

*News Release***Ontario Increasing Mental Health Support During COVID-19**

April 2, 2020

Additional Resources will Improve Access to Online and Virtual Supports

TORONTO — Ontario government is making it easier for everyone, especially those on the front lines, to reach out for mental health support during the COVID-19 outbreak. To improve access, the province is providing emergency funding of up to \$12 million to immediately expand online and virtual mental health supports and \$2.6 million to hire new psychologists and other mental health workers to support Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) personnel.

"Dealing with an evolving crisis like COVID-19 puts a lot of stress on everyone, including people who are self-isolating, families with kids out of school, and the frontline health care workers and first responders who are keeping us safe each and every day," said Premier Ford. "This very difficult situation will impact different people in different ways, but I can assure everyone we will be there to support you and help you cope in every way we can. Clearly, protecting our health and well-being is everything, and that includes our mental health."

These services will help people experiencing anxiety, stress and other mental health challenges, including people who are unable to access their regular in-person counselling supports. These resources will address the needs of youth and adults and will include more dedicated supports for those working on the frontlines who are dealing with the difficult realities of COVID-19 every single day.

"It's never been more important for Ontarians to stay home to stop the spread of COVID-19," said Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. "As they do, we need to provide them with the supports they need to stay mentally healthy during these challenging times as more Ontarians experience heightened anxiety and depression."

With this investment, mental health agencies will receive emergency funding to hire and train more staff and purchase necessary equipment, appropriate technology and additional licenses. The emergency funding will immediately expand services, based on evidence-informed cognitive behavioural therapy

(CBT), on a range of platforms including:

- **[BounceBack](#)**: A guided self-help program for adults and youth aged 15 and over using workbooks with online videos and phone coaching support.
- **[Kids Help Phone](#)**: 24/7 virtual support service offering professional counselling, information and referrals as well as volunteer-led, text-based support to young people in both English and French at 1-800-668-6868.
- **Internet-based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (iCBT)**: Online CBT , supported by therapists; available in English and French.
- **iCBT for frontline health care workers**: Online CBT targeted at frontline health care workers experiencing anxiety, burnout or PTSD. Those requiring intensive levels of care could be referred to virtual face-to-face care.
- **Training for Brief CBT-based interventions**: Training will be provided to frontline workers in organizations such as Telehealth and emergency departments in order to better support individuals experiencing acute anxiety due to the pandemic.

The hiring of additional mental health workers for the OPP is in response to four of the 66 recommendations made by the OPP Independent Review Panel (IRP) in its [final report](#). Established in April 2019 to examine the OPP's workplace culture, the IRP was also tasked to look into how the OPP addresses issues of mental health, occupational stress injuries and suicide among its members and provide a series of recommendations. The funding will help the OPP hire mental health workers who will:

- Provide clinical services to members of all ranks and make referrals to external services if needed;
- Develop and deliver mental health support programming specific to unique policing needs (e.g. geographical, specialized services, cultural);
- Facilitate educational programs to both uniform and civilian members to reduce stigma and promote resiliency and access to help when facing mental health challenges; and
- Provide guidance in peer support programs.

"The current COVID-19 outbreak reinforces how much we rely on front lines workers and why it is so important to look after their mental health and wellbeing," said Sylvia Jones, Solicitor General. "With this new assistance, OPP personnel will get access to the mental health support they need to continue protecting our communities."

"Many Ontarians, including our dedicated first responders, are experiencing increased anxiety because of COVID-19 and are worried about their health, the health of their family and friends, and the future of their livelihoods," said Michael Tibollo, Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. "We continue to

work with our partners across the mental health and addictions sector to fund more innovative services such as internet-based cognitive behavioural therapy, ensuring Ontarians receive the high-quality care they expect and deserve."

Where to Find Help:

- For Ontarians currently receiving mental health and addictions services and supports, please contact your current service provider to learn about potential virtual care options.
- For Ontarians interested in public addictions services and mental health services for those over 18, they can contact [ConnexOntario](#), Ontario's mental health, addictions and problem gambling help line at 1-866-531-2600.
- Children and youth under 18 can locate mental health services through the [Ontario.ca](#) and [Kids Help Phone](#) websites, or contact [Kids Help Phone](#) (1-800-668-6868) for 24/7 support, if they need someone to talk to.
- Good2Talk is a free, confidential mental health support service providing professional counselling and information and referrals for mental health, addictions and well-being to postsecondary students in Ontario, 24/7/365. Learn more at [www.good2talk.ca](#)^[RR(3)].
- To access BounceBack and their guided self-help program using workbooks with phone coaching support, visit [bouncebackontario.ca](#) or ask your primary care provider for a referral.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Ontario Provides \\$3.3 Billion More to Increase Health Care Capacity](#)
- [Ontario's Action Plan: Responding to COVID-19](#)
- [Ontario Improving OPP Workplace Culture](#)
- [Supporting OPP Personnel and their Families Dealing with Mental Health Challenges](#)
- Visit Ontario's [website](#) to learn more about how the province continues to protect Ontarians from COVID-19.

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