

Turning the Tide:

A Plan to Champion Mental Health for the next Generation

Mental health is a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his own community.

Government Action:

Provide sustainable funding for **every elementary school to have a full-time mental health professional** that will fulfill the following mandate:

1. Ensure every student receives the most beneficial psycho-educational assessments for classroom support in a timely manner
2. Coordinate holistic and community-oriented mental health strategies for the benefit of families, students and staff
3. Oversee the successful training of all school staff in evidence-based mental health pedagogy and trauma-informed practice



Responses to Common Questions:

Why focus on elementary schools?

Child and youth mental health problems are prevalent

As many as 25% (over 800,000 in Canada) of children and youth experience significant mental health issues.

Intervention needs to start earlier

Up to 70 per cent of young adults suffering mental illnesses report that the symptoms started in childhood

Our time is demanding urgent action on mental health

COVID-19 will cause a far reaching 'echo' pandemic of mental health issues. Today, only one in five children and youth who need mental health services receive care. We need to act now to turn the tide.

Why should schools be responsible for mental health services?

Schools are an ideal place to provide mental health services to children and youth.

Virtually every community has a school and most children spend at least 6 hours a day there. In fact, research has shown that students are more likely to seek counseling when services are available in schools. In some cases, such as rural areas, schools provide the only mental health services in the community.

There is growing momentum for school-based mental health in Canada and elsewhere

Over the past decade, a number of provincial, national, and international initiatives have emerged in support of school mental health.

Why a mental health educator for every school?

It creates more equitable access to health services for children

Up to 60% of students do not receive the treatment they need due to stigma and lack of access to services. Of those who do get help, nearly two thirds do so only in school.

The right investment is building internal capacity

A full-time mental health school coordinator proves the most cost-effective. With the objective to scale programs across school districts, success and sustainability are achieved by building internal capacity through an on-site coordinator

Why are assessments needed for every child?

These are critical tools to help students who have high needs

Not all students require specialized assessments, but those who do often cannot access them in time to change their learning for the better. An on-site mental health professional will reduce current caseloads and build capacity among staff to expand assessments in the future

It builds an equitable Alberta

Improving access to quality mental health services for all children, irrespective of their income, is the right thing to do. When individuals in society are healthy, everyone benefits.

Why is training of teachers in mental health issues important?

Teachers have high expectations to succeed for their students

Only through consistent training and support can teachers gain the right confidence and skills to address the urgent mental health needs of children. Also, ongoing training in mental health will provide the self-care needed to sustain their care of our children.

Why not have the ministry of Health be responsible for mental health?

The Alberta government already recognizes the need to cooperate in providing the most effective services

Alberta Health has stated a key priority is improving the connection and integration of mental health services across health and community partners. When government ministries work together to support the mental health of students, this collaborative effort enhances integration, communication, alignment and co-ordination across projects and initiatives.

How much money will this cost?

It will cost less than the fee to join a sports team

\$114 per student - that is the cost for each child, along with their parent and teacher, to have equal access to mental health care. That equals approximately \$59,000,000 per year across all school districts. To put that into perspective, the current provincial budget for mental health and addictions is \$100 million, \$8.3 billion for education, \$3.9 billion for community and social services, and \$1.6 billion for children's services "to ensure children, youth and families have the services and supports they need to thrive".

The return on investment means sustainable government and stronger families

In any given year, one in five people in Canada experiences a mental health problem or illness, with a cost to the economy of well in excess of \$50 billion. Investing in mental health care among children will reduce the burden on health, employment, and justice systems in the future.

By investing now, we can turn the tide on mental health in one generation.