July 31, 2012

The Honourable Dwight Duncan, MPP
Minister of Finance
7 Queen’s Park Crescent, 7th floor
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1Y7

Dear Minister,

In February, the Commission on the Reform of Ontario’s Public Services recommended that the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation consider ways to increase revenue. The following month, the OLG announced a multiyear modernization plan.

With years of research, treatment, and health promotion experience in problem gambling, CAMH has practical and academic interest in this direction. Research shows that:

- Approximately 3% of the province’s population experiences moderate to severe gambling problems and between 30% and 40% of Ontario’s gambling revenues come from this 3%.
- Problem gambling is associated with depression, anxiety, and suicide. It affects family and marital relationships, work and academic performance, and can lead to bankruptcy and crime.
- Increases in gambling availability are associated with increases in problem gambling.

It seems likely that any expansion of gambling in Ontario will have a negative impact on vulnerable individuals. As the OLG modernization plan is implemented, I hope that you will prioritize Responsible Gambling (RG) by:

- ensuring that plans for privatization of gambling operations strengthen the OLG’s conduct-and-manage function, with a view to establishing RG benchmarks for all gambling venues, including those in resorts;
- maintaining a strong commitment to public education, and helping to promote educational, care and recovery resources to people with gambling problems and their families;
- commissioning impact studies of new venues and new gambling modalities.

I appreciate that revenue generation is a key priority for the Ministry and the OLG. At the same time, I hope that public health and social responsibility considerations will support a balanced approach. As the OLG considers its expansion plans, CAMH will help in any way we can to prevent problem gambling and promote responsible gambling practices in the industry.

Sincerely,

Catherine Zahn, MD, FRCP(C)
President and CEO