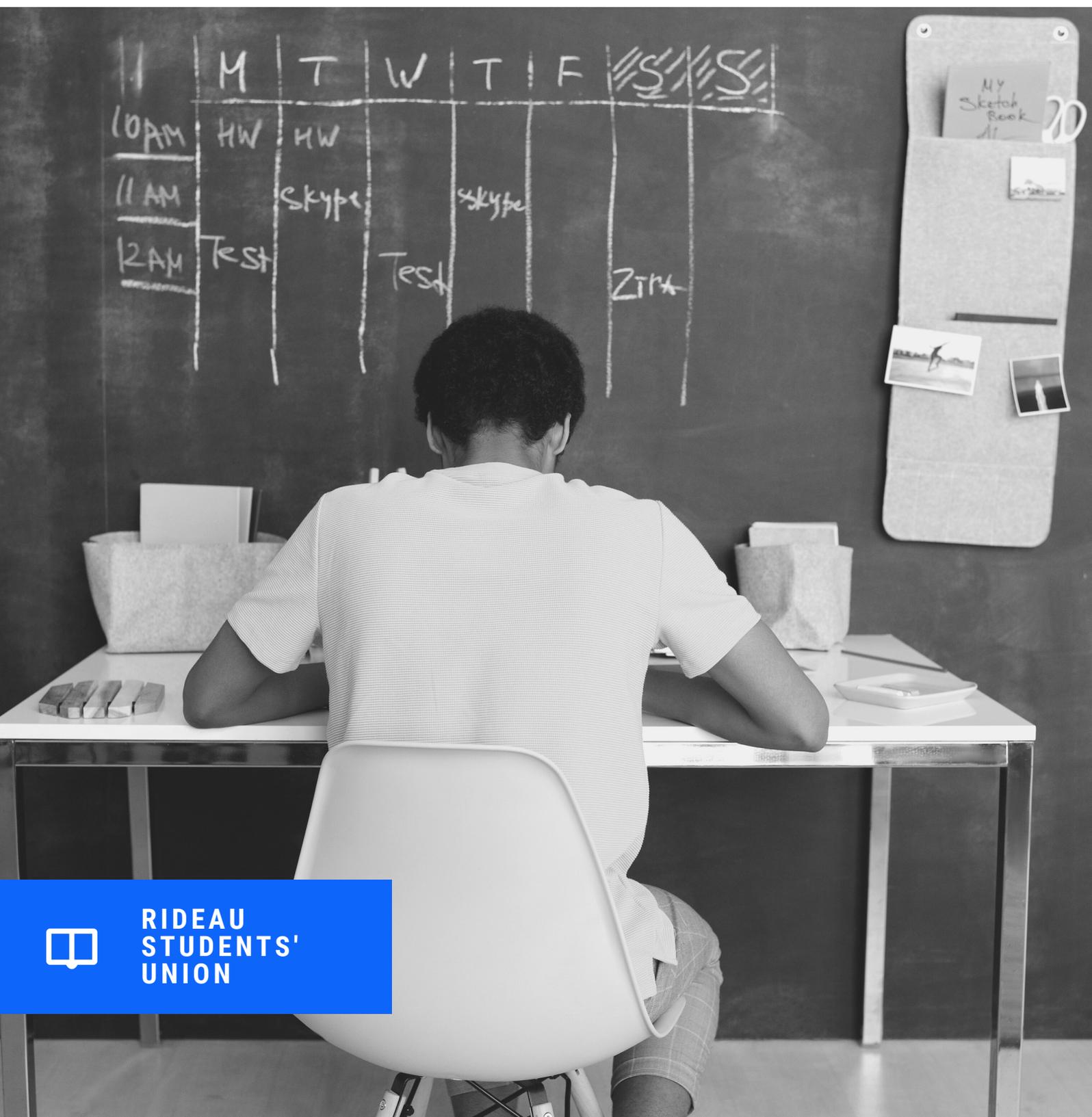


# MENTAL HEALTHCARE IN ONTARIO

A REVIEW OF STUDENTS'  
NEEDS REGARDING MENTAL  
WELLNESS

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RIDEAU  
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## INTRODUCTION

Though public healthcare provision systems in Canada was established in 1966 and full universality in 1984, the Canadian health systems continue to lack guidance and appropriate response on the subject of Mental Healthcare. The coronavirus pandemic has brought various issues to the forefront of public politics and, as individuals are now in isolation, a major issue has become the sanity of individuals as they cope with the issues that surround them. This is not just an issue relevant during the pandemic, but a recurring issue in Canadian society. Mental health is the key to various other issues, ranging from crime to economic development. It is vital that Canada takes this opportunity to address the issue once and for all and help the millions of Canadians that suffer from some form of mental health issue.

