

Policy Implications: Funding and Our Future

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A pleasure and honor for me to be here today. Would like to acknowledge the leadership of Dr. Karen Minden, Dr. Bruce Ferguson and Dr. Debra Pepler.

Taking this from a different perspective. May be preaching to the choir. I suspect many of you here are familiar with the following situation. That one day when people you serve have this moment of clarity where they realize how the unacceptable has somehow become acceptable. It's when you realize that your teen has complete control of your home. Or that counting the money you leave on the counter at home is now part of your regular routine. Or that lying, truancy and conflict is just a regular part of the day. It's when we realize - holy crap, we have a problem. And they know that this is not acceptable and seek assistance to address it. It's those moments of clarity when people we serve say to themselves - this needs to change. The status quo cannot carry on. But just willing change doesn't make it so. And that is why this forum is so important. Let me explain. And I fear I may offend some of you in this room in what I will say - but suspect you understand where I am coming from.

COMING AT THIS FROM A NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE. Consider for a moment that substance abuse costs \$40B per year/greater than the federal stimulus plan/loss productivity/massive impact on our already fragile healthcare system/massive impact on the criminal justice system. Consider that somehow Canadian youth lead/as in #1/all G8 countries in cannabis use. Just how is it that we've excelled in this manner? Consider that alcohol and tobacco use are the two leading preventable cancers. Consider that 40% of crime is caused by alcohol and drugs / not simply associated with directly attributable to. And finally consider that 20% of all acute care hospital day beds are occupied due to substance abuse.

Article in Globe & Mail today. And despite all of this - we still find ourselves with an addiction system well below par in how other health disorders are viewed, funded, equipped and treated.

That despite the many excellent programs and professionals in the addiction system - and the hundreds of millions of dollars spent on our system - we still have a paucity of solid data - or perhaps aggregated, comparable data to substantiate our direction and investments. Consider also that we do not have national certification program for counselors, nor a national accreditation program for prevention or treatment programs and no pan-Canadian performance or outcome evaluations process for the field. At least none that captures the entirety of all our good work. And this is why this conference is so timely - it forces to realize that the unacceptable has become somehow part of our everyday lives. That for some reason, we are prepared to allow ourselves to be underserved. Today serves as a stark moment of clarity for us all.

I look to those of us in this room who are stewards of the system to see ourselves as accountable and responsible for addressing this significant gap. And this is why I welcome this community of practice. And let us learn to stumble, walk then run together. But let's be clear.

Seeking help shouldn't be contingent on a cheque book or someone who just happens to know of a 'good' program. Whatever good means. Today's fiscal environment is demanding a far

higher level of scrutiny on results for investments than ever before. And we must embrace this challenge. Because it can only serve us collectively in celebrating the excellence we have while working to improve the balance of the field. We need to collectively set the bar and to marshal ourselves accordingly.

This session is called Policy implications - funding and our future. For too many years and frankly it still exists today, our field has been overly politicized - where policy by decibel won out and where endless arguments on harm reduction vs. prohibition has clouded substantive debates on quality of care and measurable outcomes. While we may have put some of this semantic judo behind us, our field is often quite keen to muddy the waters and confuse our policy masters as to the best way forward.

I am reminded of a discussion that occurred some years ago with a senior advisor to the Prime Minister - officials presented their drug strategy - which was unfortunately very short on specifics and measurable indicators and he said "you want me to wager half a billion dollars a year of public money on this?" So our task as we have this moment of clarity - of seeing the system for all that it is - is to commit to steadily improving it - and I am happy to report that we have considerable opportunity before us.

In the last five years:

- operationalized the Framework which allowed us to move from Ready Fire Aim. To Ready Aim Fire
- We have now aligned our commitment and intent and built specific tools that complement directly this forum
- We've created a national treatment strategy articulating a continuum of care and helping understand how best and where to invest - Alberta just adopted this approach and a string commitment to evaluation and measurement. Newfoundland is also doing the same - who's next?

And of course Ontario's new Mental Health and Addiction Strategy. We've created national standards for youth drug prevention programs in schools, families and communities - we now need to apply these and ensure that all programs meet these standards. We've created national competencies for the workforce - behavioral and technical - these can now serve as a base for national certification. And we have many more tools to take advantage of. And to do so, we need all orders of government, the not for profit and private sector to come together to do so. We still have massive gaps before us. Ensuring real time treatment when required is still a massive challenge/remote communities especially impacted/new technologies...We have a virtually epidemic of pharmaceutical abuse where opiate and benzodiazepine abuse has eclipsed many street drugs. So as we look to our policy makers I have a few brief recommendations for their consideration. Low hanging fruit.

Consider setting a destination. Commit to creating and setting the bar. Let's work towards national certification and accreditation. Support this conference by sustaining discussions and a community of practice. Of letting this moment of clarity to remain front and centre to our work. Call upon CCSA. Thank you.