

Hon. Doug Downey  
Attorney General of Ontario  
McMurtry-Scott Building, 11<sup>th</sup> Floor,  
720 Bay Street,  
Toronto, ON M7A 2S9

Hon. Christine Elliott  
Minister of Health  
College Park, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor,  
777 Bay Street,  
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

Hon. Sylvia Jones  
Solicitor General of Ontario  
George Drew Building, 18th Floor,  
25 Grosvenor Street,  
Toronto, ON M7A 1Y6

Hon. Todd Smith  
Minister of Children, Community and  
Social Services  
Macdonald Block, Rm M2B-88,  
77 Wellesley Street West,  
Toronto, ON M7A 1N3

Hon. Michael Tibollo  
Associate Minister,  
Mental Health and Addictions  
Whitney Block, 1st Floor, Rm 1618,  
99 Wellesley Street West  
Toronto, ON M7A 1W3

April 17, 2020

Dear Attorney General Downey, Minister Elliott, Solicitor General Jones, Minister Smith, and Associate Minister Tibollo:

**Re: Continued Impact of COVID-19 on service delivery across the Human Services and Justice Coordinating Committee Network**

On behalf of the Provincial Human Services and Justice Coordinating Committee, I am writing to you today regarding COVID-19 and to provide an ongoing update on its impact on service delivery across our network.

We would again like to thank you for your commitment to supporting individuals living with mental health and addictions issues and your stated \$12 million investment for our sector in *Ontario's Action Plan: Responding to COVID-19*. We also appreciate your ongoing commitment to consulting with representatives of the community-based human services and justice sectors during this challenging time.

Our network affirms the importance of a coordinated, cross-sectoral approach to address issues affecting Ontarians in conflict with the law and its effective means of reducing criminalization across the province. We remain committed to providing essential supports to communities that face multiple barriers to accessing health care.

You will recall from our previous letter dated March 30, 2020, that we identified for you the key priorities from our sectors that are urgently required to continue to provide the often life-saving treatment and services for Ontarians. These included the provision of additional personal protective equipment for human services and justice system providers, additional funding for the expansion of technology and digital solutions for service provision, and our request for increased flexibility for service providers for 2019/2020 fiscal-year end spending. **We are very grateful to you and your ministries for granting us this flexibility in our 2019/2020 fiscal year-end spending and would like to request this same flexibility in the current 2020/2021 fiscal year as well.**

Our network continues to identify and respond to the ever-changing needs of vulnerable Ontarians during the COVID-19 pandemic. Accordingly, we urge you to consider additional priorities from our network to address these critical issues:

- **A housing crisis is emerging for the influx of Ontarians being released from custody.** First and foremost, we applaud the Government of Ontario for your extraordinary efforts to increase the volume of individuals being released from correctional custody during this pandemic. We are concerned however that the housing needs of those recently released from custody cannot be met by the current level of housing supply. This crisis requires an immediate solution. A number of creative responses have emerged as a result and could serve as useful practices to scale up across the province. In the Northeast Regional HSJCC for example, providers are using an empty hotel as an isolation centre for people being released from correctional custody.
- **Mobile Crisis Intervention Teams are being limited by a lack of personal protective equipment.** With limited access to this crucial equipment, the registered nurses and mental health and addictions workers that usually accompany police officers when responding to 9-1-1 crisis calls are reduced to only providing support by phone, significantly restricting the capacity of services being provided to persons in crisis across Ontario.
- **Cell phone-related restrictions are significantly impacting service provision.** Many of our vulnerable clients do not have a cell phone, and therefore cannot be reached by their service providers during this pandemic. Additionally, within correctional facilities, individuals in custody are not permitted to call a cell phone, which means that they cannot reach their service providers who are now working remotely due to this pandemic. We believe an immediate solution to this issue would be to expand access to cell phones with prepaid phone cards for all individuals in custody and those being released.
- **Ontarians are often being released from custody without plans or the necessary tools to support their reintegration.** A lack of release from custody or discharge plans, especially for those on remand, is putting these clients at additional risk for a number of negative outcomes. We are also deeply concerned to hear from our members across the province that the standard procedure of providing lifesaving NARCAN to these clients upon release is currently being disrupted. Being given access to cell phones and prepaid phone cards would allow these clients to connect with the services and supports they require following their release. Increased access to hand sanitizer, sanitizing wipes and personal protective equipment in correctional facilities would also lessen their exposure to COVID-19.

