



# Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office

Bureau de l'intervention en faveur des patients des établissements psychiatriques

March 10, 2006

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper  
Office of the Prime Minister  
80 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister Harper:

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your recent election as both Member of Parliament and Prime Minister. Serving the people of Canada will be both rewarding and challenging but you are positioned uniquely to make a difference in the lives of all Canadians, including those with disabilities.

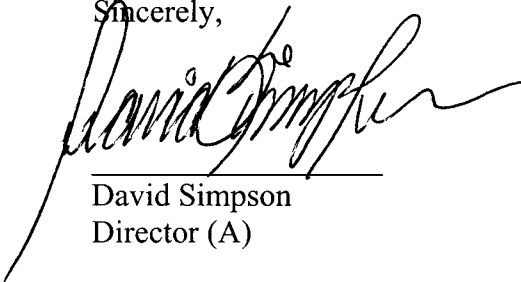
The Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office (PPAO) was established in 1983 as an arm's length organization of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to protect the legal and civil rights of inpatients in the ten current and divested provincial psychiatric hospitals. We provide independent and confidential advocacy services and rights advice to consumers of and those seeking access to mental health services. We work to empower mental health consumers to make informed decisions about their care, treatment and legal rights.

I am writing today to bring several issues to your attention that are of significance to both our clients and our organization. First, we are hopeful that your government will encourage the efforts of Senator Michael Kirby and the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology respecting mental health, mental illness and addictions. Their work and resulting recommendations have the potential to shape the delivery of mental health and addiction services in Canada, for this and future generations. As noted in our attached submission to the Standing Committee, we believe the federal government should make it a priority to develop a national action plan on mental health.

Second, the PPAO is also supportive of the creation of the National Commission on Mental Health. Your government has the opportunity to shape the creation of the Commission and to make it a world-renowned organization with regards to mental health, patients' rights and the development of best practices focused on wellness, recovery and empowerment. Canada can provide international leadership by working with stakeholders, patients, clients, families, health providers and advocates to design a mental health and addiction system that is client-centred, client-directed and responsive to the unique needs of individuals with mental illness. For the past two decades, the PPAO has provided service in Ontario and, if you wish, we would be more than pleased to share our expertise and experiences.

Finally, the PPAO recommends that the federal government introduces and implements a national independent advocacy and rights protection program for vulnerable populations, such as seniors, women, children, First Nations, inmates and individuals with mental illness and addiction. Given the vulnerability and fragility of these specialized populations, we believe that such a rights protection program would safeguard their rights while giving a voice to their issues and concerns. The Ontario model for the provision of independent advocacy and rights advice is one that could easily be adapted by the federal government. To learn more about the PPAO, including our vision, mission and the services we provide, please visit our website at [www.ppa.gov.on.ca](http://www.ppa.gov.on.ca).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Simpson", written over a horizontal line. The signature is fluid and cursive.

David Simpson  
Director (A)