

March 4, 2017

The Honourable Dr. John Haggie, Minister  
Department of Health and Community Services  
1<sup>st</sup> Floor, West Block  
Confederation Building  
St. John's, NL A1B 4J6

Dear Minister Haggie:

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has continued to demonstrate it is working toward improved access to and delivery of mental health care in our province. On behalf of the Association of Psychology Newfoundland and Labrador (APNL), I am requesting an opportunity to meet with you and your team to discuss how psychologists can be a significant part of how that is achieved.

First, personally and on behalf of APNL, I commend you and this government on reaching a funding agreement with the Government of Canada that will see targeted investment in mental health services in our province. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians need better access to effective mental health care and this funding is an important step toward achieving that goal. The challenge is ensuring the investments are directed toward improving or providing better access to more of the right thing, not just more of anything.

The cost of mental health services on our systems is huge and the barriers to accessing quality care are systemic and economic ones. Registered psychologists can help alleviate those burdens and barriers if they are effectively integrated into the primary health care and funding models in the provincial health care system. Research has proven that psychological treatments are as and often more clinically and cost effective for treating a wide range of mental health disorders than other treatments, such as medication.

Psychologists in Canada have been regulated for decades and, to the best of our knowledge, only psychologists and physicians in Canada can diagnose mental disorders. Registered psychologists make up the largest group of regulated, specialized mental health care providers in the country, outnumbering psychiatrists 4:1. When one in five Newfoundlanders and Labradorians will experience a mental health problem in any given year and referrals to mental health and addictions services are steadily increasing, that ratio alone clearly illustrates how stronger integration of psychologists into mental health delivery models can improve access to much needed and effective mental health care.

Fortunately for Newfoundland and Labrador, there are already proven models of care that effectively integrate and increase the role of the psychologist. These models result in better patient, health system and population mental health outcomes and can build on the work already underway here in Newfoundland and Labrador, such as the recently introduced stepped care models and interprofessional care teams. The Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) commissioned a report

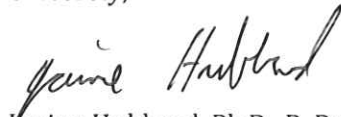
that assessed such models and how those approaches could work in Canada. Attached is a brief prepared by CPA with its Atlantic Canadian psychological association partners outlining our recommendations for how those models could be applied in our region to improve mental health care delivery. Collectively, we agree that investing in integrated collaborative care practices in primary care settings and targeting sentinel populations across Atlantic Canada is the way forward. This aligns with the CPA and the Canadian College of Family Physicians' joint call on the federal Ministry of Health for integration of mental health services into primary care.

We see a significant opportunity to leverage the skills and expertise of the Newfoundland and Labrador's 200 registered psychologists in early intervention and treatment of our province's mental health problems, particularly within primary health care settings and with our children and youth population. Mental health illness often starts in childhood and adolescence and registered psychologists are trained and able to work with youth to assess, diagnose and treat them early and consistently. Psychologists already work in our publically funded health care system, the justice system and the education system and are accessible in many of our province's urban and rural communities. The challenge is ensuring that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians can access these resources by ensuring and supporting funding models that increases broader access.

We know what works. We must do a better job at getting what works to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that need it. There are real, tangible benefits to investing in mental health programs that are supported by evidence, consistently delivered and evaluated for outcomes. And psychologists can and must be a part of that process. Atlantic Canada's psychologists have come together to develop and recommend how our provincial governments can better address the mental health needs of their citizens. We have initiatives in mind that we believe can be implemented in Newfoundland and Labrador at a size and scope that is both realistic to achieve those goals and that are scalable as results and costs prove them to be effective and efficient. Among these are initiatives for integrating psychologist into existing primary health care teams, such as the family practice medicine units, and supporting enhanced access for children and youth.

Again, I am requesting the opportunity to meet with you to share our perspectives and further discuss how psychologists can be a partner with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. I look forward to hearing from your office soon.

Sincerely,



Janine Hubbard, Ph.D., R. Psych.  
President

c.c: John Abbott, Deputy Minister, Department of Health and Community Services