

Steve Lurie's letter to the Globe & Mail, January 9, 2012, in response to ["Police learn how to deal with the mentally ill in crisis"](#)

The Globe folio on the law and mental health raises an important public policy issue -- the degree to which the justice system should be the default response when mental health services are in short supply. Last May the Ontario Chiefs of Police passed a resolution calling on the provincial government to invest more in community mental health services to reduce demand for police interventions. While governments across the country have funded more court support services and police crisis intervention teams, and research has demonstrated the effectiveness of these services, the fundamental problem is still access to mental health treatment and community support services.

Studies show that case management and community treatment teams for people living with serious mental illness reduce costly hospitalizations by over 50%. Yet there are over 16,000 people waiting for case management services in Ontario. Supportive housing costs far less than shelters and hospitals, yet there has been no major investment since 2005, and according to a recent study done for the Mental Health Commission, there are 520,000 people living with mental illness in Canada who are homeless or vulnerably housed. In Ontario over 42,000 are waiting for supportive housing. Paradoxically the investments in community mental health services proposed by Senator Michael Kirby five years ago would add only 0.29% to annual health spending, but would improve access and quality of care, while making the health system more efficient. Governments need to consider the social and health costs of not investing in community capacity and put more resources into diverting people with mental illness from the justice system

Steve Lurie