

March 31, 2026

Open Letter to Obby Khan, Manitoba Leader of Opposition

Social Workers Are Essential Mental Health Care Providers

Dear Mr. Khan,

We are writing on behalf of the Manitoba College of Social Workers in response to your remarks made in the Manitoba Legislature on March 26, 2026 regarding social workers and their role in responding to individuals experiencing mental health crises. Your statements that social workers are “not mental health professionals” and “not professionals” are not only inaccurate, but offensive and deeply dismissive of an entire field dedicated to supporting the well-being of Manitobans.

At a time when our province is facing significant mental health challenges, it is critical that public leaders speak with care, accuracy, and respect about the professionals working on the front lines. Social workers are, in fact, highly trained and regulated health professionals. Social workers hold professional degrees, adhere to strict standards of practice, and are governed by a professional regulatory body. Social workers providing mental health services are trained in mental health assessment, crisis intervention, trauma-informed care, suicide prevention, and therapeutic modalities.

To suggest that social workers are unqualified to respond to mental health crises is irresponsible and reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of our scope of practice. Social workers are often the first point of contact for individuals in distress. We work in hospitals, community agencies, schools, crisis response teams, and outreach settings, frequently serving individuals who may not otherwise have access to care. Our approach is holistic, person-centered, and grounded in evidence-based practice.

Effective mental health care is not delivered by one profession alone. It is the result of interdisciplinary collaboration where social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, nurses, and other respected professionals each play essential roles. Undermining one group does not strengthen the system - it weakens it.

Your comments are particularly troubling given that they were made during Social Work Month - a time intended to recognize and celebrate the contributions of this vital profession. Instead, your words have caused harm, frustration, and disappointment among thousands of social workers who serve Manitobans every day with skill, compassion, and professionalism.

There are over 3,000 social workers in Manitoba. We are not only essential members of our healthcare and social service systems, we are also constituents, community leaders, and voters. As social workers we deserve leaders who demonstrate informed understanding and respect for our valued profession.

The Manitoba College of Social Workers calls for a clear and immediate response through the following actions:

- Publicly correct your inaccurate statements about social workers
- Issue a sincere apology to the social work profession
- Engage with social workers and their professional bodies to better understand our role in mental health care

This is an opportunity to demonstrate accountability and a willingness to learn. Manitobans deserve leadership that is informed, respectful, and committed to strengthening, not diminishing, the professionals who care for our communities.

Sincerely,



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Executive Director/Registrar



Jennifer Meixner, MA, BSW, RSW
President

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