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Dear Minister's Advisory Group on Mental Health,

Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) commends you for producing the consultation paper 'Every Door is the Right Door', which is the first report from the Ontario government that seriously discusses integration of the mental health and addiction systems. This is an important and long overdue step, as these two issues frequently intersect and optimal health outcomes are promoted through holistic approaches. Unfortunately, many Ontarians are left untreated due to an inability to recognize the interdependence of these problems and collaborate across health system silos.

OPHA also welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on this discussion paper. We have carefully considered the issues, and would like to offer several recommendations that we believe will strengthen the overall impact of your strategic proposal:

- 1. Ensure effective collaboration across and within sectors by:**
  - Conducting a thorough environmental scan of the current system to map all existing services and "players" in mental health and addiction, thereby identifying the internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats.
  - Evaluating any collaboration efforts and partnerships developed.
- 2. Reduce negative perceptions, which is critical for success within diverse environments like Ontario and Toronto, through anti-stigma campaigns that:**
  - Provide relevant information in a culturally-appropriate and understandable manner.
  - Use information channels that are accessible to isolated and marginalized populations.

- Give a face and positive voice to mental illness and addiction (inspiring true stories).
- Educate the public about mental illness and addiction, including signs and symptoms.

**3. Focus on reducing inequities by:**

- Tailoring services to meet the needs of diverse populations.
- Providing diversity and cultural sensitivity training to service providers.
- Providing accessible services where marginalized populations live, work, and play
- Developing diversity policies within service organizations.

**4. Build strong communities by increasing social connectedness and decreasing discrimination, violence, and social disparities.**

- Develop evidence-informed services that are relevant to the community's context.

*\* See: Victoria Mental Health Promotion Foundation [VicHealth]. (2006). "Evidence in a nutshell - mental health promotion." Victoria.*

These recommendations will enhance the 10-year strategy outlined in the paper. Taken together, we believe this plan will greatly improve Ontario's mental health and addiction systems. There are several key points incorporated into the plan that the OPHA considers essential for success.

OPHA supports the need to address the full spectrum of mental health needs, from mild to severe, rather than only serious and persistent problems. This approach should include a variety of initiatives that promote mental health and prevent mental illness. OPHA also welcomes any attempt to empower individuals to proactively manage their own health and well-being. However, it is equally important to support and educate the communities and families of those affected. Increased understanding of the nature and symptoms of addiction and mental illness can support early detection and treatment and can prevent relapses. Health promotion and illness prevention are becoming increasingly important in this economically strained environment. Research has demonstrated the vital importance of early intervention. Increasing social connectedness, reducing social inequities, and implementing interventions that reduce violence and discrimination are the three key areas that have been shown to promote mental well-being.

A very important question put forward in the report asked: "Can Services Do a Better Job of Meeting People's Needs?". OPHA believes that although 'outreach' has been a popular term in mental health for over a decade, there are still many groups where outreach is very limited, including the homeless, ethnic, and culturally-diverse communities. All services, from primary care to ACTT teams, have a responsibility to reach the truly hard-to-serve. Tailoring programs for marginalized and vulnerable populations can increase accessibility, as has been demonstrated through peer-to-peer services. We applaud the collaborative approach outlined in your report. Co-operation is particularly essential when dealing with serious mental illness and addiction. Unfortunately, many professionals and organizations do not collaborate on client care, which can create major barriers to treatment. Effective collaboration will require a keen awareness of all the key "players", layers of decision-making, and formal and informal communication links.

The population-based approach outlined in your report is a new and welcome strategy for the mental health and addiction systems. The key to success lies with accessible education, resources, and anti-stigma campaigns. For example, these strategies could help position the workplace as a forum for building positive mental health. At present, many workplaces are not accommodating to individuals with mental health problems, thereby contributing to higher rates of stress and depression. Healthy workplaces can create a culture that supports mental health. The framework outlined in 'Every Door is the Right Door' envisions the individual at the centre of a comprehensive and accountable support system. The system would not simply 'fix' mental illness, addiction, and disability, but instead create a supportive environment to foster mental health for individuals and communities. This is a commendable vision. In order to bring this plan to fruition, action must take place at all levels, including individuals, organizations and entire communities. This will reduce barriers to good mental health and develop community resiliency.

OPHA is interested in being involved with any further consultations related to this paper. Given that mental health is critical to community health and is embedded in many of the Ontario Public Health Standards, we suggest you also invite the public health communities to participate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carol Timmings".

Carol Timmings  
President