



# Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office

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

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **PSYCHIATRIC PATIENT ADVOCATE OFFICE COMMENDS ONTARIO POLICE CHIEFS FOR PROTECTING THE PRIVACY OF PERSONS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS**

TORONTO, July 25 – The Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office (PPAO) today commended the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police (OACP) for its new guideline protecting the privacy of persons with mental illness who encounter police as front-line emergency health care responders.

Until now, police forces across Ontario have been individually responsible for deciding whether to publicly disclose mental health information about someone who has been subjected even to a routine background check.

An inconsistent patchwork of procedures often led to unfair disclosure of non-criminal information on routine background checks and vulnerable-sector screenings, leading to discriminatory hiring practices by employers and volunteer organizations.

"By prohibiting the release of non-criminal mental health information collected by police, the new guideline is a meaningful step forward that will protect tens of thousands of Ontarians from stigma and discrimination" says Ryan Fritsch, the PPAO's legal counsel.

Vahe Kehyayan, Director of the PPAO says "We commend the OACP for developing the guideline in consultation with the Police Record Check Coalition and our office to better protect Ontarians with disabilities from criminalization and marginalization."

For 28 years, the Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office has provided rights advice and advocacy services to patients with mental illness in Ontario. In 2010, the PPAO provided rights advice 25,000 times and advocacy services to more than 3,500 clients.

Since 2006, the PPAO has lobbied government and police forces as Co-Chair to the Police Record Check Coalition. The Coalition has dozens of institutional and individual members including the Ontario Association of Patient Councils and the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario Division.

Fritsch said the PPAO is urging all police forces across the province to adopt and implement the new guideline. "Persons with disabilities deserve every equal opportunity to work and volunteer in their communities without barriers or fear of discrimination," he said.

Information about the new Guideline is available on the PPAO's website at <http://www.ppa.gov.on.ca>.

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