

FACE OF POVERTY CONSULTATION

a faith-based coalition working to eliminate poverty

The Hon. Kelly Regan
The Minister of Community Services
Province of Nova Scotia
Halifax, Nova Scotia

24 February 2021

Dear Minister Regan -

The Face of Poverty Consultation (FACE) was concerned with several issues raised by the Nova Scotia Division of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) in their presentation to the meeting of the Standing Committee for Community Services at their meeting on 5 January 2021.

First - The CMHA advised that the effects of COVID-19 are widening inequities in Nova Scotia - those caused by illness, job loss, lack of income, loss of access to services, isolation, stress, anxiety, poor housing or no housing, family violence and that these inequities are suffered particularly by racialized persons. Also mentioned was the fear that the effects of COVID-19 will mean long term trauma in Nova Scotia, and perhaps particularly for marginalized children. The CMHA sees the need to provide more upstream universal health supports (ie preventive health care) across the province for all Nova Scotians. This would prevent many chronic and persistent issues by providing timely access to care and service.

Second - The stated mandate of CMHA is to provide tools and supports to people to cope with life's challenges wherever they may be. To do this the CMHA in Nova Scotia needs permanent core and stable funding to provide for more staffing and to continue with their programs that have worked. Funders are often interested in "new" programs. It is to be noted that across Canada less than 7% of health budgets goes to care for persons with mental health issues and/or addictions. There is a need for a continuum of care for mental health as in other health issues. At one time there were 17 branches of CMHA in Nova Scotia. Now there are only two, and the Nova Scotia Division now is left to provide and fund services in other parts of Nova Scotia. During COVID-19 their workload has quadrupled because they do not turn people away. Fortunately the CMHA is able to work with other community organizations in Nova Scotia to supply social supports to their clients.

Third - The presenters advised that a significant factor in ensuring and promoting mental health is safe, affordable and appropriate housing. It was noted that 75 -80% of their clients receive Income Assistance- so right away poverty is an issue. Therefore individuals' funds for housing are very limited. Housing is a major issue - transitional housing, emergency housing and affordable long term housing. The experience of FACE in attendance at meetings of the Standing Committee over the years has been that housing/ homelessness has been a repeated refrain in most of the issues that DCS deals with. More funding for affordable housing is urgently needed right now. We can only trust that some immediate actions will come from the work of the newly appointed Affordable Housing Commission.

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page 2

The FACE urges that both the Departments of Community Services and Health and Wellness notify the Premier Iain Rankin of their understanding of the urgent need for funding both for affordable housing and for healthcare, and in particular, for care for persons with mental health and addiction issues, much of which is provided by the CMHA in Nova Scotia.

Thank you for your attention. We look forward to your response.

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CC:

The Hon. Zach Churchill , Minister of Health and Wellness and Office of Mental Health and Addictions
The Hon. Geoff MacLellan, Minister of Infrastructure and Housing
Dr. Brendan Carr, President and CEO, NS Health