

KIDS' MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES NO PLACE FOR A PATCHWORK QUILT

For every 100 Ontario kids who need support and treatment for mental health issues, 67 aren't receiving them. Imagine that. It is estimated that about a million children in the province battle mental health problems. So two thirds of them - about 667,000 - aren't getting help.

What would happen if that same abysmal statistic applied to kids fighting childhood cancers? Or muscular degenerative diseases? Or visual impairment?

Mental health disorders are nothing more or less than that. Same as diabetes. Same as any other illness.

We would not tolerate that many kids being deprived of any other essential health service, but we do just that when it comes to mental health care. That suggests that while societal views on mental health have come a long way, we still have a very long way to go.

The information, damning and baffling, comes from the 2014 Ontario Child Health Study (OCHS) published in the Canadian Journal of Psychiatry last month.

It gets worse. The same research tells us that no one in Ontario is ultimately responsible for children's mental health care. To quote from the journal: 'In essence, the 2014 OCHS provides a 30-year report card on children's mental health, suggesting that for far too long, Canadians have tolerated an inadequate patchwork of services - which the public may be unaware of until children develop problems and families try to get help.'

The research spotlighted by the respected medical journal was carried out by the Offord Centre for Child Studies, which is affiliated with McMaster University and McMaster Children's Hospital. It studied 10,802 Ontario youth aged four to 17. Eight papers were generated, which required an entire issue of the journal dedicated to the research. How important is this exhaustive work? Consider this from the report:

"Mental disorders typically start in childhood and cause substantial individual and collective burdens across the lifespan. These disorders are also now the leading cause of childhood disability worldwide. Exacerbating the burdens, high childhood disorder prevalence has been coupled with low children's mental health service reach. Service shortfalls have persisted despite growing research evidence on effective interventions and despite widespread recognition that timely access to adequate health, social, and educational services is a fundamental right for all children."

What do decision-makers need to do now that we have this authoritative data? Again, from the report: Ensure coherent policy leadership, make and sustain comprehensive children's mental health plans, ensure the use of effective interventions, reach all children with mental disorders using innovative service approaches and ensure adequate and dedicated children's mental health budgets.

It's a tall order, but it starts from one place: ditch the patchwork quilt approach and adopt a more unified, holistic strategy. A diverse array of service-providers need to be heard and incorporated. But it all starts with everyone pulling in the same direction, with everyone being aware of what other stakeholders are doing.

It's an ambitious approach, requiring a high degree of collaboration. But it's hard to imagine a more worthy cause and more deserving population.

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HALTON HAS TOP CREDIT RATING, STRONG FINANCIAL POSITION

A 30-YEAR DISTINCTION, WRITES GARY CARR



GARY CARR
Column

I am pleased to announce that Moody's Investors Service has upheld Halton's top credit rating once again, and we have now maintained this distinction for more than 30 years!

In their recent report, Moody's shares high praise for Halton's financial management, plans and policies. They also assigned us a "stable" outlook for positive and consistent fiscal outcomes in the future.

Moody's highlighted the following credit strengths as part of its analysis:

- Halton's excellent track record of posting

strong fiscal results each year, supported by stable operations and an effective multi-year budgeting process;

- Halton's forward-looking operating and capital plans to address pressures and spending requirements early on;

- Halton's low and declining debt burden; and

- the community's diversified economy and strong population growth.

The agency also praised Halton's conservative debt and investment management policies and comprehensive, transparent and timely financial reporting.

This rating helps us finance major investments by providing continued access to the best capital financing rates available. This means that public funds go further whenever we perform regional works, such as road, water and wastewater projects in your community. As a result, it helps keep property taxes low as we maintain and enhance our in-

frastructure, supporting economic prosperity and a high quality of life.

Earning the highest possible credit rating from two international rating agencies each year - Moody's Investors Service (Aaa) and S&P Global Ratings (AAA) - is critical to maintaining our strong long-term financial position. In June 2018, S&P Global Ratings upheld its own top rating for the region, and earning this distinction from both agencies is a key objective of the 2019 Budget and Business Plan.

Moody's credit opinion report confirms that we are moving in the right direction. Our prudent financial practices will continue to support a thriving community in the years to come, keeping Halton a great place to live, work, raise a family and retire.

To learn more about finance and transparency at Halton Region, please visit halton.ca.

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ABOUT US

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