



April 16, 2020

The Honourable Premier Jason Kenney
Office of the Premier
307 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2B6
Email: premier@gov.ab.ca

Dear Premier Kenney:

RE: COVID-19 Mental Health Support for Albertans

This is a follow-up to our April 1, 2020 correspondence to the Honourable Minister of Health, Tyler Shandro. We are writing, once again, in the public interest of all Albertans to thank you for steps announced yesterday to address the current and future mental health needs of Albertans.

Recent research published in the March 2020 *Lancet* (click [here](#)) reported negative psychological outcomes associated with the much needed social isolation to address the COVID-19 pandemic. This is consistent with recent messaging from the World Health Organization that also identified mental health costs associated with the necessary physical separation and social isolation required at this critical time.

Additional mental health needs are being accrued because of the substantial personal and economic losses facing many Albertans because of the current crisis in the energy sector. The CEO of the Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses, Dan Kelly, in a March 26, 2020 Calgary Herald article noted that five members reported suicidal ideation in one week. Anecdotal reports from some of our members also indicate an increase in suicidal ideation and active plans. This supports the Alberta Health's designation of mental health services as being essential especially during the pandemic.

Evidence from the economic and emotional aftermath of the Fort McMurray wildfires also indicated stress reactions including anxiety and depression were common. In more severe cases this can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder, thoughts of self-harm and other forms of externalizing behaviours such as family conflict. Access to mental health services outside the limited publicly funded services was and continues to be an issue that has frequently been compounded by affordability, especially during times of substantial employment losses.

The majority of the approximately 4,000 members of the College of Alberta Psychologists are private practitioners who operate outside the publicly funded healthcare system. Despite many encountering economic setbacks associated with the current pandemic, a number are offering their services free of cost to frontline healthcare workers and first responders under the Psychologists' Association of

Alberta Disaster Response Network. This is consistent with your Alberta Energy Management Agency's *Bits and Pieces Program* initiatives.

Many of our members have quickly pivoted to telehealth services. They have been supported by related professional standards, practice guidelines and training resources. On behalf of all Albertans affected by the COVID-19 pandemic especially those who have encountered personal and job losses we respectfully thank you and your office for the additional resources to meet these needs now and in the foreseeable future.

Notwithstanding the above, we remain of the view that psychological services should be viewed much in the same manner as other publicly funded, privately delivered, health services. Allowing for publicly funded privately provided psychological services would take immediate pressure off other healthcare professionals including those working in urgent and emergency care facilities. In addition, although many Albertans will receive sufficient support from general crisis counselling and problem solving, those with significant symptoms and diagnosable levels of mental health disorders will require more intensive assessment and therapy services that psychologists have been thoroughly trained to provide. Providing the right care at the right time by the right professional is fundamental to efficient and effective healthcare system. This is particularly true in times of an overburdened physical healthcare system.

In closing, on behalf of the College of Alberta Psychologists' Council and regulated members, we are thankful for all the hard work your Government is doing, particularly in providing mental health and addiction services, and we continue to be willing to support their efforts. If you have any questions or require additional assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us.



Dr. Richard J. Spelliscy, R. Psych.
Registrar and Chief Executive Officer



Dr. Kerry Mothersill, R. Psych.
President, College Council

/ks
Ref:/Corres 2020