Moving On Mental Health:
A system that makes sense for children and youth
Introduction

Every child and young person deserves support to reach their full potential – and our communities and our province need them to realize that potential. Children and young people deserve a mental health system that delivers services and supports that respond quickly and comprehensively to their needs, as close to home as possible.

Yet today, one in five young people is battling a mental health issue, and 70 per cent of all mental health and addictions issues begin in childhood and adolescence. That is why Ontario launched the Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy, focusing on children and youth first.

The Ministries of Children and Youth Services, Education, Health and Long-Term Care, and Training, Colleges and Universities are working in partnership to implement the strategy and achieve its goals: to improve access to high quality mental health and addictions services, strengthen worker capacity, create a responsive and integrated system and build awareness and capacity about mental health issues within communities.

In spite of difficult economic circumstances and enormous fiscal challenges, new funding is reducing wait times for mental health services, ensuring earlier identification and fast access to the right services.

One year into the strategy, we have 600 new mental health workers on the ground in schools, communities and youth courts, and we are providing services to an estimated 20,000 more kids and their families.

It is a strong beginning. It’s making a difference – but there is more to do.

The government’s immediate priorities are: to deliver more services and to help children and youth get the services they need faster. Over the next three years, the government is building on its investments, which provide more direct services in communities, and fundamentally changing the system itself. This will transform the experience of children, youth and families by creating the best service system to support children and youth with mental health needs and make the most of our investments now – and in the future. The result will be a child and youth mental health system that makes sense to families, and is coherent to teachers, doctors and all those who work with families to find help.

Our action plan, Moving on Mental Health: A system that makes sense for children and youth, will get us there.
Why does our system need to change?

Parents have consistently reported that finding the right services and support is confusing. Teachers, family doctors and others who help children also find our system challenging, and this prevents young people from getting the help they need.

This is a problem we are determined to fix.

We envision a very different experience for Ontario’s young people and their families who seek treatments and support for their mental health problems. The *Moving On Mental Health* action plan will transform the system over the next three years, so:

- Parents will know where to go for help, and know how to get services quickly.
- Funding will reflect each community’s current and future needs.
- All Ontarians will know how well the system is working.

Our goal is to deliver a coordinated, responsive system that makes sense to parents and young people, that is easy to navigate, that enables fast answers and clear pathways to care. Most important of all – the system must deliver early and appropriate help for each child and youth who needs it.
The plan

Specifically, the *Moving On Mental Health* action plan will transform the experience of families seeking help by:

- **Creating and supporting pathways to care** – Clear and streamlined pathways to care between primary care, schools and community-based supports and services will help children and youth moving through and across the service system know what to expect along the way. Sharing this responsibility across sectors requires greater clarity about the roles of all those who help support children and youth: education, primary care, child welfare and others.

- **Defining core services** – There are core mental health services that will be available in communities across Ontario, with other specialized services available regionally or provincially. Defining core services will make our system more transparent to parents and young people, as well as those who help families find the services they need.

Supporting these core elements are changes that will help us build a stronger, more coherent and accountable system of care:

- **Establishing community lead agencies** – Lead agencies across Ontario will be responsible for providing core services and collaborating effectively with other services that play a role in young peoples’ lives, such as schools, hospitals, those working in primary care and child welfare authorities. Parents will only tell their story once.

- **Creating a new funding model** – The new funding model will recognize individual community population and need, so agencies can respond effectively to local demands.

- **Building a legislative and regulatory framework** – A framework will enshrine the accountability of lead community-based mental health agencies so that all are held to the same standard of care, regardless of where they are located in the province.

*not real name.*
Full implementation of the *Moving On Mental Health* action plan will take about three years. Change will be deliberate, methodical, and determined. The plan benefited from extensive consultation with parents, young people, service providers and system experts. Implementation will also be guided by advisory groups, so that parents, youth and service providers have the opportunity to provide advice and feedback along the way.

It is an exciting time for Ontario’s child and youth mental health sector. Thanks, in large part, to all our partners, we have already seen positive change that has improved and expanded mental health supports for Ontario families. It is important that we continue our work together to build a stronger system that is coherent, open and welcoming, and accessible. Parents must have confidence that their children are well-served, and young people must be given the supports they need to thrive and succeed.

Ten-year-old Johnny* had severe behavioural problems and was waiting for services for months. New government funding allowed the agency serving Johnny and his family to hire more mental health workers. They helped Johnny get the home-based services he needed. Today, his attitude and outlook both at home and school have improved dramatically, as has his family’s well-being.

*not real name.
To learn more about Ontario’s child and youth mental health system, visit ontario.ca/youthmentalhealth