

HEALTH POLICY BRIEFING

NEWS CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

Ottawa called on to boost community care for children with mental health issues

Too many youth are going to the hospital for mental health issues when they would be better off being treated in a community care centre, say experts.

By DENIS CALNAN

Some say the federal government needs to invest in community care for children with mental health concerns because a growing number have been going to hospitals, which is taxing on both young people and the health-care system.

According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, there was a 50 per cent jump in patients between the ages of 5 to 24 visiting emergency departments for mental health conditions between 2006-07 and 2014-15. It also says there was a 42 per cent increase in the rate of young patients being admitted to hospital for a mental health condition over the same period.

"Ideally, most kids would be cared for in the community," said Kathleen Morris, vice-president of research and analysis at the Canadian Institute for Health Information.

"That would be by nurses, or family doctors, social workers, psychiatrists, help through their schools or their recreation departments. And that would leave hospitals to provide short-term care for the most complex kids," she said.

"And so what we wonder when we see these very significant increases in the use of hospital services is whether kids are waiting until they're in crisis before they're getting to the hospital and that the care that they need in the community, they may not be able to find it," she said.

"In a hospital, all that can be done for kids there really is to be kept safe," said Kimberley Moran, CEO of Children's Mental Health Ontario.

"Typically, when you have mental health issues and you get hospitalized, it's because you're a danger to yourself; i.e., that you have a suicidal risk or you're a danger to others. And so, if you spend a week or 10 days in hospital, that's not really the kind of long-term treatment that you require. That kind of long-term treatment occurs in the community," she said.

The challenge of helping a child with a mental illness is a story that touches close to home for Ms. Moran.

"The reason why I am so passionate about this subject is because, actually, my daughter is in those figures," she said.

"In 2011 she became sad, and we couldn't get the help we needed in the community centre because of wait times and wait lists. And within three and a half months, she tried to take her life. And she was only 11 years old," said Ms. Moran.

She said the first line to combat mental health problems is long-term counselling and therapy.



Health Minister Jane Philpott is being called on to ensure more funding for community health care to, among other things, keep children from going to hospitals to deal with mental health issues. *The Hill Times* photograph by Jake Wright

Ms. Moran's said all provinces struggle with similar issues in having proper funding for community health care and it is something the federal government could be involved with more.

The Liberal Party states on its website that it "will negotiate a new Health Accord with provinces and territories, including a long-term agreement on funding," something the government has taken steps to address.

Health Minister Jane Philpott has publicly stated that she would like to sign a new accord soon.

Ms. Moran said: "I think that with the new Canada Health Accord, that there is an opportunity for the federal government to put in system-performance indicators to make sure that there's appropriate services in community-based services so that children and youth don't need to turn towards hospitals in crisis at these ever increasing rates."

Ms. Moran said hospitals are among the most expensive ways to provide care to children with mental health challenges.

"It's both better for the patient and better for the system to have them treated close to home, in their community, outside of hospitals for most things, and save the scarce hospital resources for those who are among the most complex of patients, who really need that specialized care," said Ms. Moran.

She said there are variations in the numbers of children being admitted to hospitals for mental health across the country. The Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Prince Edward Island have some of the highest rates.

"But some of that could be connected to the role of the hospital in the health care system. It may be the hub of the health care system in those smaller areas," she said.

"We see lower numbers of kids and youth being admitted in Nova Scotia, Quebec, and Manitoba. Although it's difficult for us to understand why that is."

Ms. Moran is hopeful that many provinces are working to address the issue and the numbers may already be decreasing, but it will take more time for those stats to be tracked and accounted for.

news@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

ARE YOURS LICENSED?



Always check for the eight-digit **Natural Product Number.**



Sensible rules for Natural Health Products (NHPs)

Give Canadian consumers safety and choice with sensible rules for NHPs that stop unlicensed internet sales.

chfa

Voice of the Natural Health Industry
La voix de l'industrie de la santé naturelle

Safe. Effective. High-Quality.

chfa.ca f Instagram Twitter