



Youth Advocate for Provincial Strategy to Address Long Wait Times in Mental Health Services for Children and Youth

Following the first ever youth-led mental health summit in the province, hosted by Children's Mental Health Ontario, young advocates are urging the Government of Ontario to create an official strategy to reduce wait times for child and youth mental health services. The youth are also calling for intensive immediate services on a short-term basis for those who are on lengthy wait lists for long-term counselling and care.

Dozens of youth participated in the Children's Mental Health Ontario's Youth Action Committee summit, held in partnership with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). Youth represented various children's mental health networks and groups including, The New Mentality, The Mental Health Commission of Canada, The Jack Project, and Stella's Place.

The theme of the summit, *Waiting for Change*, intended to provoke important dialogue about the critical topic of wait times and the toll they take on young people and their families. The summit preceded the Children's Mental Health Ontario's annual conference, [Better Together: Collaborating for a Stronger Child and Youth Mental Health Summit](#), held Nov. 23-24 in Toronto.

During the summit, youth were able to share stories about their personal experiences as examples of the need for a co-ordinated strategy. One delegate, Travis Franklin, 17, Kingston, ON (CMHO Youth Action Committee Member) is supporting the call for more support from youth peers. "We need more peer-to-peer support groups, because youth trust youth over adults time and time again."

Kim Moran, CEO Children's Mental Health Ontario says she applauds this youth group for sharing their experiences and offering concrete solutions. "There are too many children waiting too long for community-based mental health services," she said. "The youth who have experienced it know first-hand the supports they need, and following this summit, this group has developed real solutions to address the challenges we are facing in the community."

Recommendations coming out of the youth summit include developing a strategy that brings government and children's mental health centres together to support children, youth and families while they wait for services by facilitating:

- Peer-to-peer and family support groups with appropriate levels of staff supervision and training, to help young people and their caregivers assist one another while waiting;
- Temporary counseling resources to help children and youth while they wait for longer-term care, including walk-in clinics, immediate access to a counselor for initial sessions, and drop-in group programs;



- Individual plans to keep children and youth safe while they wait for services, including suggestions of positive coping mechanisms, numbers to call in a crisis, and information about local grassroots support groups and community activities.

The youth group also recognizes the need for funding to ensure improved access to programs and support.

Background

According to a [report card](#) released earlier this year by Children's Mental Health Ontario (CMHO), more than 6,000 children and youth, or nearly 40 per cent of those seeking mental health therapy and counseling treatment, are not receiving immediate care, waiting over a year or more. The report also shows that the number of children and youth waiting for counseling and therapy community-based treatment is expected to double to 12,000 by 2016.

With 70 per cent of mental health issues emerging during adolescence it is especially important to make more resources available and focused on early intervention and treatment. Suicide is the second leading cause of death of youth between 10 and 24 years. Data from CMHO shows that referrals for treatment in the community-based sector are on the rise by a startling 10 per cent per year.