

# **POLICY**

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE  
ONTARIO PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT**

**THE NEW MENTALITY**  
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**YOUTH  
ACTION  
COMMITTEE**



Young people in Ontario and child and youth mental health (CYMH) service providers are operating in crisis-mode. Youth often end up in crisis before they are able to access services. On the other side of care, service providers struggle to provide youth with timely access to high-quality care, as they attempt to manage long waitlists and stagnant budgets.

Following consultations with young people across the province in 2017 and a survey in 2018, Children's Mental Health Ontario's Youth Action Committee (YAC) has released their most recent youth-led policy paper, *From Crisis to Quality: Bridging Services in Gaps and Child Youth Mental Health Services*. In this youth-driven document, the YAC provides guidance to CYMH service providers on how to meet the needs of Ontario's youth in some key areas: better supporting youth transitions through services; ensuring effective care for youth with diverse backgrounds and identities; serving rural, remote, and northern communities; and collaborating with youth as partners in designing services that work for them.

However, through our engagement with youth, it was clear that some recommendations around the resourcing of the sector had to be presented directly to the Ontario Government. **In addition to the need for the Government to invest significantly more in CYMH treatment services, to meet the needs of youth across the province, the YAC has identified specific initiatives that require government action and support.** It is our hope that the Ontario Government will join the efforts of young people in Ontario and CYMH agencies to collaboratively build a system that meets the needs of all children and youth.

### **1) Raise the age of child and youth mental health services from 18 to 25**

In the current system, children and youth are cut from services at age 18 and expected to seek help on their own in the adult mental health sector. This lack of continuity in care contributes to youth and service providers operating in crisis-mode. Raising the age to 25 allows youth more time to build their resilience with intensive services and to prepare themselves for the adult mental health sector, should they still need care. This also affords service providers more room to collaboratively work on a transition plan with the youth to ensure that their transition to adult services is smooth and sustainable.

82% of youth respondents to the 2018 YAC survey were in favour of raising the age from 18 to 25.

### **2) Ensure effective treatment for youth with diverse backgrounds and identities**

In order for CYMH treatment to be effective and successful, youth need to feel connected to their service providers--a strong level of trust and understanding is required. And in order for this connection to be

built with young people with diverse backgrounds and identities, service providers need to be trained to successfully and safely work with, and relate to, these young people. As such, the government needs to invest in training for service providers to ensure they are capable of doing so. **Over 97% of youth who responded to the YAC's 2018 survey believe that undergoing cultural safety/diversity education should be required for CYMH service providers.**

### **3) Expand community-based services for Indigenous youth**

Indigenous youth face unique social and health challenges that alternative treatments must reflect. By providing funding for more community-based services, this could allow the specific needs of youth in Northern, Rural, and remote communities to be better met through more community-driven, culturally appropriate, and relevant services alternative to traditional Western counselling and therapies. Such alternative services can include, land-based healings/teachings, art therapies, and recreational physical activity programs.

During a 2017 youth consultation process in Thunder Bay, Indigenous youth specifically recommended the establishment of mental health clinics and youth centres on each reserve. In addition, Indigenous youth spoke to the need for increased access to counsellors, Elders, and First Nations mentors within First Nations' communities and schools. The YAC committee endorses these recommendations and recognizes the life-saving potential of mental health service expansion in Northern, Rural, and remote communities.

### **4) Increase mobility to access services for rural, remote and northern youth**

Whether directed toward more mobile services to meet youth in their community, or to allow for transportation to be provided by CYMH agencies, funding needs to be put towards combating the barrier of youth accessing services in remote, rural, and northern communities. **About 40% of youth respondents to the 2018 YAC survey indicated that it takes them between 30 minutes to one hour to get to the mental health service they need to access.** This has implications in many domains of a young person's life, such as limited time for homework and restrictions to a healthy lifestyle of a balanced diet and sleep schedule. For those unable to access services in their community, when asked what they are doing to manage instead, the most common responses were:

- "Going to the emergency department; being hospitalized in some cases"
- "Developing unhealthy habits"
- "Sometimes nothing"

### **5) Support Youth Engagement**

Part of building a CYMH system that has continuity is to ensure that there is consistency between expectations and delivery. CYMH agencies must collaborate with youth to identify specific needs and ways in which they can be met. When these needs are identified collaboratively with youth, they are understood more fully and service providers are able to meet them in a more efficient and cost-effective way. **To engage youth, 67% of respondents to the 2018 survey feel they should be paid or receive an honorarium when collaborating with agencies.**

To recognize the importance of youth partners, agencies should be funded for youth engagement.

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FUNDING FOR THIS WORK WAS PROVIDED BY

A large, stylized graphic of a red starburst with a black outline, set against a yellow background with a pattern of small black dots. The words 'YOUTH ACTION COMMITTEE' are written in a bold, yellow, sans-serif font with a black outline, centered within the starburst. Several black lines radiate from the starburst, each ending in a small blue star with a black outline.

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