## RELEVANCE

Mental health is an important part of everyday life for almost every Canadian and branches out into a wide variety of issues. As all people are human beings, filled with emotion, trauma and a habit of struggling in finding purpose and encouragement, it is natural that everyone should need some sort of support in their endeavours. Often it is even just the lack of an individual who people feel comfortable sharing with that may drive people off the edge, to the verge of suicide. In Canada alone, every year there are 11 suicides every day, and suicide is the second leading cause of death among individuals aged 15-34. 8% of adults will experience major depression during their lifetime and 1 in 5 will personally experience a mental illness.

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## RELEVANCE CONT'D

Though this in itself should be enough to encourage reform on the issue, it should also be noted that poor mental health has its impacts on other aspects of society as well. Inadequate care for one's mental state may drive them to pursue criminal ventures, it will lead to low productivity which will be poor for the economic condition of the country, it discourages innovative and creative pursuits which creates resistance for technological development and it prevents youth from making the most of their childhoods. The anxiety, pressure and depression that society has come to enforce as a part of day-to-day life transcend age, ethnicity, gender, religion and even class.

## POLICY

Annually, Canadians spend 6.3 billion dollars in out-of-pocket, uninsured expenses, on mental health services and treatment that could not be provided by the current healthcare system. Mental disorders are the second greatest hospital care expenditure in the country for children. It is very clear that mental health is an issue not being adequately addressed by governing agencies as it is a cause of significant mental, physical and financial damage for Canadians and there is limited support for citizens against it.

The Rideau Students' Union has conducted a study and proposes the following reforms to enable citizens and address the issue of mental health once and for all.

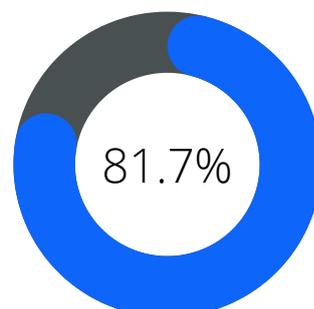
## POLICY PROPOSALS

1. All psychotherapy, mental health medications, psychosocial treatments and brain stimulation therapies should be covered by Canadian healthcare systems
  - a. Total costs are estimated to be around \$0.90 per person
  - b. Following the Canada Health Act, coverage would be administered by the Provincial Government and regulated by the Federal Government
  - c. Mental Health prescriptions must be humane and skill-based
2. Local Governments ought to offer free support group activities in their cities, lead by mental healthcare professionals, with 1 group for every 100,000 people
3. The Federal Government should devote at least \$1 billion in order to train mental health professionals across the country
  - a. This will incorporate mandated training for individual mental health professionals, peace officers, teachers and other healthcare professionals
  - b. The training programs must be created with the support of mental health professionals

## STUDY

To understand the issue of mental health better, in February of 2021, the Rideau Students' Union conducted a survey among 62 high school students, 59 of whom were from the province of Ontario. The study tested three categories of opinion and background among students; the impacts of mental health issues on students, the adequacy and accessibility of current systems and opinions on reform.

81.7% of students believe that mental healthcare services would be beneficial to their worldly life. 66.1% of students also tell us that they have had a family member or friend that they believe could have benefited from mental healthcare support. These two are basic statistics that indicate the demand for mental healthcare among students and even among adults. Although the issue often goes under the radar, mental wellness is a topic that influences almost everyone and it has significant impacts on other metrics such as crime, poverty and overall economic development.



