
REPORT TITLE: **Responding to the Mental Health and Addictions Needs in Peel**

FROM: Cathy Granger, Acting Commissioner of Health Services

RECOMMENDATION

That the advocacy approach outlined in the “Key Priorities for Action” in the report from the Acting Commissioner of Health Services, titled “Responding to the Mental Health and Addictions Needs in Peel” be endorsed;

And further, that the Region of Peel continue to engage the Province to ensure funding equity and improved mental health and addictions services integration for Peel;

And further, that the Region of Peel continue to engage the Province to ensure that appropriate funding is provided for the additional system pressures that have resulted from COVID-19;

And further, that a copy of the subject report be forwarded to the Hon. Christine Elliot, Minister of Health, Hon. Michael Tibollo, Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, and the local Members of Provincial Parliament.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- On March 12, 2020, Regional Council approved the Health System Integration Committee Recommendation HSIC-2-2020 that endorsed the advocacy approach outlined in the report titled “Addressing Community Mental Health and Addictions System Challenges in Peel”.
- On March 3, 2020, the Province released *the Roadmap to Wellness: A Plan to Build Ontario’s Mental Health and Addictions System* which establishes the foundation for future investment and system improvements to guide the sector.
- Through the *Roadmap to Wellness*, the Province aims to address key challenges in the broader mental health and addictions system, many of which reflect key priorities for Peel, including extremely long wait times, issues with accessing services, uneven service quality and fragmentation and poor coordination of services.
- Since the release of the Roadmap, the Province, Region of Peel (Region) and health system partners have had to adjust to new challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Recently, the provincial government announced up to \$12 million in emergency funding to expand online and virtual mental health supports for all Ontarians and specific services for frontline essential workers.
- Addressing challenges with social isolation, anxiety, mental health and addictions, and other inequities is especially critical during COVID-19. The Region has mobilized quickly to participate with community mental health and addictions system partners, leveraging local programs and initiatives such as Peel’s Community Safety and Well-Being Plan, Home for Good Program, local Ontario Health Teams, and the Region’s Community Response Table.

Responding to the Mental Health and Addictions Needs in Peel

- The Region is committed to work collaboratively with community mental health and addictions service partners to implement the Province's Roadmap and continue advocating for investment to address gaps, ensure funding equity, and improved mental health and addictions services integration in Peel.
-

DISCUSSION

1. Background

On March 12, 2020 Regional Council approved Recommendation HSIC-2-2020 that endorses the advocacy approach brought forward at the February 20, 2020 Health System Integration Committee meeting titled "Addressing Community Mental Health and Addictions System Challenges in Peel". This report was also accompanied by a delegation from the Canadian Mental Health Association Peel Dufferin and the Peel Children's Centre. While the report detailed provincial directions and recent developments regarding investments in the mental health and addictions sector, the delegation noted immediate and ongoing challenges in the system, which have exacerbated during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

As highlighted to the Health System Integration Committee, the prevalence of mental health and addictions challenges in Peel has continued to parallel population growth. It is estimated that one in five people will be impacted by a mental health illness and/or substance disorder in any given year.¹ In Peel, this means an estimated 276,000 residents will experience a mental health and/or substance disorder. Yet, only one in three Peel residents received the treatment that they need leaving an estimated 184,000 Peel residents (including just over 60,000 children and youth) without the necessary treatment and appropriate community supports.²

Given the recent challenges with COVID-19 pandemic, existing disparities and system pressures will likely be further amplified and underscore the urgency for continued efforts to ensure that there is adequate and appropriate mental health and addictions supports to address the unique needs in Peel.

2. Overview of the Provincial Mental Health and Addictions Strategy: Roadmap to Wellness Plan

a) Provincial Roadmap for the Mental Health and Addictions System

On March 3, 2020, the Province released the "Roadmap to Wellness: A Plan to Build Ontario's Mental Health and Addictions System" (Roadmap) which establishes the foundation for future investment and system improvements.

