



Law and Mental Disorder Association

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Open Letter to the Anonymous Donor of \$100 million to CAMH

On January 11, 2018, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) announced that it had received an anonymous donation of \$100 million. According to CAMH's statement and media reports, the funds will be earmarked for mental health research, particularly "high-risk, high-reward research" into understanding the 'biomedical causes of mental illness.'

We are lawyers who practise in the mental health and justice sector. Individually, we represent clients who have mental health issues, which bring them into the criminal courts and civil mental health systems. Collectively, we advocate for the clients and educate lawyers and others who work with this population. Inevitably, we all deal with CAMH when clients are hospitalized or in need of other supports.

Your act of generosity is remarkable. We are hopeful that medical research may one day have a positive impact on the lives of our clients. CAMH is pleased that it will soon be able to hire more scientists for its research centre.

However, on behalf of the current generation of clients of the mental health system, we ask you to consider earmarking some percentage of your donation at least to relieve the immediate crisis engendered by existing barriers to rehabilitation and reintegration into society for these individuals.

\$100 million, or even a fraction of it, could immediately and directly transform the lives and alleviate the day-to-day suffering of thousands of persons living with mental health issues in Ontario today. Just a few examples are:

- Providing decent long-term housing and reducing wait lists for this housing. As an example, there are more than 140,000 people on Toronto Community Housing's waitlist. People with mental health issues who do not need to be hospitalized are often homeless. Every year, many die on the streets.
 - Providing more beds in short-term housing and shelters. The number of interim housing options for clients with mental health issues (many also struggling with addiction) are far outstripped by demand. Even when an opening comes up, maximum stay is usually 30 days or less.
 - Providing funding for educational and vocational opportunities. As an example, CAMH offers a limited amount of [bursaries](#) for clients to pursue education courses. Clients vigorously compete for bursaries, each generally valued at only a few hundred dollars. Stable and fair employment is the cornerstone of recovery and dignity. Clients need meaningful financial assistance to pursue their vocational goals.
 - Creating more recreational therapy, occupational therapy, social activities and other positive rehabilitative options for inpatients of CAMH.
 - Providing community supports for clients living in the community, such as case managers, peer support organizations, recreation and drop-in centres.
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- Providing funding for vital services that are not covered typically by OHIP, such as individual therapy, counselling, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and Dialectical Behaviour Therapy, and treatment by psychologists.
- Attracting clinicians and funding for high-quality psychiatric treatment for patients outside of Toronto and other major urban centres, such as rural areas, Northern Ontario and aboriginal communities.

In CAMH's [video](#) celebrating your donation to its research fund, CAMH's scientists tell us that they are already "surrounded by very good researchers" and that the opportunities for scientists at CAMH's research centre "are absolutely endless."

Please dedicate a portion of your donation to immediately creating some of those same endless opportunities for individuals living with mental health issues in Ontario today.

Anita Szigeti

President, LAMDA

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