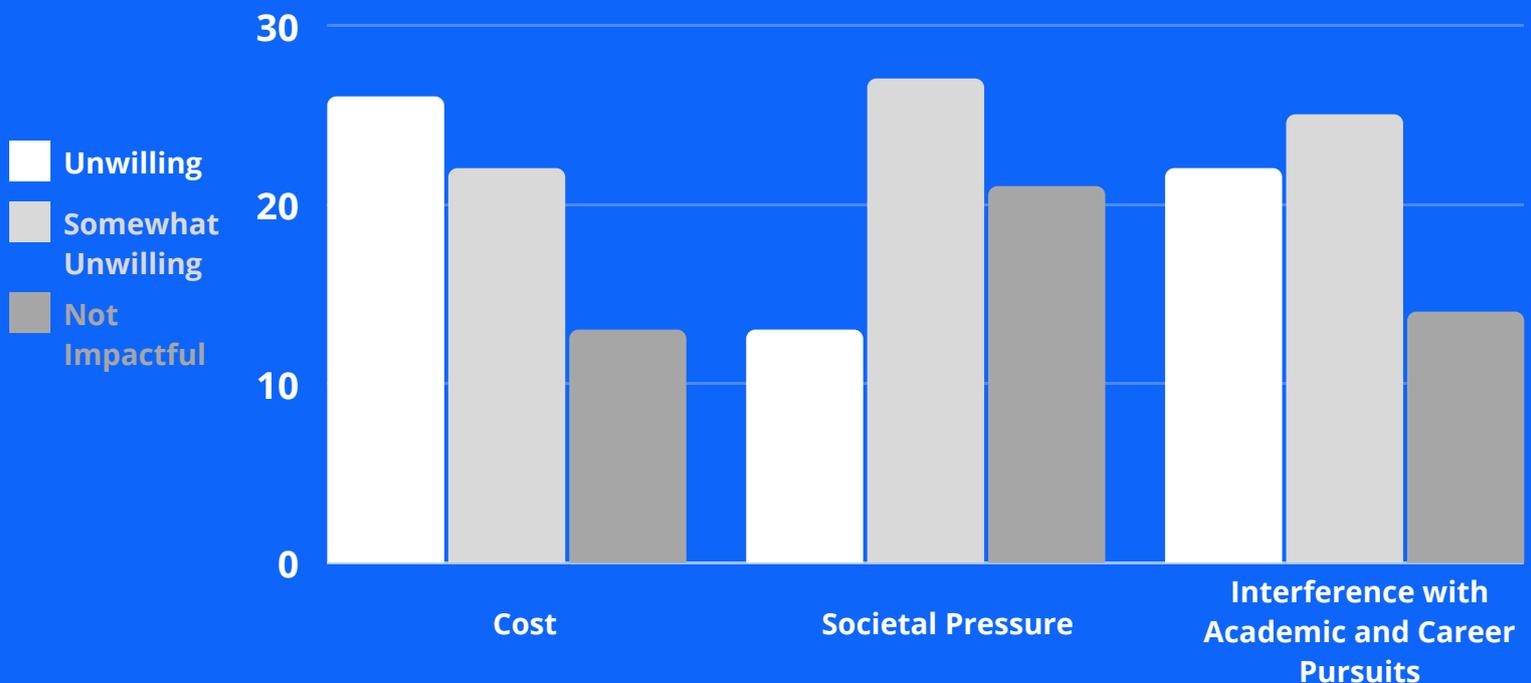
of students believe mental healthcare would be beneficial to their worldly life.

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## STUDY CONT'D

Of the students surveyed, 45.8% of students said that they had needed mental healthcare but were unable to access it. When looking at the reasonings for why people were unable or unwilling to access mental healthcare, 78.7% of students said that high costs were a strong motivator in preventing them from accessing care, 65.6% of students pointed to societal pressure and stigma and 77.0% of students were driven away from the option for fear of interference with career and academic pursuits. Students were also given the option to express other concerns regarding barriers to access and pointed out issues of finding therapists, a feeling that it may not help coupled with limited time in students' schedules and familial pressure. Some also noted that therapists are not interchangeable and some work better with certain students, an important consideration for the provision of psychotherapy to students and that drugs should be used carefully in the field, especially more potent ones. This section of the survey also reveals some gender differences as those who identify as female are more likely to stay away from mental healthcare due to interference in academic and career pursuits and those who identify as male are more likely to stay away from mental healthcare due to societal pressures.

