

**Mental Health
Implementation Task Force
Central East Region
(Penetanguishene)**

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December 19, 2002

Honourable Tony Clement, MPP
Minister of Health and Long Term Care
10th Floor, Hepburn Block
80 Grosvenor Street,
Toronto, ON M7A 2C4

Dear Minister:

On behalf of the Mental Health Implementation Task Force for the Central East (Penetanguishene) Region, it is my distinct privilege to provide you with our Final Report, "Making It Happen – NOW!"

This report represents nearly two years of intense work by over a hundred dedicated Task Force members, sub-committee members and staff, along with input from literally hundreds of community members. Truly, the people have spoken!

As you and your staff review our report, I am confident you will be as excited about its content as am I. We have listened to our community. We have recommended bold steps for reform, based on what we have heard. We have tested those steps on the community and the community has responded positively. The community is ready for change. We must not miss the opportunity.

I would strongly recommend, as outlined in our Summary Report, that your Ministry consider this region as a pilot site to implement a reformed system management mechanism such as that proposed by our Task Force. Further, it is critical that your Ministry develop a clear transition plan to capture the expertise, consensus and enthusiasm developed by the Task Force process. Many people who have made significant contributions to our Task Force process are so committed they have agreed that, if asked, they would serve in a transition process to ensure the will expressed by the community is respected. That is a major commitment by a group of very unselfish people.

The community has clearly identified the need for two fundamental issues to be urgently resolved. First, as I said in my letter to you accompanying our Preliminary Report in June, funding for community mental health services in this region of Ontario is totally inappropriate when compared to other regions of the province, according to statistics prepared by your own Ministry. The significant underfunding in this region must be rectified to ensure that essential services are available and deliverable. While the Task Force does not want to delay much needed reforms, it is my opinion...an opinion shared by the Task Force...that the majority of recommendations contained in our report cannot and should not be implemented until you address the inequitable funding issue we have so clearly outlined.

Second, the need for clarity from your government in relation to the future of Mental Health Centre Penetanguishene is essential. It is impossible to effectively plan for the mental health services of this region until a decision is made with respect to divestment. Reform of the mental health system in Ontario calls for the divestment of all psychiatric hospitals. It is just unacceptable that there has been no movement since the inception of our Task Force around the divestment of the Penetanguishene facility. It disturbs me that I have seen no action by your Ministry on either funding or divestment in our area, despite continuing pleas from this Task Force for action.

Our Task Force, like the Provincial Forum, has embraced the recovery philosophy. This is a philosophy of hope and encouragement for folks who use the mental health system. We would urge your Ministry to ensure this philosophy is encouraged and supported to ensure people with mental illness are treated as persons of worth and dignity, with the right and ability to aspire to goals that they choose. An effective public education program is essential to foster this and other objectives of mental health reform, and the Task Force strongly supports an effective Public Education and Communication plan for our region and for the province.

The final report of the Task Force is contained in three separate but connected documents. The first document is our Summary Report. It provides an overview of our work and findings, along with detailed Task Force recommendations. The second document contains background information regarding our region and full reports of our various sub-committees. The third document reflects the financial and human resource considerations.

You should know that the work of one sub-committee is not yet complete. Late in our mandate it was recognized that significant attention needed to be paid to First Nations/Aboriginal issues. We struck a sub-committee during the summer and their work is still a work in progress. Included in our report is a draft of their recommendations as they stand at this point in time. Your ministry staff has agreed that the work of that subcommittee can continue through January, out of respect for the process the First Nations/Aboriginal community requires to obtain approval from its various sectors. Their final report will be submitted upon completion.

Our Task Force was one of the last to be appointed by your government. It is a tribute to Task Force and sub-committee members and to an incredible staff, that we have completed our work on time and with a level of detail that quite frankly, amazes me! I have never had the privilege of working with such dedicated and unselfish people and want you to know that the report is a clear reflection of their dedication and determination.

The climate for change is right. The time for change is NOW! The people of our region have spoken, and they have spoken loudly. The report is a clear reflection of their hopes and desires. Their wishes must not be ignored! You and I have assured our people that the government is committed to reform. Our credibility is on the line! The next move is yours!

Respectfully submitted,

John A. McCullough, Chair.

cc: Hon. Dan Newman, Associate Minister of Health & Long-term Care
Hon. Jim Wilson, MPP
Mr. Garfield Dunlop, MPP
Mr. Joe Tascona, MPP
Mr. Norm Miller, MPP
Task Force Members
Mr. Michael Klejman, Regional Director, MOHLTC Central East Region
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