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Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Cuts to health-funded CBOs cruel and misguided**

Provincial government cuts to community-based organizations (CBOs) that provide health services to Saskatchewan's most vulnerable people are cruel and misguided, according to SGEU.

Frontline services for people with mental health problems, from counselling and advocacy services to crisis intervention and housing, are under threat, along with a range of other programs, including addictions services, support for children with autism, and people with acquired brain injuries.

"It is reprehensible to target people who need support the most but are least able to organize and speak out for the programs and services they rely on," says SGEU President Bob Bymoan.

"CBOs are already chronically underfunded. The non-profit agencies receive far less funding to provide services than they would if the programs were delivered by government or through the formal health care system," says Bymoan.

A 10 per cent cut to health-funded CBOs, recently announced by Minister of Health Jim Reiter, will be devastating to the people who need frontline services. The services that CBOs deliver keep people off the streets and out of the criminal justice system or the acute care health system, Bymoan adds.

"There's no real savings when you cut CBOs. The people who don't get the services they need will likely end up in hospital or in court, or in jail, which will cost the public system substantially more in the long run," Bymoan says.

"Most importantly, these are real people, whose lives matter, whose families matter, and who can be helped with the right programs and supports," according to Bymoan. "We can't just write them off as if they don't count."

Saskatchewan already lags far behind other provinces in support for mental health services. Other provinces spend, on average, seven per cent of their health budgets on mental health, while Saskatchewan only allocates five per cent, resulting in a \$108 million annual shortfall compared to the national average, according to the Canadian Mental Health Association.

“A 10 per cent cut would likely result in deep and debilitating program cuts to many already-underfunded services, and force agencies to lay off staff who provide the vital frontline contact with at-risk clients,” says Bymoer.

“We urge government to reverse this decision and start funding CBOs adequately, so they can provide quality supports and services that the most vulnerable in our society need. It is not only the right thing to do. It is the financially responsible thing to do,” Bymoer adds. “Government will bear the costs of dealing with Saskatchewan peoples’ health issues, one way or another, and even well-funded CBOs would cost less than addressing these issues in a courtroom or emergency room.”

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