma to the victims of sexual assaults, sex trafficking, domestic abuse or other violent crimes.

As a society, we have both a moral and an economic imperative to find an effective way to meet the needs of at-risk persons with mental disorders, whose circumstances do not allow for them to wait days, months or even years for appropriate and professional interventions. Each person with an untreated mental disorder that lands in the hands of the police or the justice system should be measured and viewed as negative outcome of a failed mental health system. The OPA and members of the justice system believe that litigants with mental disorders required both legal and psychological supports to ensure fair treatment under the law. In addition, victims of sexual assaults, domestic abuse and other violent crimes deserve psychological supports to avoid re-traumatization (See Issue Brief: *The Role of Psychologists and the Justice System*)

Component Four: The role of psychologists in the resettlement efforts for Syrian Refugees of all ages, especially children, adolescents and their family members - addressing psychological trauma

The fourth component builds directly from the third component. It is aimed at supporting the complex needs of the **Syrian Refugees**. Through our consultations with LOA, the OPA recognizes that immigrants and refugees need a complex mix of health, social services, education and career counseling and legal services. In partnership with LOA, Psychology Aid Ontario will strengthen the work conducted in LOA Clinics throughout the province by supporting psychologists to conduct comprehensive assessments to identify the totality of services that individuals require to improve and stabilize their mental health and to support their successful settlement into the fabric of Ontario's communities. The comprehensive assessments that psychologists are uniquely trained to provide, are necessary stepping-stones to the development and implementation of individualized treatment and settlement plans that can then be used to build the inter-professional team that will meet all their needs.

One often forgotten element of the refugee crisis is mental health - survivors have witnessed atrocities including the death of loved ones, famine and sexual violence. Many of the survivors are children and adolescents who may not have the cognitive and emotional skills to process complex trauma. Persons with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or Acute Stress Disorder may be tormented by having to relive their traumatic experience, as happens in the hands of providers not trained to treat psychological trauma. Refugees frequently suffer as well from co-morbid disorders such as severe depression and cognitive dysfunction. The combined result of these conditions often interferes with educational, vocational and community functioning.

Young victims of trauma may present in the classroom with symptoms that appear as behavioural or attention problems {i.e. conduct disorder or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)}. These children often go untreated, labeled, wrongly diagnosed, medicated and sent on a negative trajectory. Children deserve to be understood and cared for adequately and given the tools necessary to process trauma, develop coping strategies and develop the resiliency skills that are necessary to overcome their mental disorders. Their parents deserve the same level of psychological supports since child and adolescent mental health is a family affair. *(See Issue Brief: Syrian Refugees and Psychological Trauma)*

To make **Psychology Aid Ontario's Proof of Concept** proposal immediately applicable, the members of OPA will offer assessment and treatment services at a highly discounted price for vulnerable individuals. "Return on Investment" outcome measures in key domains such as sustained housing, employment/education, quality of life, and mental health recovery and stability that reduce long term costs in the health, education and justice sectors will be measured. For the first time, government will have a snapshot of the interface between the public and private mental health sectors in the provision of assessment for complex, vulnerable persons requiring healthcare, social services, legal advice, or involved in the justice or correctional systems. While we do not propose that PAO is the answer to all mental health system pressures, nor the end of the process of improving the mental health system, we believe it is a major step forward in bringing greater equity and achieving better outcomes for those involved. We also believe health practitioners will welcome this additional option for referral and quick intervention. The lack of access to psychological services impacts on lives of literally thousands of Ontarians - and on the purse strings of multiple government Ministries. PAO offers a cost-effective and reliable way to begin to address these issues and create a sustainable mental health system for Ontario

Psychology Aid Ontario's main purpose is to ensure that the human journey from birth to death does not result in a lifetime of deprivation and psychological pain for individuals, their family members and society in general.

Psychology Aid Ontario was created to provide such services for the most vulnerable amongst us.

About the Ontario Psychological Association

Who are we?

The Ontario Psychological Association (OPA) is a not-for-profit voluntary professional association that was founded in 1947 and is the home of psychology in Ontario. Our members are graduate students in Master and PhD level psychology programs, psychologists and psychological associates. Our members are recognized as expert clinical practitioners, educators and researchers.

What is Our Mission?

The Mission of the OPA is to improve the physical and psychological health of Ontarians by advocating for timely and equitable psychological services informed by research, education and collaboration.

What is our Vision?

The Vision of the Ontario Psychological Association, home of psychology in Ontario, is that every Ontarian has timely and equitable access to the health services they need to maintain their psychological health and wellbeing.

What are our Values?

- Timely and equitable access to psychological services for all Ontarians;
- The application of research to promote best psychological services;
- Life long learning supported by excellence in training and continuing education;
- Ethical behaviours, professionalism, self-regulation and collaboration;
- The principles of good governance and effective administration; and,
- Nimbleness - the ability to understand the world around us and thrive in transformational systems.

What we do?

The Ontario Psychological Association's Articles of Incorporation provides an overview of what we do:

- To enhance the psychological health of Ontarians through the advancement of psychology as a profession;
- To promote psychological research, its practical applications and its impact on quality services;
- To support the maintenance of high standards of training and to coordinate continuing education to prepare and support members to deliver evidence-based psychological services; and,
- To establish collaborative relationships between the psychological profession, other healthcare professionals, organizations and government.

What is Psychological Aid Ontario?

Psychology Aid Ontario is the title that has been assigned to a Proof of Concept proposal whose funds will be used to support psychologists to deliver needed psychological services. In due course, it will become a Not-for-Profit Charitable Organization. The Officers of the Ontario Psychological Association are serving as PAO's Steering Committee and will be its founding board members. Psychological Aid Ontario - it's time has come.

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