



A new mental health action plan for Quebec

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Context

In 2005, the Quebec Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) introduced its Mental Health Action Plan (MHAP) 2005-2010¹ amid major reforms within the broader health care system. The MHAP aimed to modernize the province's mental health system, notably by strengthening the delivery of mental health care within primary care and introducing new mechanisms to support a better coordination and continuity of care within a hierarchy of mental health services.

While the arrival of the MHAP 2005-2010 was largely embraced, the implementation of this large-scale reform proved challenging. Recent evaluations by the MSSS² and Commissaire à la santé et au bien-être³ have shown that implementation of many of the MHAP's proposed measures remains incomplete and that accessibility and service quality remain inadequate in many parts of the province.

On the heels of another wave of health care reforms introduced by Bill 10, the MSSS has once again published a new action plan in mental health, titled the Mental Health Action Plan 2015-2020: *Faire ensemble et autrement*⁴ (Working together and differently). Informed by ongoing reforms and vast consultations, the MHAP 2015-2020 aims to consolidate measures introduced by the previous action plan while introducing new strategies that encourage a more timely access to services and an improved care experience across the mental health service continuum.

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The new MHAP is structured around 40 distinct measures related to four overall goals

Promote the primacy of the person and their full exercise of citizenship	Provide care adapted to the needs of youth, from childhood to adulthood
Encourage clinical and management practices that improve the care experience	Ensure the performance and continuous improvement of mental health services

Measures related to the primacy of the person

As in the previous action plan, the new MHAP emphasizes that mental health services must be recovery-oriented, i.e. they should be focused on individuals' strengths, instill hope and support people's full participation in society. Measures proposed in the 2005 MHAP that require consolidation include actions against stigma and discrimination, the strengthening of housing and work integration services, and mental health supports for youth at school. The new MHAP also calls for the development of organizational action plans to promote workplace mental health and ensure mental health supports for personnel in all health organizations.

The MHAP 2005-2010 was particularly innovative in proposing a measure that called for service users and their families to participate in the planning and organization of local, regional and provincial mental health services. The MHAP 2015-2020 takes this idea a step further, proposing that every organization providing mental health services develop an *Action plan on the primacy of the person in the delivery and organization of services*. These action plans will outline:

- How service users and their families are involved in the delivery and organization of care;
- How they are informed about their legal rights;
- What actions are undertaken to fight stigma and discrimination;
- What actions are taken to promote recovery-oriented services;
- How service users and families will be informed about community supports available to them.



Measures related to services for youth

The MHAP 2015-2020 proposes nine measures aimed at strengthening the continuum of youth mental health services and ensuring a better response to the needs of different age groups. This includes supporting programs for pre-schoolers, strengthening supports for vulnerable families and neglected children, and a better detection and evaluation of youth mental health and substance use problems. The plan also features a clear focus on disseminating innovations in integrated care, continuity of care and smoother transitions from youth to adult services.

Measures related to clinical and management practices

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The cornerstone of the most recent mental health reform has been to strengthen the delivery of mental health services in primary care. New mechanisms to promote access to care and a better coordination and collaboration between services have since been created in the past few years (e.g. the “guichets d'accès”, interdisciplinary mental health teams in primary care and responding psychiatrists). Given the incomplete implementation of these mechanisms, measures of the new MHAP focus on their consolidation and the development of service standards they must adhere to. To this end, the MSSS has expanded the mandate of the National Centre for Excellence in Mental Health (NCEMH) to ensure high performing mental health services across the continuum of care and particularly in primary care.

The MHAP 2015-2020 also outlines plans to consolidate efforts to broadly implement intensive case management and assertive community treatment services for people with severe mental illness. A notable addition in the new MHAP is a measure requiring the inclusion of peer support workers within these services.

Measures related to performance and continuous quality improvement

Compared to the previous action plan, the new MHAP places a stronger emphasis on continuous quality improvement and the need for greater accountability for mental health services across the continuum of care. The MSSS promises to establish clear targets and timelines for each of the MHAP's measures and provide further guidance and tools to support the implementation of the action plan. With assistance from the NCEMH, the MSSS will identify and disseminate innovative practices and monitor changes and results triggered by the MHAP, thus promoting a culture of measurement and evaluation in the mental health system.

Conclusion

Though less concrete than the 2005 action plan, the MHAP 2015-2020 once again presents an ambitious vision for Quebec's mental health system and notably one where service users and their families are called upon to play a larger role. The success of this plan will clearly depend on actors “working together and differently” so that broad ministerial orientations can become clear practices and procedures that make meaningful improvements to the system's performance and efficiency and that impact the population's mental health.

Bibliography

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