

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**To:** [FamiliesCommunities Committee](#)  
**Subject:** Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007 Review – Written Submission  
**Date:** Monday, February 29, 2016 12:31:49 PM

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To whom it may concern:

Thank you for the opportunity to express my opinion regarding the proposed amendments to the 2007 Mental Health Amendment Act. I am writing to you today as a citizen, a teacher, a parent, and, importantly, as someone who has experienced involuntary commitment as a formal patient here in Alberta.

It is difficult for me to write these experiences to you, knowing of how minimal their import may be as you consider the business at hand as a committee, while, simultaneously knowing how long and hard I will have to work in order to regain the function necessary to feel the fullness of my life as a result of reaching out; but it feels too important to let this opportunity pass me by without at least trying.

I was encouraged to read the language of your proposed amendment, shifting from a highly stigmatizing 'avoidance of danger' model to one that centres itself around 'minimizing harm'. And while I can appreciate the nuanced subtleties that give the latter a more palatable flavour, I find myself wondering how this will play out on the ground, in overcrowded, underfunded hospital psych wards.

Among the memories that I struggle with from my time as a formal patient, the casualty with which staff seemed to issue and extend formal status for patients was deeply disturbing, and participated in the prioritization of wellness performance for patients ("gotta get those privileges") over meaningful experiences of healing -- in which a person sometimes appears to do worse in the immediate short term-- strikes me as deeply problematic. If ableism is informing mental health care in its most critical setting, what hope do the one-in-five among us really have?

The other major concern I have with the proposed amendments to the Mental Health Act is that they remain practitioner centred. I know, first-hand, what it is like to see, hear, smell, and be terrified of things that no one else in a room is experiencing. I don't actually need to be told by well-meaning practitioners those experiences should not be happening. I certainly do not require chemical restraint to prevent those experiences from happening, or continuing to happen. What I do need, from time-to-time, is a place where those experiences of mind can unfold for me that is separate from the responsibilities of my every day life. I need support in coming to the healing that makes sense to me. I need care and compassion and collaboration with treatment plans and ideas that include some amount of flexibility in their application. I need to have the opportunity to consent to what is happening to me. To consent to the side effects versus efficacy of a particular treatment.

We all know that saying about healing a mind being quite unlike healing a bone, but there is a factor that unifies all medicine from the patient perspective -- dignity. I would like permission to live with dignity, to be treated with dignity, and, with time, to die with dignity. And I would like my right to dignity -- even as a person who experiences psychosis -- to be enshrined by law, and honoured in practice.

I see the great effort that has been made by the Standing Committee on Families and Communities to imbue a sense of dignity to the process of involuntary commitment -- I see it in the language, I see it in the attention to patient preference in the discharge transition process -- and I applaud these efforts. At the same time, I feel strongly that your efforts will not translate into efficacious practice on the ground, because, this Act, on the whole does not centre patient experience, patient-defined outcomes, and patient-defined dignity in its articulation.

Thank you, again, for this opportunity to share my thoughts and experiences. You have my consent to engage in dialogue with me on this matter, via email, if that is desired. Wishing you the best as you move forward in your vital work.

Respectfully,  
[REDACTED]