



June 7, 2021

Mayor John Tory and Members of City Council
Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Dear Mayor Tory and Council Members:

Re: Agenda Item MM 34.15 “Support for a 988 Crisis Hotline”

On behalf of the University of Toronto, I write to lend our voice to your support for the creation of a new 988 Crisis Hotline.

We agree that a 988 Crisis Hotline is a very worthy goal. A single national suicide-prevention line that consolidates all suicide crisis numbers into a simple coast-to-coast 988 number accessible to all Canadians has the potential to make a significant impact in mental health care.

As we at U of T are too-frequently reminded, mental health challenges affect many in our community. We must all work concertedly towards ensuring that immediate and appropriate support for these challenges is available to those in need.

As you know, U of T has been working consistently to boost funding for mental health and wellness on our campuses. We are instituting an enhanced “stepped model of care” that recognizes that not all mental health crises are the same, and that our students need support in receiving treatment that is tailored to their level of need. This is a key element of the University’s response to the final report of our Presidential and Provostial Task Force on Student Mental Healthⁱ, released in January 2020.

As a result of this report, the University has increased annual spending toward mental health services by almost \$5M and is investing an additional \$20M toward capital infrastructure, in addition to philanthropic donations. We have also [called for enhanced partnerships](#)ⁱⁱ to be established between universities and local and regional mental-health services, and in more serious cases with hospitals.

We commend you for supporting the 988 Crisis Hotline, but want to also highlight that Toronto needs significantly more urgent care services to deal with the growing demand for mental health appointments. In our experience, an increasing number of students attend campus health and counselling services with acute, crisis-driven, and complex psychiatric presentations. These exceed our expertise and capacity, and as a result cannot be adequately supported by our existing resources.

We urge you to actively engage with the provincial and federal governments to support efforts in our city to establish new urgent care services that provide access to low-barrier, evidence-supported, brief, and urgent services to those who are experiencing crises. Such services will reduce admissions to emergency or other hospital-based interventions and improve student health outcomes by reducing the burden of mental illness and substance use concerns.

While the establishment of a new 988 line is a welcome development that will help promote awareness of services in the community, it is critical to ensure that appropriate and timely supports are available to those who seek assistance through this system. At present, Toronto, like other major metropolitan areas, has major gaps in the resources available.

We stand in partnership with you and Toronto City Council in developing collaborations among all levels of service providers, mental health experts, and government funders to create a stronger, more responsive, and compassionate system of supports for those in need, including our university and college students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'CR' with a flourish.

Cheryl Regehr
Vice-President and Provost

ⁱ www.provost.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/155/2020/01/Presidential-and-Provostial-Task-Force-Final-Report-and-Recommendations-Dec-2019.pdf

ⁱⁱ www.utoronto.ca/news/sustaining-mental-health-our-students-requires-national-strategy-u-t-provost-cheryl-regehr