



November 10, 2015

Ms. Heather Sweet MLA
Edmonton-Manning
Chair, Standing Committee on Families and Communities
c/o Committee Clerk
Legislative Assembly of Alberta
3rd Floor 9820-107 Street
Edmonton, AB
T5K 1E7

Dear Madam Chair:

Re: Review of the *Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007*

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a brief written submission on two key areas of the *Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007*. First, the College of Alberta Psychologists (CAP) would like to recognize the importance of this Review as well as the concurrent work being conducted by the Mental Health System Review Committee co-chaired by MLAs Dr. David Swann and Ms. Danielle Larivee. These initiatives in conjunction with the July, 2015 Auditor General of Alberta Report Mental Health Service Delivery Recommendations enhance public confidence that the well-being of all Albertans is a priority for both government and public officials alike.

CAP supports the amended eligibility criteria to harm from danger for the very reasons outlined by Carol Robertson Baker, Mental Health Patient Advocate at your October 5, 2015 meeting. Harm has significantly fewer negative connotations than danger and best lends to treatment compliance. We also agree with Ms. Robertson Baker that this change supports efforts to destigmatize those suffering from mental illness and clarifies to the public that the vast majority of individuals with mental illness do not pose a risk to others. In fact, it is known that individuals with significant mental health issues are more likely to be a victim rather than a cause of harm.

CAP also supports the use of Community Treatment Orders (CTOs) as an alternative to involuntary admission to a health care facility. We are encouraged by the early findings that the number of involuntary admissions and the length of stay of these admissions have both declined. We support additional quantitative research in the effectiveness of CTOs in improving general mental health, social, environmental and economic adaptation. Many of our members are highly experienced and uniquely qualified to conduct such clinical and demographic research. As such, we respectfully ask that the language of the MHAA be specifically written to include registered psychologists in addition to physicians, as individuals legislated to enact CTOs, involuntary admissions, and to sit as panel members on the Alberta Board of Review.

CAP continues to be of the belief that access to timely and appropriate mental health services for both rural and urban Albertans is often overlooked in the presence of the growing demands facing the health care system as a whole. Registered psychologists have specialized education and training in the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of mental illness and possess the competencies required to support and implement the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007

CAP is of the belief that our members possess the education and training required to play active and direct roles in mental health review panels and the issuance, implementation and monitoring of CTOs. By including psychologists in these important tasks, Albertans access to essential mental health services will be both enhanced and enriched. This is particularly true in rural and First Nations communities where many of our 3,100 members currently provide mental health services.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to provide our written comments. We are more than willing to meet directly with your Committee should you have any questions and/or require additional information. We appreciate the significance of your work and wish you the very best in your efforts to ensure the well-being of all Albertans.

Sincerely,

Roy Frenzel, Ph.D., R. Psych.
President, College Council