

BULLETIN

These 4 things can improve mental health services for kids in BC

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Did you know that some health authority staff like youth counsellors are not allowed to text their patients? Is there any other way to communicate with a young person?

That's just one of the eye-opening facts revealed by health science professionals working in BC's struggling mental health system. Hoping to make positive change and tell the story of from the perspective from the front lines, HSA compiled a number of their insights as a recent submission to the BC government's Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth.

The submission highlights four main ways to make our mental health system work better for vulnerable children and young people:

1. The critical challenge in youth mental health is that there are gaps in service delivery. These gaps aren't just 'gaps': they are huge gaping holes lined up beside each other. In some cases, a small island of service may appear, but there are no bridges to the next complementary program or service – just more vast holes.
2. The gaps in the system are not restricted to service. A critical gap is in communication. These gaps cover the whole range of communication: from children and youth identifying their issues, to families helplessly and desperately trying to support their child through their school or community services, to identifying those services, to mental health and addictions professionals communicating with each other, and to inconsistent transfer of or sharing of information.
3. Youth mental health practice is inconsistent in British Columbia. Practitioners agree that best practices must be evidence-based, adaptable to communities' needs, understood by all practitioners and, most importantly, structurally supported. What is needed is a collaborative approach to maintaining an evidence-based model for mental health care in the province, and infrastructure to ensure the best practice protocols don't drift.
4. Scarce resources have been a significant factor in the challenges associated with providing effective child and youth mental health services across the province. But those working in the field believe that improved management of the system can result in more effective use of resources. As one worker describes: "The capacity is there. We just need the time, relationships and flexibility to get there."

[You can read the whole submission here.](#)

Mental health workers have a lot to offer the system, and they must be heard. On behalf of the hundreds of mental health care workers we represent in communities across BC, HSA hopes this submission can help achieve that.

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