



All Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions

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The Profession of Psychology:

There are approximately 18,000 Registered Psychologists in Canada, and of those approximately 200 are registered in NL. This makes Psychologists the largest, regulated, specialized mental health care providers in the country – outnumbering Psychiatrists approximately 4:1. Clinical Psychologists are some of the most extensively trained clinicians in the world. With the move nationally to doctoral level entry to practice, most Psychologists now spend up to 10 years in University. Psychologists also spend years completing practica, internships, residencies and post-doctoral training.

Psychology is the study of how people think, feel and behave. Psychologists play a role in diagnosis, treatment, consultation, health promotion and research, program design, education and program evaluation. Psychologists use this knowledge to develop assessments and treatments that can help people to understand, explain and change their feelings, thinking and behaviours. Psychologists diagnose developmental problems like learning disabilities and autism, neuropsychological problems that result from head injury or dementia and mental disorders like depression and anxiety. Psychologists help people to recover from and manage these problems and disorders using evidence-based psychological treatments which they develop and evaluate.

Psychological Interventions Work and Are Cost Effective:

(refer to CPA study in handout)

Psychological treatments are proven effective in treating a wide range of mental health disorders. Psychological treatments are less expensive than, and at least as effective as medication for a number of common mental health conditions like depression and anxiety without the negative side-effects associated with medication. People with depression who are treated with psychological therapy tend to relapse less frequently than those treated with medication. Every \$1 spend on Psychology services yield \$5 saved on medical costs (Romanow Commission).

However, NL currently has several significant gaps/needs in Psychology services.

1) Extended Health Benefits Package for provincial employees

The Federal Government recently increased their coverage of Psychological services to \$2000/year for all federal employees. Recommend that the same coverage be provided to all provincial employees in NL. Additionally recommend removing the requirement for a physician referral.

Given the loss in productivity resulting from mental illness and addiction, there are compelling arguments that demonstrate a positive return on investment for employers who provide appropriate programs of prevention, identification and treatment of mental illness, particularly through extended health benefits. With respect to the treatment of anxiety and depression, the number of sessions required typically ranges from 15-20 but some clients require fewer than 10. Currently NL public sector employees receive the lowest amount of coverage for psychological services in Canada (e.g. Eastern Health plan provides coverage for two sessions at the recommended rate of \$150/hr).

There are many individuals with more complex mental health needs who will require the support and services of a multidisciplinary team with the health care system. However, many other have issues that, if addressed early, can be decreased or fully address by accessing an adequate number of sessions with a private psychologist. This will help to reduce costs to the overall health care system as well as significantly decrease wait times.

2) Health Psychology Services (both adult and pediatric)

Psychologists are well trained to provide health-focused interventions which assist in the management of long-term chronic illnesses and disability. There is extensive evidence demonstrating that some psychological treatments can be an effective intervention for not only mental health conditions but also a wide range of health conditions. Interventions can range from long-term assistance with chronic disease managements to single-session interventions to assist with needle phobias or difficulties taking medications. Currently NL has one adult health Psychologist and one pediatric health Psychologist within the public health care system in the province.

Currently significant gaps within adult services include Cancer, Diabetes, the Bariatric Surgery program or general admissions at the Health Sciences Centre.

With pediatrics, child with cardiac issues, asthma, elimination disorders, GI conditions such as Crohn's and Colitis or many neurological issues including epilepsy do not have access to a Pediatric Health Psychologist.

3) Psychology Services for adolescents and young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

It is estimated that 1 in 66 children born today are affected ASD. While considerable resources have been allocated for childhood interventions, we are significantly lacking supports for individuals (particularly higher functioning) with ASD. This is a population that is rapidly increasing without specialized psychological services available to meet their behavioural and emotional needs. Currently there is only one publically funded Psychologists who sees adults with ASD, and those

individuals must have very specific cognitive and behavioural issues to fit that mandate. This is a population at high risk of anxiety disorders, social isolation and underemployment. Appropriate psychological services could assist in meeting these needs.

4) Continued support and funding for the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology (Psy.D) program at Memorial University of NL

In 2009, MUN began offering the Doctor of Psychological (Psy.D) program, the only one of its kind in Eastern Canada. The goal of this program is to offer comprehensive, high-level training in the practice of Clinical Psychology that will help to address not only the need within our own province but also the need across Canada for well-trained doctoral level Clinical Psychologists. Most professional and regulatory bodies of psychology in Canada support the doctoral degree as the requirement for entry to practice as a Psychologist. Additionally, Eastern Health now requires a Doctorate level of training for all Psychologist positions. In order to meet long-standing issues with recruitment and retention of Psychologists in NL, it is essential to continue to education and train locally, to ensure ongoing funding and support of the Psy.D. Program at MUN.

5) Educational Psychologists with the schools

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recommends a School Psychologist to Student ratio of 1:1000 in order to support basic provision of psychological services to youth in our schools. In 2011, NL had only 38 Registered Psychologists per 100,000 people (Canada's Health Care Providers – 2011 Provincial Profiles: A Look at 27 Health Professions). Increased numbers of Educational Psychologists within our school system to help ensure the children and youth who require psychological assessments and treatments receive them.

Lower numbers of Psychologists equal even longer wait times for children to be appropriately assessed and diagnosed for learning disabilities and other mental health or developmental conditions. The earlier students are assessed, the earlier they can receive interventions to improve their learning potential and wellbeing. The Mental Health Commission of Canada states that up to 50% of adult mental and behavioural health problems begin before age 14. Early assessment and interventions of many mental health disorders can make a dramatic difference in young peoples' quality of life and future productivity and consequently can increase cost savings to our communities.

Long-Term Solutions:

Public funding of psychological services (inclusion of Psychologists under MCP). Refer to recent Globe and Mail article included in handouts.

Access to a Psychologist should be a right, not a privilege, for all residents of NL