



News Release

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KIDS' MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM A "PATCHWORK": AUDITOR GENERAL

(TORONTO) Mental-health services for Ontario children and youth are provided primarily by a variety of independent agencies that have traditionally worked "without the benefits of a legislated mandate and clear service standards," Auditor General Jim McCarter says in his *2008 Annual Report*, released today.

"The result has been a patchwork system of services," McCarter said, noting that when the province created the system in the 1970s, it did not introduce new laws to back it up. "As a result, these services were not developed in an orderly and uniform fashion across the province, and agencies have operated with considerable latitude."

The finding is contained in a value-for-money audit of the \$434 million that the Ministry of Children and Youth Services provided last year to some 440 agencies that provide mental-health services for children across the province. The 40 biggest agencies receive about half these funds. In Ontario, more than 500,000 children and youth are estimated to have at least one diagnosable mental-health disorder.

The agencies advised the Auditor's office that minimal funding increases for their core services over the past decade resulted in agencies "robbing Peter to pay Paul"—that is, using funding for purposes other than what it was originally intended for.

The Report observed that:

- Agencies should work more closely with schools to detect early signs of mental-health disorders in children to prevent more serious problems down the road.
- The Ministry "lacked the necessary information to make informed funding decisions," and so, in most cases, it "continued to provide agencies with the same amount of base funding as in the previous year without assessing whether the funding was commensurate with the demand for, and the value of, services to be provided in the local community."

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