



August 3rd, 2023

Honourable Andrew Furey, Premier
The Office of the Premier
Confederation Building, East Block
P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, NL
A1B 4J6

Subject: Student Wellness and Counselling Centre Residency Concerns

Dear Premier Furey,

The MUNFA Executive would like to bring to your attention an emerging issue at Memorial University that is expected to have a direct and significant impact on the healthcare system.

Newfoundland and Labrador is experiencing a **mental health crisis**. Our younger population aged 18-34 has the worst self-reported mental health of any province in the country, including the highest rates of mood disorders and substance abuse. The *Health Accord for Newfoundland and Labrador* recognizes the role of **mental health factors as social determinants of health**, and it establishes clear objectives to combat this problem that rely on support from mental health professionals.

The Student Wellness and Counselling Centre (SWCC) at Memorial University has maintained one of the province's two Doctoral Residency in Professional Psychology programs since the 1990s. The SWCC Residency was developed to address a severe shortage of registered psychologists and is now responsible for producing many of the practice-ready doctoral psychologists that our healthcare system urgently needs. The SWCC has maintained full accreditation from the Canadian Psychological Association—the gold standard within the field—since 2003. Such accreditation is an exceptional achievement and a mark of excellence for Memorial University.

Importantly, the SWCC Residency program is the most significant and consistent contributor to the local professional field: **over 40% of its graduates have opted to stay and work in Newfoundland and Labrador in the past 20 years.** [By contrast, the Eastern Health Residency has been hampered by inadequate retention of registered psychologist supervisors needed to run it.](#) The program at Memorial University is central to your government's goal of recruiting and retaining more psychologists and meeting *Health Accord* objectives.

Unfortunately, its 20th year of accreditation finds the SWCC with just half its permanent faculty complement ahead of a site visit for re-accreditation in late August. Despite the clear and plentiful benefits of the SWCC Residency program, Memorial University's senior administration has repeatedly denied requests for permission to fill vacant permanent faculty positions required to maintain minimum operating capacity and retain accreditation. Moreover, MUNFA recently learned that yet another permanent counselling faculty position was cut from the SWCC and its Residency while existing members were on the picket lines fighting for renewed stability.

Counselling faculty attest that the SWCC Residency program has now reached the point of imminent collapse. MUNFA detailed the current situation in a recent meeting with Dr. Neil Bose and Dr. Jennifer Lokash, who provided no commitment for renewed investments but indicated that the issue would be discussed by the Complement Advisory Committee within the next few days. Premier Furey, given the critical importance of the SWCC Residency to our mental healthcare system in Newfoundland and Labrador, we cannot afford to lose this program. MUNFA stands with Memorial's counselling faculty in calling for immediate action to prevent that outcome.

We welcome your response.

Sincerely,

The MUNFA Executive

cc. Honourable Krista Lynn Howell, Minister of Education
Honourable Tom Osborne, Minister of Health and Community Services
Dr. Neil Bose, Memorial University President Pro Tempore
Dr. Jennifer Lokash, Memorial University Provost