

Why "Select" a Committee?

The Legislative Impact of Ontario's Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions, 2010-2018

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ABSTRACT:

Ontario's Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions offers a unique case study into the long-term impact of select committee reports in Canada. SCMHA tabled its final report containing 23 recommendations in August 2010.

Special reports are the main policy influence of select committees (White 1989), but few useful tools exist to measure the impact of a report other than the number of recommendations adopted, which is a limited and controversial "batting average." (Duffy and Thompson 2003).

This project combines quantitative study of references to SCMHA in the Hansard over eight years, combined with interviews with former committee members. The SCMHA is shown to have a continuing legacy within the Legislative Assembly, and great influence as basis for advocacy, as partisan ammunition, and as voice for the mental health community.

A long-term study of a committee report offers an alternative means to assess its impact, and can help identify policy windows and the necessary preconditions for productive and successful select committees in the future.

TWO RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

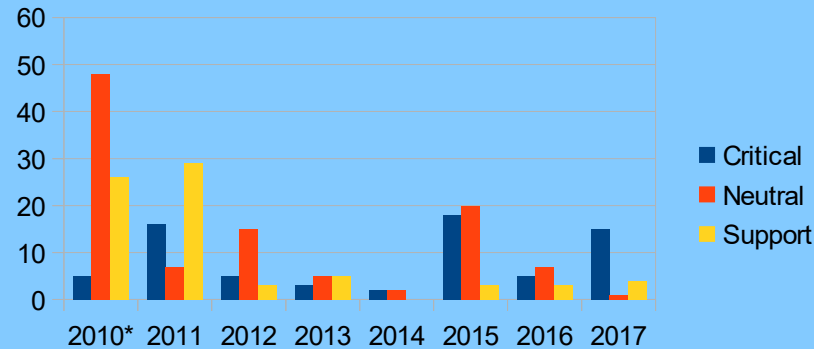
1. How do MPPs remember, use, or situate the select committee final report in their speeches before the House between August 2010 and January 1, 2018?
2. Does discussion of the SCMHA grow, lesson, or change over time, and what can this tell us about the impact or perception of the report as a whole in the Legislative Assembly?

METHODOLOGY:

1 – a complete survey of all mentions of the SCMHA or its final report in the OLA Hansard from Sept 13, 2010 to Jan. 1, 2018. Data was assembled by text searching the online House Hansard index using multiple search terms, and classified by speaker, partisan content, date, context, and type of business.

2 – a **non-random stratified sample** of MPPs who served on the SCMHA.

Mentions of the SCMHA in Hansard, by year and partisan content



*after Sept. 1, 2010

WHAT IS A "MENTION"?

A single speech by a member which in any way references the SCMHA's work or its final report and recommendations, and/or any impact the SCMHA had on policy.

	Total	CRI	NEU	SUP
LIBERAL	90	~	27	63
NDP	61	40	18	3
PC	97	30	60	7

Mentions By Party

France Gélinas (NDP Nickel Belt) and Sylvia Jones (PC Dufferin-Caledon) have the most mentions at 29 each.

CONCLUSIONS:

The MHA offered the Government a powerful, but potentially short-lived and double-edged source of political capital on mental health and addictions.

As the Government focused on other reports and its own policy implementation, the MHA report very naturally becomes a tool of the Opposition.

The biggest impact of the report may be in the broader mental health and addictions advocacy community. It was part of a radically changing conversation around mental health and opened government to patients:

in 2018, for the first time, all party platforms include mental health and addictions for the first time.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:

- 248 mentions, excluding 29 **petitions** and **procedural** mentions

- 113 mentions were **substantive**, 135 were made in passing

- 128 mentions were made by **former committee members**.

- 48 mentions of SCMHA occurred during discussion of **new select committees**

- **Private member's legislation** inspired most mentions in 2012-13 and 2016-17.

- Decisive turn to **critical** comments after 2015, due to the introduction of the *Mental Health Amendment Act*.

- All but two of the **substantive** supporting comments are from 2010-2011.

Government MPPs talk about their mental health plans, but not the SCMHA's report.

- After 2011, it is only Opposition MPPs who use the report in the House as a legislative or policy tool.

SECRETS OF THE SCMHA:

1. **Extensive public consultations** and engagement and **sufficient time and resources** to study the issue; a successful model for future select committees.

2. **Former members became passionate advocates** for the final report. There was low turnover in members and **no change in government** between 2010-2018.

3. Prior to and during the committee, mental health and addictions was **non-partisan**, and there was **little risk of blame-seeking**.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY:

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White, Graham. 1989. *The Ontario Legislature: A Political Analysis*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Schofield, Josie and Jonathan Fershau. 2007. "Committees inside Canadian Legislatures." In *Policy analysis in Canada: The state of the art*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press

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Type of Business	Total	NDP	LIB	PC	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Introduction of Bills	3	2	1		1						2	
Introduction of Visitors	2	1	1		1					1		
Member's Statements	11	2	2	7	4	2	1	1		1	2	
Ministerial Statements	11	2	3	6	2	3	1	2	2		1	
Opposition Day	22	3	8	11	1	16	3		1			1
Oral Questions	40	8	28	4	7	12	6	1	1		3	10
Orders of the Day	124	31	39	54	62	11	1	4	1	35	7	3
Petitions	23	18		5			1	2	3	7	7	3
Private Member's Public Business	40	14	11	15	3	8	11	5		5	2	6
Reports By Committees	1		1		1							