# News Release

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## STRONG LEADERSHIP, FOCUS AND RESOURCES REQUIRED TO BOLSTER YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN B.C.

Youth with mental health problems in British Columbia are not consistently receiving the treatment and support they desperately need, says a report released today by the Representative.

*Still Waiting: First-hand Experiences with Youth Mental Health Services in B.C.* calls on the provincial government to address urgent needs for direct mental health services in B.C. The report speaks to a fragmented and under-resourced system of services for youth ages 16 to their 19th birthday. Weighing input from more than 850 youth, parents, caregivers, and professionals who work in the field, it concludes that having one clear point of accountability for a system of services that spans government ministries and health authorities is key to supporting these youth.

"Youth struggling with mental health problems and the people who care for them told us loud and clear that finding help can be a confusing and traumatic experience that often ends in a revolving door through the hospital Emergency Room," said Representative Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond. "Doctors and other professionals who participated in this review depicted an inefficient system marked by silos and a lack of communication and co-ordination.

"The bottom line is that youth are often not getting help when they need it, and we are missing a key chance to prevent longer-term consequences for them and their families. This is a critical age range, when getting the right mental health intervention can be life-changing. We must build an effective and approachable system."

Youth and their families identified long waits – some a year or longer – to see a mental health professional or to receive treatment as a major barrier to getting help. Other barriers range from a general lack of understanding about mental health on the part of youth, their families and potential "first-responders," to major inconsistencies in services offered in different parts of the province, to poor planning for youth who are making the often difficult transition from youth mental heath services into the adult mental health system.

Key systemic deficiencies identified include a lack of acute emergency care for transition-age youth which often sees them with no appropriate place to go when they are in crisis, a lack of community-based intensive intermediate supports, and a lack of mental health education, support and respite services for parents and caregivers.

The Representative recommends the creation of a Minister of State for Youth Mental Health to ensure that government provides adequate resources and that services are properly coordinated and available consistently across the province. Included in that recommendation is a call for a three-year operational plan, with immediate improvements to direct services in emergency, acute and community-based intensive intermediate care as well as a move to more youth-friendly engagement and service delivery models.

"Our society often doesn't do a good job providing services to this age group," Turpel-Lafond said. "But that has to change. We must help these youth where they live because, left untreated, mental health problems can rob them of their best chances in adulthood with great cost to them and their families."

Turpel-Lafond said strong and decisive leadership is required in government because services for youth with mental health problems span across multiple ministries and organizations and pressure must be brought to not simply respond to the crises but also to plan for a continuum of supports into adulthood.

"A single point of responsibility is necessary to ensure that major issues such as gaps in services and long wait times are solved and that youth mental health becomes the priority it must be in B.C. We won't get there with the current level of commitment and absence of accountability for services."


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