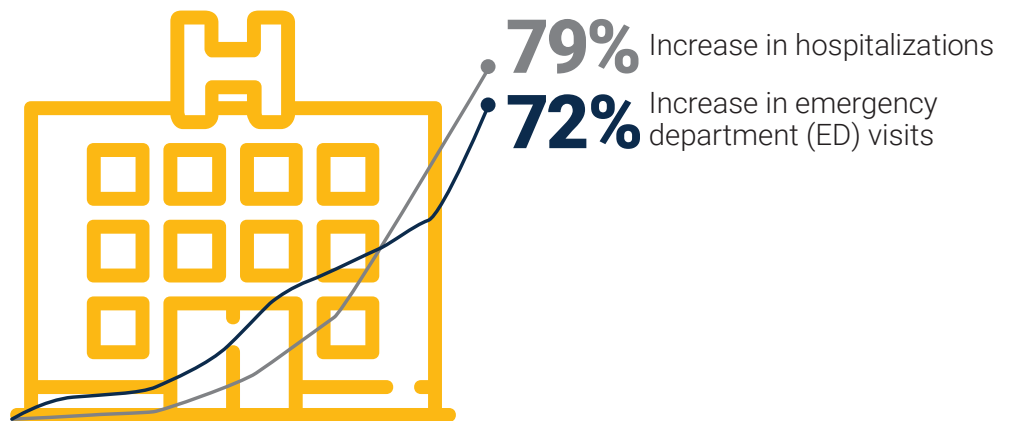


# Immediate action needed to address alarming spike in hospital usage among kids with mental health issues

Ontario's alarming trend of increasing hospital utilization among children and youth struggling with mental health and substance-use issues continued in 2016-2017. Based on data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), since 2006, the number of young people making emergency department (ED) visits for these concerns has increased 72%; the number who were hospitalized has increased by 79%. Meanwhile, during this same period, the rate of hospitalizations for other conditions in the child and youth population has fallen by 22% across Canada.



## The Cost of Inaction

Skyrocketing hospital usage rates for children and youth with mental health disorders is a concerning trend. Based on CIHI's data, CMHO predicts additional increases in CYMH hospital utilization and associated costs in 2018-2019. If no changes occur, we project<sup>1</sup>:

**H**  
**72,000**  
 more emergency department visits

**Bed**  
**14,000**  
 more hospitalizations

**\$\$\$**  
**\$220,000,000**  
 in additional hospital costs

## Lack of Child and Youth Mental Health (CYMH) Services in the Community

The reduction in hospitalizations for children and youth with non-mental health issues reflects a focus in the health care sector on meeting people's needs within primary care and community-based settings, where we can do so more appropriately and more cost-effectively. Yet the rising rates of hospital usage for children and youth with mental health needs specifically demonstrates that we are not doing the same when it comes to the provision of CYMH services.

The last time there was a sustained increase in funding for community-based CYMH services was 2006. And in the 12 years since, during which inflation has increased, we have seen capacity in the community sector shrink by more than 20%. Unsurprisingly, it is during this same period that CYMH hospital utilization and costs have escalated dramatically.

We know there is no way in a single year to decrease CYMH hospital utilization in the way that would be required. But these three figures illustrate the ongoing consequences of continued inaction.

Further, these figures are based on just one year; consider their magnitude stretched out over five or ten years. Without action now, we risk spending billions of dollars in hospitals on CYMH services that can be better delivered in community-based settings for a fraction of the cost. And we will continue to send hundreds of thousands of young people to hospitals, when we know that's not the best place for them to be if we want to actually help them get better.

## The Solution? A Community-Based Approach

We know that demand for mental health services significantly exceeds supply. Implementing a stepped care model, with a focus on community-based treatment, will yield significant savings to health care systems. This approach would ensure that the most effective, yet least resource-intensive treatment, is delivered to patients first – with young people only ‘stepping up’ to intensive/specialist services as clinically required.



Bolstering the capacity of community-based CYMH services within a stepped care model would:

- 1) **Eliminate service gaps:** expanding the capacity of community treatment will cost-effectively increase service capacity.
- 2) **Improve coordination and networking:** articulating the roles and responsibilities of primary care, community treatment, and hospitals will enable a seamless and high quality patient experience.

<sup>1</sup>First, we calculated what could have been the case if CYMH utilization in hospitals saw the same 22% decrease as other conditions since 2006; second, we calculated our actual projections for 2018-2019.

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## Child and Youth Mental Health Centres and Children's Mental Health Ontario

Child and youth mental health centres are the backbone of Ontario's community-based child and youth mental health system. They provide a complex array of programs and services delivered by trained mental health professionals including: targeted prevention; brief services; counselling and therapy; family capacity-building and support; specialized consultation and assessments; crisis support services; and intensive treatment services.

Children's Mental Health Ontario (CMHO) works to identify and develop solutions to important policy issues affecting the child and youth mental health sector. We represent close to 100 accredited child and youth mental health centres that provide treatment and support to infants, children, youth and families. This includes targeted prevention, early intervention, short- and long-term counselling and therapy, addictions services, and intensive services for those with complex and/or persistent mental health and addictions issues.

