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OUR FIRST WEALTH MUST BE MENTAL HEALTH...

A SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

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Introduction

The Canadian Psychiatric Association (CPA), the national voice of psychiatry, appreciates the opportunity to submit its views and recommendations to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance. The investments outlined in the Brief are intended to address and improve the mental health of Canadians. The CPA strongly believes that there can be no wealth, in all of its dimensions, without mental health.

Introduction

Given that the focus of the Committee is on issues related to productivity and competitiveness, the CPA has structured its submission in a way that recognizes the importance of investing in programs and services that address the mental health of Canadians. As much as the general numbers related to mental illness are known (see attached infographics) the mental health of Canadians is integrally tied to the future prosperity of this great country. In our view, it is a precondition that must be addressed to unleash the unlimited potential that is Canada.

1. *What measures would help Canadians to be more productive?*

Federal-Provincial-Territorial Health Accord

While the federal-provincial-territorial discussions came to a head in late December 2016, the outcome to-date has led to anything but a national "health accord". To-date, there have been a series of hi-level bi-lateral agreements, with the exception of Manitoba, that have been signed. That said, there has been no transfer of funds earmarked for mental health by the federal government (which stands at \$100 million for 2017), or any public declaration of priorities, or how the provinces and territories will be accountable for such funding.

Clearly, there are many details that have yet to be revealed to Canadians and the mental health community. The CPA looks forward to working with the federal government to ensure that these investments are well spent and improve the mental health of Canadians.

What we do know is that in addition to Canada Health Transfer, which will continue to increase on an annual basis at three percent, the federal government has committed \$5 Billion over the next 10 years earmarked for mental health initiatives. On average, the federal government will transfer \$500 million to the provinces and territories to focus on mental health initiatives over each of the next 10 years.

The CPA strongly applauds the federal government for its leadership and foresight to focus on a sector of the health system that has been systematically underfunded for decades. The CPA sees the \$5 billion investment as an important step that will begin to provide additional resources to a system that is already significantly stretched.

In a report released by the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH) in the fall 2016, it called on the federal government to increase its annual funding earmarked for mental health by \$777.5.¹ This would increase government funding for mental health from 7% to a minimum of 9% as recommended by the Mental Health Commission of Canada. This amount also recognizes that the federal share of provincial and territorial health funding should remain at 25%.

Recommendation #1 – That government funding for mental health should increase from 7% to a minimum of 9% of total public health spending, with the federal government contributing 25% of the total.

At the same time, the CPA strongly believes there is legitimate leadership role for the federal government to support and coordinate proven and/or promising mental health innovations that require funding so they can be spread across regions, provinces and the country. This issue was strongly supported by a report commissioned by the federal government.² In this role, the federal government, working closely with the provinces and territories can act as a strategic catalyst for change.

Recommendation #2 – The federal government establish a five-year \$100 million Mental Health Innovation Fund.

Knowing that research is often a precursor to innovation, the CPA would strongly encourage the federal government to invest additional resources to support mental health research. Our understanding is that the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) devotes less than five percent to mental health research, while the burden of mental health stands at more than 10%.³

Recommendation #3 – That the federal government increase funding for mental health research that is reflective of the burden of mental illness.

Cannabis

In May 2017, the federal government tabled legislation that would legalize cannabis. Around the same time, the CPA released its position statement *Implications of Cannabis Legalization on Youth and Young Adults* which highlighted a number of issues and concerns if the federal government is to legalize cannabis use.

The science which tells us that early and regular use cannabis use can affect cognition, such as memory, attention, intelligence and the ability to process thoughts and experiences. It can also increase the risk of developing a primary psychotic disorder as well as other mental health issues such as depression in those who are already vulnerable to those disorders.

Research shows that the human brain continues to develop until around the age of 25, therefore psychiatrists are concerned that the regular use of cannabis prior to that age may negatively affect the brain's healthy maturation process. For this reason the CPA recommends in its position statement that Canadians should not be legally allowed to use marijuana until the age of 21, and that legislation should restrict the quantity and potency of the drug until they are 25.

¹ *Mental Health Now!* Canadian Alliance of Mental Illness and Mental Health. September 2016. According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, in 2015 total public health spending amounted to \$155.9 Billion. An increase from 7% to 9% in public health spending for mental health would amount to \$3.11 Billion. 25% of the total is \$777.5 million.

² *Unleashing Innovation: Excellent Healthcare for Canada*. Report of the Advisory Panel on Healthcare Innovation. 2015.

³ *Mental Health Now!* Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health. September 2016.

To ensure that the public interest is protected as much as possible if cannabis is to be legalized, the CPA has called on the federal government for investments in: (1) public education (with a particular focus on youth and young adults); (2) research (biological and psychosocial research on cannabis and mental health); (3) expanding support for prevention, early identification and cannabis-cessation treatments within the framework of mental health and addictions; and (4) prudent consideration of advertising and marketing guidelines.

Recommendation #4 – That the federal government ensure adequate resources are invested to address the legalization of cannabis in the areas of: (1) public education; (2) research; (3) prevention, early identification and cannabis-cessation treatments; and (4) advertising and marketing guidelines.

2. What measures would help Canadian businesses to be more productive and competitive?

Aligning Tax Policy with Health Policy

On July 18, 2017, the federal government issued a consultation document entitled *Tax Planning Using Private Corporations* which details three legislative changes that could have a negative impact on independent professionals and small business owners, of which many physicians are.

While the CPA is in the early stages of analyzing these proposed changes, care must be taken to ensure that the objectives of tax policy are effectively aligned with health policy. Otherwise, there is the risk that such measures may have unintended consequences that negatively impact a number of practicing physicians.⁴

Closing Comments

Thank you for the opportunity to offer our views and recommendations to the Standing Committee. In each case, the priorities identified by the CPA speak to the importance in the mental health of Canadians as a precursor to competitiveness and prosperity. After all, our first wealth must be our mental health!

⁴ A Picard. *Ottawa's New Tax Measures Unfairly Target Many Doctors*. The Globe and Mail, August 1, 2017