To support the implementation of the Roadmap, the Ministry of Health (Ministry) also established the Mental Health and Addictions Centre of Excellence, which is responsible for providing leadership to ensure the effective implementation of the Roadmap. Implementation of the Roadmap is centered on four pillars that will support the delivery of services Ontarians require across their lifespan:

¹ Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2013). Strengthening the case for investing in mental health in Canada.

² Offord Child Health Studies. (2019). Ontario Child Health Study.

Responding to the Mental Health and Addictions Needs in Peel

- i) Improving quality: by identifying service gaps, establishing performance metrics, and setting service-level indicators.
- ii) Expanding existing spaces: including child and youth health services (youth hubs) to create an integrated continuum of services.
- iii) Creating innovative solutions: using best practices to inform the design of programs to address current gaps in care (including the provinces Mindability Cognitive Behavioural Therapy program).
- iv) Improving access: by streamlining and coordinating supports through a toll-free number, website with an online chat function, access to in-person supports, and ongoing collaboration with Ontario Health Teams. As part of the Province's Roadmap, an initial investment of \$20 million in immediate funding will be used to launch the Mindability Cognitive Behavioural Therapy program.

b) Recent Provincial and Federal Announcements

As part of the Province's Roadmap, an initial investment of \$20 million in immediate funding will be used to launch the Mindability Cognitive Behavioural Therapy program. The province has made additional investments in recognizing the toll that the COVID-19 pandemic is taking on mental health. The Ontario government established a Mental Health and Addictions COVID-19 Response Table on May 5, 2020 to help mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 on accessing public mental health and addictions services. The Response Table is currently identifying concerns, implementing quick solutions, supporting virtual care, and sharing best practices to ensure issues impacting the mental health and addictions system are addressed quickly.

Emergency funding of up to \$12 million will be used to immediately expand online and virtual mental health supports. This funding will help mental health agencies hire and train more staff, purchase necessary equipment and technologies, and expand services on a range of platforms including:

- Bounce Back: A guided self-help program for youth over 15 and adults through online videos and phone coaching supports.
- Kids Help Phone: which has seen a 24/7 virtual professional counselling, information and referrals to youth.
- Internet-based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy supported by therapists.
- Online Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for frontline health care workers experiencing anxiety, burnout or post-traumatic stress disorder.
- Training for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy-based interventions for frontline workers, including Telehealth and emergency departments, to better support individuals experiencing acute anxiety due to the pandemic.

The government has also presented \$2.6 million to Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) to hire new psychologists and mental health workers to support OPP personnel.

The federal government has announced \$240.5 million funding to develop, expand, and launch virtual care and mental health tools to support Canadians. Some of this funding has been used to support the Wellness Together Canada tools which offers self-guided courses, resources, group coaching, community of support, and phone or chat counselling with a dedicated line specific for frontline workers.

Responding to the Mental Health and Addictions Needs in Peel

3. Current Community Responses in Peel

Addressing challenges with social isolation, anxiety, mental health and addictions, and other inequities is especially critical during COVID-19 to reduce further impacts to the mental health and well-being of residents in Peel. As COVID-19 protective measures are put in place, some programs have been put on hold while waitlists continue to grow. Additionally, there are concerns for the well-being of frontline and health care workers in positions of high risk as well as vulnerable populations with limited access to social supports.

The Region has mobilized quickly to participate with community mental health and addictions system partners through a coordinated approach, leveraging local programs and initiatives as highlighted in the Health System Integration Committee Report (i.e. Peel's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan, Home for Good Program and local Ontario Health Teams). Community partners are working to foster supportive environments, transform care pathways and mitigate risk for crisis situations by:

- Increasing opportunities for social connectedness, especially among youth i.e. through local Peel initiatives such as the Youth Empowering Students for Mental Health (YES4MH) initiative for secondary school students, Project Now to address suicide prevention, and the Malton Youth Wellness Hub to co-locate related services to support youth well-being.
- Improving system navigation for mental health and addictions services while supporting nurses and mental health support staff that have been an integral part of community responses to vulnerable persons needing isolation.
- Addressing needs around client-centered care pathways (particularly transitional points between youth and adult system) and ensuring timely access to mental health and addictions services.
- Outreach supports through Canadian Mental Health Association Peel to advise shelters on isolation and recovery best practices.
- Local agencies are increasing capacity to deal with increased service inquires and crisis calls through virtual counselling and other supports. These demands have been met from resourcing in other parts of the mental health and addictions services.
- The Region established a Community Response Table (with over 90 virtual partners) where community organizations and municipal partners can share information and problem-solve together to meet the needs of vulnerable residents. The table has compiled a list of mental health and well-being supports that are available to provide mental health, stress and anxiety supports in the community. Many of these resources are updated and promoted through outreach by the Community Response Table.

4. Key Priorities for Action

COVID-19 has exacerbated existing pressures within the mental health and addictions system in Peel. The Region will continue to work with local stakeholders through an enhanced advocacy approach to build on recommendations from the Peel Community Mental Health and Addictions Round Table (October 2019), in addition to addressing needs identified through COVID-19.

As reported to the Health System Integration Committee, local priority areas (summarized in Appendix I, along with priorities outlined in the Roadmap) require focused advocacy efforts through a coordinated approach with sector partners.

Responding to the Mental Health and Addictions Needs in Peel

Key advocacy priorities will include:

- Maintaining dialogue with the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, Hon. Michael Tibollo, to address existing underfunding, especially underfunding for child and youth services such as counselling and therapy (see Appendix II for overview of key funding issues and requests identified by the partners present at the October Round Table);
- Raising awareness with local Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs) on the issues and inequities within Peel which contribute to growing waitlists (that currently exceed the provincial average); and
- Working through community partnerships to address key challenges that have been brought to light through the COVID-19 pandemic including mobile outreach, supports for frontline workers, isolation and issues related to domestic violence (i.e. Community Response Table, Community Safety and Well-being Plan, and local Ontario Health Teams).

RISK CONSIDERATIONS

Due to the ongoing response to COVID-19, the Province has yet to identify funding for mental health and addictions services that would address ongoing gaps and needs in Peel. While a formal Provincial budget expected in the Fall (2020) may contain new announcements there will likely be financial challenges following the COVID-19 pandemic that may impact funding levels for local mental health and addictions programs and services.

Furthermore, there are few details regarding the next phase of Ontario Health Team implementation which will impact the transfer of funding accountability from LHINs to Ontario Health, and consequently the ability to effectively advocate for equitable funding allocations for mental health and addictions services. Staff continue to monitor provincial investments and the development of local area Ontario Health Teams along with relevant implications for equitable funding and integration of community mental health and addictions services in Peel.

CONCLUSION

As the Province moves towards system recovery and readiness to implement the Roadmap, there is an opportunity for the Region and its community partners to engage with the Province to ensure funding equity and improved mental health and addictions services integration.

The Region of Peel will continue to work alongside community partners to support Peel's community mental health and addictions services through enhanced public policy and advocacy, as well as system collaboration and data coordination.

APPENDICES

Appendix I - Opportunities for Peel within the New Provincial Mental Health and Addictions Strategy

Appendix II - Addressing Community Mental Health and Addictions System Challenges in Peel

Responding to the Mental Health and Addictions Needs in Peel

For further information regarding this report, please contact Brian Laundry, Director, Strategic Policy and Performance, brian.laundry@peelregion.ca.

Authored By: Kassandra Masley, Research and Policy Analyst and Niyati Salker, Advisor, Strategic Policy and Performance, Health Services

Reviewed and/or approved in workflow by:

Department Commissioner and Division Director.

Final approval is by the Chief Administrative Officer.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy Polsinelli". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'N' and a distinct 'P'.

N. Polsinelli, Interim Chief Administrative Officer