

# OUR VISION

A trusted leader transforming healthcare and cultivating a healthier community



Janice Kaffer, President & CEO, Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare

## It's time to make mental health care a priority, not a privilege

Negotiations are tough – Windsor gets that. We respect the process of bargaining and positions taken by parties when talks get tense – and on the matter of December's health accord – negotiations were no doubt tough. The Federal & Provincial Governments have different views on how health funding needs to look going forward.

Today [one in five](#) Canadians will experience a mental illness in their lifetime, yet only [7%](#) of approximately [\\$220 billion](#) dollars spent on healthcare in Canada goes to mental health and addictions services. It is estimated however, that the cost to the Canadian economy resulting from mental health illnesses is at least [\\$50 billion annually](#). This represents a very large gap in funding verses need, excluding an already vulnerable population. On a social level it is unacceptable and on an economic level, unsustainable.

The Erie St. Clair Local Health Integration Network (ESCLHIN) has developed a comprehensive and ambitious plan for mental health and addictions services in our region. It is time to adopt these strategies, and others that have not yet been articulated, and put them into action.

With over 26 unique mental health and addictions programs, specialized inpatient services, outpatient and outreach programs serving children and youth, adults and seniors, Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare has a first-hand perspective on the pressures in the mental health system. We know what a focused investment in this sector could achieve, more importantly, we understand the profound impact an investment could have on our patients and their families.

Through improvement efforts and partnerships, Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare has been working to create a stronger, more seamless mental health system without any new funding. In 2016, with the support of the ESCLHIN, the Downtown Transitional Stability Centre was opened,

providing services to those experiencing mental health crises that do not 'belong' in the emergency department. Working closely with our partners at the Canadian Mental Health Association we have created a centralized access point so those with mental health challenges know where to get help and hopefully bypass the system complexities.

The funding proposal from Federal Health Minister Dr. Jane Philpott sparked experts in the mental health field to discuss what a targeted investment in mental health delivery would mean for patients, families and communities across the country. To continue this discussion locally, I asked our team at Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare to list our highest needs and where a targeted investment in mental health care could do the most good. From the youngest and most vulnerable in our community who wait too long for service at our Regional Children's Centre, to those adults who are ready to leave our care but can't find housing and community supports, to the 143% increase in local ED visits for self-harm among our youth (2010 to 2015); the list is long and growing longer each year.

With an increase in funding, a discharge transition team could be created to support those in hospital who belong at home and who could benefit from treatment in their familiar surroundings but require more intense support. We also see an immediate need to develop a team to support long term care homes in admitting clients with behavioural issues. This would result in fewer of our elderly living in hospital, waiting for a bed in long term care. These initiatives could be implemented next year but not without new dollars.

As part of the hospital system redevelopment plan currently before the government, all hospital based mental health will be managed and delivered by Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare. The vision for the old HDGH campus on Ouellette Avenue to be transformed into a community mental health centre is incredibly exciting and important for our community. These are changes that are part of a larger system redesign but improvements that are also many years out and not yet approved by the Minister of Health.

In the meantime, the funding we receive today is not sufficient to meet the current and growing demands. The elastic band has been stretched to its maximum and some of our most vulnerable citizens are feeling that tension. It's time that we begin to invest in five decades of underfunding and clear the already complicated obstacles from these patients' paths.

**Janice Kaffer, RN**

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