



November 2, 2021

The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos  
Minister of Health  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Duclos,

On behalf of the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW), I would like to extend sincere congratulations on your re-election and appointment as the Minister of Health for the Government of Canada. CASW especially applauds your appointment as we know from your critical work during your time as Minister of Families, Children, and Social Development that you deeply understand the importance of the social determinants of health. This perspective will be even more vital as Canada responds to the health and wellness challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

CASW is confident that you will build on your and your government's strong track record of making targeted investments and delivering historic strategies to address Canadians' overall wellbeing. We were delighted to see your government's campaign promise to ensure better access for all Canadians to health and mental health teams, as well as the acknowledgement of the key role of social workers through the pledge to include them in the existing Student Loan Forgiveness programme.

As we know, the pandemic has and will continue to bring lasting health and mental health impacts for Canadians, and the need for responsive, accessible, and timely services has never been greater. Registered Social Workers (RSW) are trained professionals with a broad scope of practice, capable of offering many types of services and care, often at a lower cost than other professionals – and can, and should, play a key role in pandemic recovery.

That said, we are currently woefully without the data required to meet ensure we meet Canadians' current and future needs and require funding for a social work *sector study*: we have little understanding of the number of social workers, or proportion of social workers in different practice areas, working across Canada and whether this workforce has the capacity to meet current or projected needs of Canadians. We lack key demographic, labour market and education/training information. The last such government funded study, *In Critical Demand*, was completed in 2000.

A comprehensive sector study is required for the profession to support recruitment and retention, education/training realities and projections, and provide the basis for strategies to ensure a strong

social work workforce moving forward. COVID-19 has only increased public need for Registered Social Workers (RSW) – who serve in a myriad of essential roles in our communities from hospitals to mental health, to substance use, to name only a few – and funding for a sector study is an important piece in ensuring that the professional social work workforce can meet Canada’s growing needs moving forward.

Supporting the better implementation of social workers throughout Canada would also help support [The Patient’s Medical Home](#), a vision CASW is proud to share with the College of Family Physicians of Canada, the Canadian Medical Association, and others, for the future of care that would bring seamless, wrap around, interdisciplinary services to Canadians. The future will need to be silo-free.

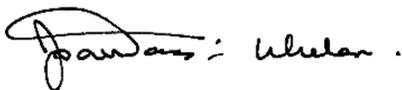
In this regard, we are delighted to see your government centering the mental health of Canadians through the development of a new Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. Your government has a strong track record of prioritizing evidence based and public health approaches, and we know you will work tirelessly alongside Minister Bennett in this regard.

To bolster this work, and build on your strong track record of prioritizing public health approaches, CASW urges your government to swiftly act on the campaign promise to reform the Criminal Code to repeal mandatory minimum penalties; take the next step in your work legalizing cannabis by [decriminalizing the personal use psychoactive substances](#); and [decriminalizing sex work](#). Each of these bold public health initiatives are grounded in evidence of harm reduction and – when combined with coordinated investments in the social determinants of health – will save lives.

Further, CASW advocates that the next vital step in supporting Canadians’ mental health and well-being is bringing about [Mental Health Parity](#) in Canada through a new Act. We were delighted to hear Prime Minister Trudeau’s words on World Mental Health Day that “*good health must include mental health -- that means taking care of our mental health just as we would our physical health.*” We could not agree more: legislating a *Mental Health Parity Act* would affirm this in both principle and in practice.

There is much work to be done as we begin charting a new course in the wake of COVID-19, but we are hopeful that, with your leadership, the health and well-being of Canadians can look beyond recovery, but to a bold, just, and novel future. We look forward to the forthcoming mandate letters, and to supporting your work and the Government of Canada more broadly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joan Davis-Whelan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Joan Davis-Whelan, MSW, RSW  
President, CASW