

# **All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions**

## **Progress Report**

**October 2015**

## **Background**

One in five Newfoundlanders and Labradorians live with a mental illness or addiction in any given year. Furthermore, the chance of any one of us developing a mental disorder over the life span is close to 50 per cent. In 2012-13, there were 3,000 hospitalizations related to mental health and addictions issues in Newfoundland and Labrador, and referrals to mental health and addictions services in the province are steadily increasing. Like any other health care issue, mental illness and addictions require a range of high quality and accessible programs and support services to provide individuals with the best possible outcomes and opportunities for recovery.

A first of its kind in Newfoundland and Labrador, the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions (APC) was established as a result of a private members' motion supported by all honourable members of the House of Assembly. The APC's mandate is to conduct a full review of the provincial mental health and addictions system to identify gaps in services and areas for improvement. Upon conclusion of this review, the APC will submit its recommendations to the House of Assembly with the objective of improving mental health and addictions programs and services for residents of Newfoundland and Labrador.

## **All-Party Committee Membership**

The committee consists of the following members of the House of Assembly:

- The Honourable Steve Kent, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health and Community Services; Chair of the APC
- The Honourable Felix Collins, Attorney General
- Mr. Kevin Pollard, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and Community Services and MHA for Baie Verte – Springdale
- Ms. Tracey Perry, Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier and MHA for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune
- Mr. Dwight Ball, Leader of the Official Opposition and MHA for Humber Valley
- Mr. Andrew Parsons, Official Opposition Critic for Health and Community Services and MHA for Burgeo – La Poile
- Ms. Gerry Rogers, MHA for St. John's Centre

The alternates to the APC are:

- Mr. Kevin Parsons, MHA for Cape St. Francis
- Mr. Christopher Mitchelmore, MHA for The Straits – White Bay North
- Ms. Lorraine Michael, MHA for Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi

## **System Review Process**

The APC has been following a multi-pronged approach in its review of the mental health and addictions system. The committee has hosted several public presentation and dialogue/discussion sessions throughout the province with community groups, stakeholders,

and individuals and families with lived experience of mental illness and addictions. It has received public submissions and feedback online, by email and telephone and conducted meetings with executive and mental health and addictions staff at each of the four regional health authorities. It has been given tours of health care facilities and Her Majesty's Penitentiary (HMP); and has begun the process of hearing from experts on best practices in mental health care delivery.

Public presentation and dialogue and discussion sessions began in May 2015, and continued until August 2015. Consultation sessions took place in Labrador City, Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Corner Brook, Grand Falls-Windsor, Marystown and St. John's. These sessions were well attended, and provided an important opportunity for people to share their personal experiences and perspectives on the provincial mental health and addictions system directly with members of the APC. Through its consultation process to date, including public dialogue/discussion sessions and public presentation sessions, the APC has heard from 65 mental health and addictions stakeholder groups, received 64 public presentations from individuals, families and organizations, and held round table sessions with 255 participants. Information and input received from the public dialogue/discussion sessions and public presentation sessions can be viewed online at [www.BeHeardNL.ca](http://www.BeHeardNL.ca).

Members of the APC met with leadership teams and mental health and addictions staff members at each of the regional health authorities, and learned first-hand what is working well within each region, as well as some of the systematic challenges faced by staff that provide care to individuals with mental health and addictions issues. APC members also toured Humberwood Treatment Centre in Corner Brook, Hope Valley Youth Residential Treatment Centre in Grand Falls-Windsor, the Waterford Hospital, and Her Majesty's Penitentiary (HMP) in St. John's.

The APC received expert presentations on best practices in mental health service delivery. This included a presentation, by Ms. Ann Vivian-Beresford and Ms. Nicole Gill of the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information, on the *Provincial Mental Health and Addictions Programs Performance Indicators Report*; a comprehensive document that supports health care decision making, policy and program development, and tracks performance monitoring and trending over time. The APC heard from Dr. Nick Kates, Chair of the Department of Psychiatry at McMaster University, about ways to improve collaboration between mental health and primary care services. It also met with Ms. Louise Bradley, President and CEO of the Mental Health Commission of Canada, to learn more about what the Commission is doing to improve mental health outcomes for all Canadians.

