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The mental health and addictions crisis in Nova Scotia is not getting the attention it deserves. There is lack of funding, an overburdened system suffering from lack of physicians, psychiatrists, social workers, nurses, and over all lack of timely and accessible services.

Discrimination is rampant within our systems and within society as a whole, against those with mental health problems. We must find new ways of working collaboratively with communities, families, all caregivers, EHS, police, to improve our compassion, response and attention to our most vulnerable people in our society.

The privacy laws are outdated and Nova Scotia's clearly is the most restrictive in the country with regards to disclosure of personal health information without consent. These laws perpetuate the stigma against mental illness and addictions because they do not recognize the symptoms of the very illnesses that lead to someone needing help, but not being able to ask for help or recognize that they are ill.

I am tired of hearing government make excuses for why these laws are so important to protect privacy when they know these laws are creating significant barriers to early intervention and preventing deaths. In fact yesterday I heard a politician brag that even with this change Nova Scotia still has the most strict privacy law in the country. This person clearly has never looked after a severely mentally ill loved one or watched their child spiral into a crisis right in front of them and been completely powerless to help them due to this very dangerous law and certainly does not have any perspective of a person who has lost a loved one to suicide.

The research, stats and experience of many clinicians, nurses, social workers and especially people with lived and living experience clearly shows that the right balance between protection of privacy and protection of life is has not been met.

The amendment being put forward in Bill 127, Clause 33 is the catalyst to make big change; to change practice and culture to augment our overburdened system and enable earlier interventions. It will be very important to retrain and educate clinicians and all health care workers who are faced with these

decisions of what information to accept and provide every day, to ensure everyone is kept safe and given every opportunity to live. It will be equally important to ensure all Nova Scotians understand their ability and rights to keep their loved ones safe.

Suicide rates in Nova Scotia have been the highest ever and continue to grow each year, the highest being in 2024 ; 159 people. Everyone is impacted by suicide. It is one of the highest causes of death in young people. We lose 3 people to suicide per week on average in Nova Scotia. We must reduce stigma, work to collaborate, bring suicide out of the dark and into the light, stop perpetuating the stigma, by keeping out dated laws that make it impossible to remove the stigma.

This change is very positive because it continues to protect privacy and autonomy, but allows for the clinicians and health care workers to have the leeway in situations where it is needed to protect health safety and life. It enables collaboration with caregivers and families where it is needed and ensures the clinician has the ability to obtain vital information to protect health, safety and life.

I applaud this gov't for finally putting this amendment forward and trust that it will pass and become law.

In loving memory of my dear nephew, Ben Brennan, an incredible bright light who now is gone from our family, and this could, and should, have been prevented. The time for change is NOW !!

Karen Saunders-Brison

Via email