

Noah Irvine

February 13, 2017

Mr. Justin Trudeau
Constituency Office
529 Jarry Street East Suite 302
Montreal, QC
H2P 1V4

Dear Mr. Trudeau,

I am a grade 11 student at Guelph Collegiate Vocational Institute. I am writing to all Members of Parliament in their constituency offices to raise an important issue that has personally affected myself and my family. Twelve years ago I lost my mother to suicide. I was five years old and she was just 24 years of age. Then in 2015 I lost my father to his battle with mental illness. He was 40.

Suicide is an epidemic in this country and in my province as we lose too many people every year, from First Nations and Canadian Youth to men and women in uniform, and my mother. In total in this country, we lose nearly 4,000 people to this epidemic every year. In Ontario, more than 1,000 people every year, three people a day, will die from taking their own life. Ontario is investing in more funding for mental health over the coming decade but it is not enough. According to a Globe and Mail article, titled "Time to bolster Canada's chronically underfunded mental health system," the mental health disease burden in Ontario is 1.5 times higher than that of cancer and heart disease combined. Yet we are only investing 500 million dollars over 10 years, compared to 16 billion dollars in other areas of health care.

We are facing a suicide crisis in Ontario and the rest of Canada. Canada is one of the few developed nations that does not have a national suicide prevention plan. Yet, in 1993 Canada hosted an international conference in Alberta on behalf of the UN to develop a national suicide prevention strategy throughout the world. Out of this conference a final document was adopted by the UN and in 1996 it formed the basis of the UN document "Prevention of Suicide: Guidelines for the Formation and Implementation of National Strategies." Many G8 nations including the United States along with many other countries globally have adopted this UN document. Now 22 years later Canada has not yet developed our own national suicide prevention plan, or adopted the UN backed suicide prevention plan.

My father was seriously mentally ill. He had been hospitalized around 4 times but had gone to the emergency room around 10 times. In Ontario, we have the mental health act. This act gave far too much power to my father. He was in hospital because he was mentally impaired and with that act he was expected to make decisions a healthy person would make. This act allowed my father to refuse help and follow up treatment. Had the act not have been in place, he could have been treated by the hospital for his psychiatric episodes. As my dad's father was his primary caregiver, he was always in the dark about my dad's treatment and that is because my father could instruct the hospital as to whom his medical information was given to. My father's death was very complex but the mental health crisis in Canada is complex in and of itself and still nothing is done about it.

I understand this is a large and complex issue. We, as a country, need to work together across all levels of government. I would recommend the implementation of a ministry both federally and provincially that would solely deal with mental health. Our healthcare system is strained and the health care ministers already deal with so many other areas that are complex in nature. Mental health is so large I do not believe the current structure is enough to adequately deal with this crisis. Therefore the federal government and the province of Ontario should create a new ministry that only deals with mental health.

We continue to fail in providing for the mentally ill. My mother and father are prime examples of our country failing to provide to the mentally ill. This issue is not an easy fix, it requires a significant amount of time and energy dedicated to fighting this crisis. Please do not let my mother's death have been in vain or my father's death. Both of their deaths and the thousands that die every year should fuel your fight in ending this crisis.

In closing, I challenge you to meet with the families of suicide victims, the mentally ill and the caregivers for the mentally ill in your community, so you may understand why this epidemic affects everyone in this country and the people of your constituency.

Thank you for your time,

Noah Irvine