



May 23, 2009

Ms. Carol Tooton, Executive Director
Canadian Mental Health Association, NS Division
and
Ms. Joan Jessome, President
Nova Scotia Government & General Employees Union
c/o Mental Health Coalition of Nova Scotia
via e-mail: mhcnns@ns.aliantzinc.ca

Dear Ms. Tooton and Ms. Jessome:

Thank you for raising such an important issue during the election campaign. It is good to know that your group is working together to raise the priority of mental health issues. You ask a simple but important question: What can we do for Nova Scotians living with mental illness?

Our government is concerned with the health and well-being of all Nova Scotians and, therefore, has invested heavily in the treatment of illness in this province as well as placing a greater priority on making sure we prevent illness and keep our citizens healthier and happier.

As research shows that, at some point in their lives, mental health problems affect one in three Canadians, chances are that each of us knows someone with a mental health problem such as a substance-related disorder, depression, anxiety, or a psychotic disorder.

In terms of dealing with mental health, we have made advances through the following:

- Set in motion the province's first mental health court - to open Fall 2009.
- In response to the Nunn Commission recommendations, we invested \$3 million at the outset to start responding. The funds go to several initiatives including hiring more mental health professionals.
- Expanded mental health and addictions services by \$2.8 million in 2008-09. This will increase access, decrease wait times and place mental health services in the community for the Capital District Health Authority and the IWK Health Centre. It will also enhance services to youth in the Cape Breton District Health Authority with addiction issues.
- Created the Seniors Mental Health Network, bringing together a group of experts in the field to focus on enhancing and expanding mental health services to seniors at the community level.

- Since 2000, increased spending on mental health services by 54 percent.
- Committed \$6.7 million to construct more appropriate facilities for mental health patients requiring long-term treatment.
- As a part of the depression strategy launched in 2005, developed and made available new resources such as fact sheets, calendars and posters focusing on raising awareness of depression in the workplace and the need for early identification and intervention. In 2008, launched the booklet Women and Mood Disorders: Stories of Recovery to raise awareness about women's experience of mood disorders and encouraging those effected to seek professional help.
- Proclaimed new mental health legislation - The Involuntary Psychiatric Treatment Act - July 2007.
- Invested \$4 million in an Autism Treatment Program for young children with autism. An independent evaluation of the first group of children to receive was received in April 2008 and indicates the treatment outcomes for these children were very positive.
- In September 2006, we announced \$400,000 over four years to the Canadian Mental Health Association - Nova Scotia Division to invest in the Communities Addressing Suicide Together initiative.
- The new \$20.4 million emergency and trauma centre at the QEII Health Sciences Centre just opened includes a mental health suite.
- From March 2009 to December 2009, our health department is hosting sessions on a new mental health first aid training program for the general public, being offered coast-to-coast by Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Canada.

We will continue to work through our health department in partnership with communities and stakeholders to support appropriate access, education and services for those Nova Scotians dealing with mental illness.

I was pleased that in our Budget 2009-10 that we tabled on May 4, 2009 we noted that Nova Scotia is one of the only provinces to provide increases to the health system while balancing its provincial budget. District health authorities and the IWK Health Centre received \$1.398 billion in 2008-09 for health-care budgets, including wages and benefits. This was not easy to find the funds, but we continue to invest in all aspects of our health system as we are able.

Again, thank you for raising this question to all leaders. I appreciate having the chance to respond to your coalition membership on behalf of the Progressive Conservative Party of Nova Scotia.

Sincerely,



Rodney MacDonald
Leader, PC Party of Nova Scotia