

EDUCATION & HEALTH
Halifax-Yarmouth Diocesan Council

RESOLUTION 2015.01

Coverage for Psychologists under the Nova Scotia Medical Services Insurance Program for the initial assessment, diagnosis and therapy for adolescents with psychological and emotional disorders.

Whereas, 40% of the 45,000 Nova Scotia youth who require mental health assistance face wait times for initial assessment ranging on average from 32 to 70 days for non-emergencies; and

Whereas, early intervention of mental health disorders in adolescents has been associated with reduced severity of symptoms and improved adult mental health outcomes; and

Whereas, psychologists have it within their scope of practice to do initial assessments, diagnosis and provide therapy for adolescent mental health disorders; and

Whereas, only psychiatrists are funded by the Nova Scotia Medical Services Insurance Program (MSI) for the initial assessment, diagnosis and treatment of adolescent mental health disorders;

Therefore be it resolved, that the Nova Scotia Provincial Council of the Catholic Women's League of Canada urge the Nova Scotia Provincial Government (Department of Health and Wellness) to cover psychologists' services for the initial assessment, diagnosis and treatment of adolescent mental health disorders under the Nova Scotia Medical Services Insurance Programs (MSI).

Brief:

In Nova Scotia, there are 267,000 youth between the ages of 15-25. Of these, 45,000 require “mental health assistance; 40% (18,156) do not access treatment” (Murray, 3). When troubled youth seek help for mental health issues in a medical setting such as the IWK Health Centre, Halifax, N.S., five out of 10 patients can wait up to 83 days to receive an initial assessment (Government of Nova Scotia). If youth were assessed, diagnosed and received therapy more quickly, they have an excellent chance of recovery. For example, once depression is recognized, therapy can make a difference for 80% of people who are affected, allowing them to get back to their regular activities (Canadian Mental Health Association).

In March 2012, the Nova Scotia Mental Health and Addictions Strategy Advisory Committee released their report and recommendations titled “Come Together”. The report identified an objective of reducing wait times as a priority for children and adolescents. The model of care was the Choice and Partnership Approach (CAPA) initially offered through the IWK Health Centre, Halifax, NS and select regional hospitals and community based programs. The report emphasized the need for adequate human resources to meet the goals of being able to offer those with an urgent level of priority and appointment within 7 days; a semi-urgent appointment would be 14 calendar days and regular or general referrals would be within 21 days (Mental Health and Addictions Strategy Advisory Committee). In 2015, when youth sought help for mental health issues in a hospital or community setting, the average wait time is still 32 to 70 days for non-emergency situations (Province of Nova Scotia Wait Times).

The scope of practice for Psychologists, as mandated under the Psychologists Act and the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology, is defined as follows

“As provided by statute, psychologists may examine the behavior of children and adults; diagnose psychological and emotional disorders; provide consultation and therapy; counsel individuals, groups and organizations to enhance physical and mental health and to achieve more effective personal, social and vocational development and adjustment; teach and apply psychological theory and principles regarding behavior and mental processes such as learning, memory, perception and human development, and design, conduct and communicate the results of psychological research.” (Association of Psychologists of Nova Scotia).

At present, only psychiatrists are reimbursed by the Provincial Medical Services Insurance Program (MSI) for the initial assessment, diagnosis and treatment of adolescent psychological and emotional disorders (Association of Psychologists for Nova Scotia; Nova Scotia Medical Services Insurance; Nova Scotia Psychologist). If Psychologists’ services were also covered under MSI, it would mean that many more youth could receive earlier and timelier assessments, diagnosis and therapy. (Carver; Davidson, 3)

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Action Plan:

1. Visit the Nova Scotia Provincial Minister of Health and Wellness to lobby for support for coverage for Psychologists under the Nova Scotia Medical Services Insurance Programs to include initial assessment/diagnosis of adolescents with mental illness.

2. Encourage Catholic Women's League members to write letters to the Nova Scotia Provincial Minister of Health and Wellness to include psychologists' services for adolescent mental health disorders to be covered under the Nova Scotia MSI programs.
3. Educate members on the concerns and issues about the resolution.
4. Monitor the government's plan of action in response to the "Come Together" initiative contained in the Resolution.