

July 8, 2019

Hon. Michael Tibollo
Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
Ministry of Health
438 University Ave
8th Floor
Toronto ON
M5G 2K8

Dear Minister Tibollo,

On behalf of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture's 38,000 farm family members and supporters, please accept our congratulations on your recent cabinet appointment as Ontario's new Associate Minister for Mental Health and Addictions. We are pleased the Ford Government has made this very important and timely decision to create a new Associate Minister position to focus on mental health and addictions. We are confident this position will give these issues the attention they desperately deserve.

More than ever before, a social climate exists that is more accepting and supportive of mental health challenges. OFA is pleased to see that the Ontario Government intends to invest \$1.9 billion for mental health, addiction, and housing supports that will be matched by the federal government, resulting in a \$3.8 billion investment over ten years.

Ontario's agriculture sector is a major economic engine, providing jobs in both rural and urban communities. Our farms offer stability to rural communities and represent an integral part of our social fabric by providing a healthy, safe food supply. We believe the lack of a coordinated, long-term approach to farmer mental wellness research and resource development has the potential to become a major detriment to the growth of our sector and a contributing factor to the on-going attrition of Ontario farmers.

We would like to take this opportunity to highlight the needs of farmers and rural residents living with mental health challenges. Farmers are a minority in Ontario living within a very specific set of circumstances and facing serious occupational stresses in their service to society, our food system, and the broader economy. They also face a myriad of problems associated with mental health: poor access to comprehensive services; (agri)cultural and social stigmas; social isolation; and ready access to the means to commit suicide, to list just a few.

OFA shares your view that confronting mental health and addiction issues is complex and will require an integrated approach from multiple stakeholders. The 10 recommendations outlined in the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture Report, *Mental Health: A Priority for our Farmers* provides an excellent roadmap towards building mental health and resiliency among

Ontario's farm communities. We are excited to work collaboratively with you and associated Ministries towards fully implementing these 10 recommendations.

Sincerely,



Keith Currie
President