



June 21, 2023

[Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister](#)
[Chrystia Freeland, Minister of Finance](#)
[Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Health](#)
[Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions](#)

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VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dear Prime Minister, Minister Freeland, Minister Duclos and Minister Bennett,

Mental health is a fundamental human right.ⁱ Historically, resources have been prioritized to protect and promote the physical health of Canadians. The effects of such unequal esteem are evident when treatment for physical ailments lead to clear pathways of covered healthcare services and a supporting system, but the same cannot be said about mental illness and high risk substance use. As Boards of Health, we support the notion that mental and physical health should be equally valued, and advocate for access to mental and substance use health care that is **truly** universal. We exhort you to take meaningful action by following the recommendations outlined in the [Act for Mental Health campaign](#).ⁱⁱ

The provision of universal, accessible, culturally safe, and appropriate mental and substance use health care is an equity issue. Canadians pay \$1 billion a year for private counselling,² but many do not have the means to afford it. Canadians who live with low income, live in rural or remote communities, are Indigenous, immigrants, 2SLGBTQ+, among others who experience intersecting inequities, are less likely to have access to the services they need to recover and thrive. Rural and remote communities face unique challenges on the social determinants of health which have contributed to significantly worse population mental health outcomes, e.g., poorer mental health, higher rates of death by suicide, etc.ⁱⁱⁱ Sixty per cent of Timiskaming residents aged 12 and older rated their mental health to be good or excellent, which was the lowest across all Northern Ontario Health Units^{iv} and statistically lower when compared to Ontario.^v

The pandemic has further exacerbated the pre-existing population mental health and substance use concerns. To recover from this crisis, adequate and sustainable funding is needed to implement comprehensive community mental health and addictions programs and services that effectively cover from primary to tertiary prevention. The 2023 Federal budget will not be sufficient to address the need that already exists.

As a Board of Health, we believe that it is time to *act for mental health*. We join the network of Canadian organizations and the thousands of individuals who have demonstrated their support for the *Act for Mental Health* campaign. We urge you to take action.

Sincerely,

Stacy Wight, Timiskaming Board of Health Chair

ⁱ World Health Organization (n.d.). *The Right to Health. Fact Sheet No. 31*. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights..

ⁱⁱ CMHA National. (2022). *A Federal Plan for Universal Mental Health and Substance Use Health: Background Paper*. Act for Mental. Retrieved April 20, 2023, from <https://www.actformentalhealth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/AfMH-White-Paper-EN-FINAL.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2021). *The impact of Covid 19 on rural and remote mental health and substance use*. Ottawa, Canada.

^{iv} Kvas, M. (2020, August 18). *Northern Ontario's state of Mental Health and Why*. Northern Policy Institute. Retrieved April 20, 2023, from <https://www.northernpolicy.ca/northern-ontario-mental-health>

^v Statistics Canada. Canadian Community Health Survey 2017/18. Share Files, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.