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Hon. Christine Elliott
Minister of Health & Deputy Premier
Ministry of Health
5th Floor, 777 Bay St.
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March 15, 2021

Dear Minister Elliott,

I am writing to you regarding a deeply concerning situation which has been brought to my attention by agencies and physicians serving the Portuguese-speaking community of Toronto. As you may be aware, my riding of Davenport is home to the largest concentration of Portuguese-speaking residents in Canada.

Years ago, members of the Portuguese-speaking community in the GTA came together with mental health providers to address the lack of mental health and addiction services available in Portuguese. A community mental program was developed and has most recently been run very successfully out of the University Health Network location at Toronto Western Hospital. The program provides three main services: general assistance (comprised of a treatment and consultation service), an addiction service, and an intensive case management service for those with severe mental illness. Portuguese-speaking clinicians work under the supervision of a psychiatrist. By all accounts the program has been extremely successful, seeing 500-600 new patients per year and managing over 1000 unique patients annually.

Unfortunately, we understand that the clinic is being shut down. Recently, referring physicians have been informed that the clinic is not accepting new referrals. We have also learned that the last remaining supervising psychiatrist has left the program. I reached out through the Central LHIN who have confirmed that UHN is no longer taking new referrals to the clinic, and indeed that the clinic is in effect ceasing to exist. They claim that new patients can be referred to the UHN Community Mental Health Program. While I have been informed via the LHIN that UHN may still be able to accommodate Portuguese-speaking patients, I am deeply concerned that this essential service will not be offered to the community in their language. Furthermore, it is clear that if the problem is too many patients are being referred, surely the solution is to increase resources and funding for the program, not shut it down.

Minister, in the midst of the pandemic, the need for mental health support has become even more urgent and the number of individuals suffering and seeking help, has dramatically increased. Ensuring the right support is provided requires that patients be able to clearly communicate their concerns and share their feelings. Without the ability to communicate with someone in their own language – in this case Portuguese – I am concerned that too many

individuals will see their mental health worsen and the cost to our community, to the healthcare system and of course, those in need themselves, will grow. This is not an acceptable situation. Moreover, I understand that the Spanish-language Mental Health Clinic is also no longer operating. Where is the community to find these services in their language?

On behalf of my community, and the Portuguese-speaking community across Toronto, I ask that you immediately look into this situation and ensure that the Portuguese Mental Health Clinic is funded and operational. If University Health Network is unable to accommodate the clinic, I would ask that another location be identified. The community cannot afford to lose this essential service.

Thank you in advance for your urgent attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Marit Stiles
MPP Davenport

C.c.: Hon. Michael Tibollo, Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
Monique Taylor, MPP – Official Opposition Critic for Mental Health and Addictions
Ed Graca, Executive Director, Abrigo Centre