

Steve Lurie's letter to the Toronto Star, February 1, 2012, in response to Walkom: The downside to Ontario's health-care reforms

The urban myth that the provincial Conservative governments closed down psychiatric hospitals, and that deinstitutionalization led to the failure of the mental health system is only partially correct. Psychiatric hospital beds were reduced from 11,000 to 4,000 between 1959 and 1979, but 4,000 homes for special care beds were created along with 3,000 beds in general hospital psychiatric units during the same period. Successive governments of all political stripes have failed to make adequate investments in community mental health services. Spending on community mental health is currently 1.31% of health spending, up from 0.58% in 1987. The current government has invested \$220 million in community mental health services since 2004, but has added \$16.5 billion to health care spending. As a result the mental health share of health spending has continued to decline, while need has grown. Hopefully the 10 year mental health and addiction strategy will reduce this trend over time. According to provincial health statistics there were 42,000 people waiting for supportive housing and 16,000 people waiting for case management services across the province. It is more cost effective to invest in these types of community mental health services, which have been shown to reduce admissions to hospitals.

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