## **What We Heard**

A number of themes have emerged as a result of the public consultation and review process.

- **Access**

One predominant theme is the need to improve access to services and supports. The APC heard about the need to increase investments in mental health resources, and affordable and supportive housing. Furthermore, the APC heard loud and clear the importance of addressing wait times, and providing more resources in the school system to help the growing number of students with mental health issues. Presentations emphasized that increased access to services regardless of region, language, socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity or ability was necessary. The APC heard that people were not always aware of available resources and services, and many referenced the need for enhanced coverage for medications.

- **Quality**  
Improving the quality of care was another common theme. It was suggested this could be achieved by providing more patient-centred care, enhancing the use of multi-disciplinary teams in primary health care clinics, and the provision of ongoing professional development and educational opportunities for staff. Using technology to improve services, the Recovery Model as a best practice, and the importance of strengthening the role of families and caregivers of individuals living with mental illness and addictions, were also raised.
- **Promotion and Prevention**  
The importance of focusing on the promotion of positive mental health and the prevention of mental illness was also highlighted. A number of ways were identified to address this, including reducing stigma by providing education and awareness and supporting the social determinants of health, and working with schools in the promotion of positive mental health with a focus on early intervention.
- **Policy and Programming**  
Enhancing policy and programming by applying appropriate mental health and harm reduction lenses, and increasing engagement opportunities for individuals living with mental illness and addictions in the early stages of program development were also identified as themes throughout the consultations.
- **Community**  
A final theme identified is the need to strengthen community supports by continuing to build relationships with community-based partners; and enhancing the delivery of programs and services within the community in which individuals live and work.

## Next Steps

While the consultation process thus far has provided an important opportunity to learn about the strengths and challenges associated with the current mental health and addictions system, there is more work required to fulfill the mandate of the APC. Therefore, it is recommended that the APC continue its work following the 2015 general election. The APC should reconvene by January 31, 2016, to consider its future work, including:

- ***Expert Presentations and Submissions***  
The APC is very interested in hearing from experts in the fields of addictions, harm reduction and methadone maintenance treatment; seniors' mental health; youth and children mental health; veterans' and military personnel mental health; caregivers and women's mental health; LGBTQ mental health; as well as, representatives from Labour, the justice system, and members of the Provincial Advisory Council on Mental Health and Addictions.
- ***Consultation with Aboriginal Communities***  
The APC would like to hear from Aboriginal groups to hear their experiences and perspectives on the provincial mental health and addictions system.
- ***Conclude Public Consultation Sessions***  
The APC has visited all regions of the province as part of its consultation process; however, there are two outstanding visits remaining: Clarendville and Port aux Basques. It is recommended that the APC finalize the schedule and planning for these consultations, and determine if there are any other community consultations outstanding.

- ***Ongoing Online Feedback and Submissions***

The ability to provide feedback and submissions to the APC online, through email or by telephone is an important mechanism for individuals and families in the province, who have not had an opportunity, or have chosen not to participate in a public consultation session. Thus it is suggested that online feedback continue to be received for the duration of the APC's mandate.

Upon conclusion of its review of the provincial mental health and addictions system, the APC will table a set of recommendations in the House of Assembly.

## **Conclusion**

As members of the APC, we have embraced every opportunity to hear from community groups, and individuals and families with lived experience of mental illness and addictions throughout the province. What we have heard is loud and clear. There is a need for greater access to services; better quality of care; increased mental health promotion and prevention efforts; enhanced policy and programming; and strengthened community supports in order to improve the provincial mental health and addictions system.

While the feedback and input we have received to date has been very informative and insightful, our work is not yet complete. By continuing to work collaboratively, we firmly believe that we can achieve our goal of finding innovative solutions to improve mental health and addictions services for residents in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The APC offers our sincere gratitude to each and every person who has participated in our review process to date. Whether sharing personal stories and experiences, suggesting ideas for system improvements, or noting programs and services that are working well, the input we have received will be invaluable as we develop our final recommendations for the House of Assembly, and will ultimately help us transform the provincial mental health and addictions system to better meet the needs of the individuals and families it serves.