



Hon. Jason Kenney, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Citizenship and Immigration  
Citizenship and Immigration Canada  
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 1L1

June 15, 2012

Dear Minister Kenney,

The leadership of the Ontario Psychiatric Association joins with many other major professional health care associations in expressing grave concerns about the planned changes to the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP). We understand that under the new policy, which will come in to effect on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012, all coverage for medical care and medications for refugees will be cut except in cases of danger to public safety or to public health. We are concerned that the proposed cuts target a vulnerable population, and as psychiatrists we are particularly concerned about the consequences for the mental health of this population. Health care that withholds treatment until a mental condition becomes a crisis is never good health care, and is likely to be more expensive.

Many of the refugees that Ontario Psychiatrists now treat have been the victims of trauma, and suffer the mental health consequences of this when they arrive in Canada and apply for refugee status. They are at risk of disorders such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or Depression related to these losses, and this can interfere with their ability to engage in the refugee application process which can be prolonged. Withholding appropriate psychiatric care can jeopardize refugee applicants' ability to care for themselves and their families, prepare themselves to embrace their new communities, and to successfully pursue education or work opportunities.

We feel that it is inhumane to deprive refugee applicants of the basic health care that Canadians value as a fundamental aspect of our society. It is inhumane to deprive refugee children of vaccinations and treatment for common and chronic illnesses while their parents wait for their applications to be decided. And it is unethical for psychiatrists to deny care when it is required based on clinically assessed need.

Refugees that arrive in Canada are often lacking in financial resources. The Interim Federal Health Program has a long history of providing health care and necessary medications and health benefits for these vulnerable members of our community. If the proposed cuts go ahead, these people can be expected to suffer.

We join our colleagues in voicing our concerns about the proposed cuts to the IFHP: The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, The Canadian Medical Association, The Canadian Psychiatric Association, The Department of Psychiatry at the University of Toronto, The College of Family Physicians of Canada, The Canadian Association of Optometrists, The Canadian Association of Social Workers, The Canadian Dental Association, The Canadian Nurses Association, The Canadian Pharmacists Association, and the Canadian Association of Community Health Centres among them.

We urge you to reconsider this policy.



Dr. Sarah Jarman  
OPA President

Dr. Alina Marin,  
OPA President-Elect and Advocacy Committee Chair

Dr. Patricia Cavanagh  
OPA Council Member