



PeerWorks

Hon. Peter Bethelenfalvy
Minister of Finance
Ontario Ministry of Finance
Frost Building South
7th Floor, 7 Queen's Park Cres.
Toronto, ON M7A 1Y7

December 13, 2023

Dear Hon. Peter Bethelenfalvy,

As Operations Director of PeerWorks (formerly the Ontario Peer Development Initiative), I am writing to you regarding the growing critical needs of our community-based peer and family support organizations. I am sharing this correspondence and attachment, which includes last year's formal request, to be considered again as our pre-budget submission for the 2024 budget. Our sector was the frontline for many dire mental health needs in local communities through the pandemic. Those needs have only intensely increased with time, and we all grapple with additional realities in a post-pandemic environment.

PeerWorks, with over 50 dedicated members, including organizations and individuals, has been at the forefront of providing essential services to these essential organizations and professionals. Our leadership and support have been in the form of professional development, networking opportunities, administrative support, regional marketing, peer support training, and government advocacy for the past 32 years.

As the sole pan-provincial voice for lived experience, community-based peer support programs, and frontline peer support professionals, PeerWorks has played a pivotal role in various mental health and addictions initiatives, including the Weekly Mental Health and Addiction COVID-19 Response Planning Table. In May 2023, PeerWorks held its inaugural Queen's Park Peer Support Education Day, where our members could interact with you and your government colleagues. We thank Minister Tibollo for making such kind remarks at our lunch reception and expressing support for the vital role that peer support plays for Ontarians.

I am writing to follow up on the strong support kindly voiced by your government and to emphasize the pressing need for increased support for PeerWorks in the upcoming 2024 Budget. Our current operating budget of \$300,000 annually has proven inadequate and unrealistic. This funding is provided through a Transfer Payment Agreement (TPA) with the Centre of Excellence of Mental Health and Addictions and has remained the same since the organization was first formed in 1991 (in fact, it has only decreased).

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Despite being a recognized leader in the sector, our organization has been operating on a shoestring budget, hindering our ability to fully meet the demands of our mandate and support our dedicated members effectively.

Our organization has been working with your colleagues, Hon. Sylvia Jones and Hon. Michael Tibollo, on two crucial requests that, if addressed in the upcoming budget, will not only strengthen peer support services in Ontario but will also contribute significantly to the achievement of the "Roadmap to Wellness" plan while saving costs in hospitals and other clinical settings:

1. Increase PeerWorks' operating budget from \$300,000 to \$1.5 million.
2. Leverage PeerWorks to serve as a single flow-through funding partner for community-based peer and family support organizations and programs.

These requests have been highlighted in our previous pre-budget submissions. In addition to the financial challenges faced by PeerWorks, our members across the province are grappling with an outdated and inefficient funding model, hindering their invaluable work in various communities, including Thunder Bay, Ottawa, Kingston, Sudbury, Richmond Hill, Hamilton, Welland and Toronto. We understand that under-resourcing in the community-based mental health and addictions sector is not a problem exclusive to our segment. However, we do hope that a review of how CSIs and other peer support programs are funded can be part of a budget commitment designed to enable community-based care models like ours.

Your government's commitment to mental health and addictions, as outlined in the "Roadmap to Wellness" plan, is commendable. The 5% increase to our current operating budgets in the 2023 Budget was a step in the right direction, reflecting your understanding of the importance of community-based care. However, much more is needed to address the persistent challenges faced by organizations like ours.

Reattaching our previous pre-budget submission, which outlines the compelling case for increased support, highlights that the ask remains the same, though the needs continue to grow. We hope your government continues to recognize the value of peer support and the significant contributions of our dedicated workers, leveraging their lived experiences to impact others' lives positively.

Your continued support and collaboration with PeerWorks will strengthen peer support as a vital component of the overarching MH&A approach and contribute to the overall improvement of Ontario's mental health system. I look forward to working closely with you and your colleagues in the coming months.

Thank you for your attention, and I appreciate your commitment to enhancing mental health services in our province.

Thank you,



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CC: Hon. Sylvia Jones, Minister of Health
Hon. Michael Tibollo, Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions