



**CASW ACTS**

Canadian Association of Social Workers / Association canadienne des travailleuses et travailleurs sociaux

613 729 6668

casw@casw-acts.ca www.casw-acts.ca

M229 - 1554 Carling Avenue  
Ottawa, Ontario K1Z 7M4

November 2, 2021

The Honourable Carolyn Bennett  
Minister of Mental Health and Addictions  
Associate Minister of Health  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Bennett,

On behalf of the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW), I would like to extend sincere congratulations on your re-election and historic appointment as the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions for the Government of Canada. CASW especially applauds your appointment as we know from your background both as a physician and in politics that you deeply value 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.

We are delighted to see your government centering the mental health of Canadians through the development of this new role. CASW is proud to have been a voice advocating for the creation of this Ministry and know that in it you will continue the critical work of not only cementing mental health as a social, fiscal, and philosophical priority in this country, but also of further destigmatizing substance use by naming it as a health concern like any other.

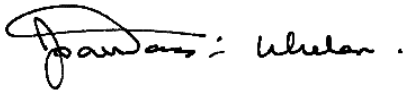
Your government has a strong track record of prioritizing evidence based and public health approaches, and we know you will work tirelessly alongside Minister Duclos and others in this regard. That said, I am certain you would agree that the current approach to the mental health and substance use needs of Canadians – especially as exacerbated by the pandemic – has not been successful in ending the opioid pandemic, or in fully realizing Canadians' wellbeing.

To bolster this work, CASW – and our many partners at the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH) – believe that a new [\*Mental Health Parity Act\*](#) is required to bring true equity to the health care needs of Canadians. 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. Further, such an Act would act as perfect support and complement to the new federal transfer for mental health promised during the election campaign.

Finally, CASW urges you to support your government in swiftly acting on the campaign promise to reform the Criminal Code to repeal mandatory minimum penalties, and take the next step in your work legalizing cannabis by [decriminalizing the personal use psychoactive substances](#). 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.

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 supporting your work in this new role and Government of Canada more broadly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joan Davis-Whelan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and a long horizontal stroke.

Joan Davis-Whelan, MSW, RSW  
President, CASW