

June 1, 2015

The Honourable Helena Jaczek, MPP
Minister of Community and Social Services
6th Floor, Hepburn Block
80 Grosvenor St
Toronto ON M7A 1E9

Dear Minister Jaczek,

Employment is an important component of recovery for people with mental illness. People with mental illness who work are healthier, have increased self-esteem, have a higher standard of living, and use fewer health services than those who are not employed. Despite these benefits, many people with mental illness are unemployed or underemployed.

CAMH recognizes the Ontario government's commitment to assist ODSP recipients to find and keep work. We are hopeful that the creation of an employment benefit that is tailored to an individual's unique needs and goals will assist more people with mental illness to find and sustain meaningful employment. We are concerned, however, with the impending removal of the Work Related Benefit (WRB) and its impact on people with mental illness who are currently working.

The mandatory WRB provides ODSP recipients who work with the means to address labour market barriers and costs. Individuals use this added income to cover transportation, equipment and clothing costs that are necessary for maintaining employment. Removing the WRB – and replacing it with a discretionary benefit – means that many will no longer be able to afford to work. The resulting economic, health and social costs for these individuals will be great.

Minister, I understand that the implementation of the new Employment-Related Benefit is delayed until October 1, 2015 as government finalizes details of the program. I would encourage you to consider including the WRB (or a similar mandatory benefit) as part of the new program. Ensuring that people with mental illness and other disabilities are supported in employment will demonstrate your government's commitment to its Poverty Reduction Strategy and Mental Health and Addictions Strategy.

Sincerely,



Catherine Zahn, MD, FRCP(C)
President and CEO