How does each of the following influence your willingness to access mental healthcare:



## STUDY CONT'D

Finally, when asked about specific policies, students gave overwhelming support for universal access to psychotherapy (90.2%), mental health medication (91.7%) and other services (93.4%). They also expressed a personal belief that teachers and law enforcement officers did not have enough training to deal with or recognize issues of mental illness. To a lesser extent, many students (59%) expressed a belief that medical professionals not specializing in mental health were also unable to deal with or recognize mental illness. It is rather clear there is a need for more training of individuals who may deal with mental illness in their careers and for the provision of mental healthcare in general.

The data collected in this study supports the previously recognized need for mental healthcare and training but reveals a deep issue of stigma. To overcome this issue, the Union has come to a separate conclusion that would conquer many of the societal pressures (regarding family, coworker and peer pressure) that limit mental wellness.

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"I haven't been able to access mental health services because I can't open up and tell people that I need them."

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## STIGMA

Stigma is the main cause for accessing mental health treatment in 40% of cases. In spite of the fact that around 34% of the Ontario high school student population has reported some sort of mental illness, 42% of Canadians are unsure whether or not they would socialize with an individual with mental illness and 27% of individuals report being outright fearful of people with mental illness.

The reason why 75% of children do not access specialized treatment for mental health issues is grounded both in inadequate provision of services and stigma. The main forms of this stigma are Negative Attitudes and Behaviour, Lack of Awareness, Pessimism of Recovery, Inadequate Training and Local Culture. Awareness and pessimism of recovery of issues that the government aims to address right now but without any proper show for the value of mental healthcare, it cannot realistically be expected that this changes any more than it already has. Universal mental health care will solve this problem on its own. Inadequate training can only be solved by devoting funds to the process of ensuring individuals have the skill to address issues in a proactive way. What remains is negative attitudes and behaviour and societal culture that dissociates humanity from a person when they seek mental healthcare. Many individuals feel devalued by their peers, coworkers, family members and others they come in contact with for accessing mental healthcare. Others believe that accessing mental healthcare would prevent them from advancing in their career or other pursuits.



## STIGMA CONT'D

In order to combat this stigma, the Union proposes a simple mandate to be carried out that would solve this problem. The Union suggests that in youth, from the ages of 12 - 21, there are mandatory annual psychotherapy or psychiatrist sessions/checkups. This will go to ensure two things:

- As all people are needed to look for psychological well-being care, there will be no expert or individual disgrace around looking for help. Psychotherapy and other psychological well-being necessities will be made a regular piece of life, very like how actual medical care is found in the present day. Should an individual wish to be pardoned for a psychological well-being exam, it will be a typical event and not be used as a sign of character by society.
- The individuals who needn't bother with extra mental medical services will get comfortable with the procedure and services that emotional wellness help entails and will relinquish biases against the individuals who need to get to mental medical care. Desensitization to a public picture of psychological maladjustment as something to fear will empower individuals to be more supportive individuals who need assistance and even encourage them to seek help of their own.

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## STIGMA CONT'D

People are driven away from getting the help they need by a belief that it will hurt them, force them into a position of social isolation and prevent them from academic and career endeavours. Though simple campaigns aimed at promoting awareness of the issue of mental healthcare are valuable, they can only accomplish so much. If we would like to truly see that accessing mental healthcare resources is seen as normal and safe, further steps must be taken.

## CONCLUSION

Mental healthcare is an issue that urgently needs to be addressed. While it comes at a cost, the cost savings it provides, reducing the amount of money spent supporting those who are unemployed, reducing crime, and costs of treatment of substance abuse-related medical conditions, is around \$51 billion. Support of this push for universal mental healthcare is a valiant effort to help people, to help society, to help the world, to be better. It is a necessity that we work together to tackle this issue immediately as the burden of failure is not just billions of dollars, but the lives of thousands, even tens or hundreds of thousands of Canadians.

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