

Small and Medium-Size Businesses Face Outsized Challenges Due to Mental Health “Echo Pandemic”

(Toronto – October 17, 2023) – Ontario’s small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are facing the negative effects of declining employee and community mental health as a result of what experts are calling the mental health “echo pandemic.” Today, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) released [*Mind the Gap: Addressing the Mental Health and Addictions “Echo Pandemic” in Ontario*](#), a policy brief examining the interconnected impacts of the mental health and addictions crisis on SMEs, communities, and the provincial health care system. The brief provides recommendations for both industry and government, calling for more comprehensive solutions and practical tools to improve mental health outcomes on a regional level.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated mental health challenges and demand for services as lockdowns, gathering restrictions, and financial stress intensified feelings of social isolation, loneliness, and anxiety. This disproportionately impacted frontline workers, marginalized communities, and SMEs.

“We have witnessed firsthand the profound impact of the mental health “echo pandemic” on our community. Our businesses are still in the process of recovering from the economic strains brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, and now we face the added challenge of declining employee and community mental health,” said Sandra Ferri, President and CEO of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce. “The interconnected impacts of this crisis have been substantial, affecting not only employees and businesses but the community at large.”

Key recommendations from the brief include:

- **Support SME capacity to offer wellness and mental health resources to employees** through increased awareness of existing tools and resources, accelerated delivery of the portable benefits strategy and the introduction of tax incentives.
- **Take a whole-of-government approach to addressing mental health and addiction challenges** by ensuring that all government policies and initiatives are designed in a way that considers the interconnected impacts of mental health and addictions on SMEs, the health care system, and communities.
- **Approach mental health and addictions work through a lens of inclusion, cultural sensitivity, and co-creation** by involving people with lived experience in the design and continued implementation of the *Roadmap to Wellness*, which should account for and reflect the post-pandemic realities and the needs of Ontarians.
- **Build upon existing efforts to improve the mental health and addictions service delivery system** by leveraging data to improve patient outcomes, scaling up evidence-based solutions, and boosting funding for community and mental health providers, supportive housing and mental health research and innovation.

“People are at the centre of all business, and when our employees and communities are struggling, businesses feel these challenges as well,” said Rocco Rossi, President and CEO, OCC. “There is a role for both the private and the public sector to work together to improve mental health outcomes across the province. SMEs continue to be on the frontlines of a crisis they are ill-equipped to tackle, facing compounding issues and often operating under resource and capacity constraints when compared to larger enterprises.”

While the Ontario Government has taken important steps to address these gaps and made important policy

and program investments as part of the *Roadmap to Wellness*, further action and collaboration are needed to improve access, integration and quality of mental health care and services along the continuum.

This brief draws on input from mental health experts and OCC members and builds on [previous policy work](#) related to mental health. [Read the brief.](#)

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About the Ontario Chamber of Commerce

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) is the indispensable partner of business and Canada's largest, most influential provincial chamber. It is an independent, non-profit advocacy and member services organization representing a diverse network of 60,000 members. The OCC's mission is to convene, align and advance the interests of its members through principled policy work, value-added business services and broad engagement to drive competitiveness and economic growth in the province.

About the Aurora Chamber of Commerce

The Aurora Chamber of Commerce is a politically independent, membership-based, volunteer-driven, not-for-profit organization. Our **mission** is to lead and serve the Aurora business community. Our **goal** is to build, drive and positively influence the economic landscape of Aurora. Learn more about the Aurora Chamber of Commerce below.

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