Earlier this year, the Provincial Human Services and Justice Coordinating Committee provided a [submission](#) to the Government of Ontario and the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to inform the 2020 provincial budget.

**Our network requested \$50 million in annualized funding in support for human services and justice services across Ontario, and \$500,000 increase for our network to continue our work to support this population.** This request mirrors the provincial investment that was made at the inception of our network over 15 years ago. We strongly encourage you to consider this request, as a funding increase is crucial to sustain our existing capacity and meet growing demands. Our network would be happy to work with government to develop a multi-year investment plan for these funds.

We thank you in advance for your ongoing willingness to work with us on these issues. We are committed to continuing to work collaboratively with government and partners across the health, social services and justice sectors to deliver a robust response to COVID-19 that ensures our most vulnerable Ontarians and their mental health and well-being continue to be supported.

Please feel free to contact us through Uppala Chandrasekera, Director of Public Policy, Canadian Mental Health Association Ontario, by email at [uchandrasekera@ontario.cmha.ca](mailto:uchandrasekera@ontario.cmha.ca) should you have any questions, comments or wish to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely,

  

---

Sara Dias

Sara Dias  
Co-Chair, Provincial Human Services and Justice Coordinating Committee  
807-468-1838 Ext:229  
[sdias@cmhak.on.ca](mailto:sdias@cmhak.on.ca)

cc David Garland, Chief of Staff, Solicitor General's Office (SOLGEN)  
Joseph Hillier, Chief of Staff, Attorney General's Office (MAG)  
Sarah Letersky, Chief of Staff, Minister's Office (MCCSS)  
Allan MacDermid, Chief of Staff, Associate Minister's Office (MH&A)  
Heather Watt, Chief of Staff, Minister's Office (MOH)  
Mario Di Tommaso, Deputy Solicitor General, Community Safety (SOLGEN)  
Deborah Richardson, Deputy Solicitor General, Correctional Services (SOLGEN)  
Irwin Glasberg, Deputy Attorney General (MAG)  
Janet Menard, Deputy Minister (MCCSS)  
Helen Angus, Deputy Minister (MOH)  
Ragaven Sabaratnam, Assistant Deputy Minister (A), Mental Health and Addictions (MOH)

### **About the HSJCC Network**

Ontario's [Human Services and Justice Coordinating Committee Network](#) was established in 1997 in response to a recognized need across the province to coordinate resources and services, and plan more effectively for people who are in conflict with the law. Our priority consideration is for, but not limited to, people with a serious mental illness, developmental disability, acquired brain injury, substance use issues, and/or fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. The network is a cooperative effort of the Ministries of the Attorney General, Children, Community and Social Services, Health, and the Solicitor General.

Our network includes 1,600+ members across Ontario. Each HSJCC is a voluntary collaboration between social service organizations, mental health and addictions organizations and partners from the justice sector, including police services, legal aid services, Crown attorneys, correctional and probation officers. There are 14 Regional HSJCCs who work to improve the issues that impact individuals regionally who require human services as they navigate through the criminal justice system. Over 39 Local HSJCCs provide education and training for their members, coordinate care for justice-involved individuals in their communities and provide input to regional committees.

The Provincial Human Services and Justice Coordinating Committee functions as a planning body, supporting the individual and collective efforts of the Local and Regional HSJCCs. The table also identifies and addresses provincial service and policy issues, makes recommendations, and identifies system level solutions.

