



Canadian Mental  
Health Association  
in Alberta  
*Mental health for all*

# ○ Making ○ Mental Health ○ Matter in Alberta

Advocacy Toolkit





# Find your Canadian Mental Health Association

## **Northeast Region** (Wood Buffalo)

**T** | 780-743-1053

**E** | [adminassistant@woodbuffalo.cmha.ab.ca](mailto:adminassistant@woodbuffalo.cmha.ab.ca)

**W** | [www.woodbuffalo.cmha.ca](http://www.woodbuffalo.cmha.ca)

## **Northwest Region** (Grande Prairie)

**T** | 780-814-2349

**E** | [info@gpcmha.ca](mailto:info@gpcmha.ca)

**W** | [www.gpcmha.ca](http://www.gpcmha.ca)

## **Edmonton Region**

**T** | 7780-414-6300

**E** | [main@cmha-edmonton.ab.ca](mailto:main@cmha-edmonton.ab.ca)

**W** | [www.edmonton.cmha.ca](http://www.edmonton.cmha.ca)

## **East Central Region** (Camrose)

**T** | 780-672-2570

**W** | [www.cmhacamrose.ca](http://www.cmhacamrose.ca)

## **Central Region** (Red Deer)

**T** | 403-342-2266

**E** | [info@reddeer.cmha.ab.ca](mailto:info@reddeer.cmha.ab.ca)

**W** | [www.reddeer.cmha.ca](http://www.reddeer.cmha.ca)

## **Calgary Region**

**T** | 403-297-1700

**E** | [info@cmha.calgary.ab.ca](mailto:info@cmha.calgary.ab.ca)

**W** | [www.cmha.calgary.ab.ca](http://www.cmha.calgary.ab.ca)

## **Southeast Region** (Medicine Hat)

**T** | 403-504-1811

## **South Region** (Lethbridge)

**T** | 403-329-4775

**E** | [admin@cmhalethbridge.ca](mailto:admin@cmhalethbridge.ca)

**W** | [www.lethbridge.cmha.ca](http://www.lethbridge.cmha.ca)



## Executive Summary

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is a national, community mental health organization reaching across Canada and focused on the mental health and wellbeing of all Canadians. It has a presence in more than 330 communities across the country. CMHA is recognized as a reliable source for information, support and compassionate understanding of those living with mental illness and the families, friends and communities who support them. We work at the intersection of clinical and community mental health care.

CMHA in Alberta consists of a suicide prevention centre, a provincial office and eight regional offices, including offices in the northeast region (Fort McMurray), northwest region (Grande Prairie), Edmonton region, east central region (Camrose), central region (Red Deer), Calgary region, southeast region (Medicine Hat) and south region (Lethbridge). Together, we advocate for increased outreach services, education, housing and suicide prevention services across the province. Our mission is to promote the mental health of all and support people experiencing mental illness. Through various projects, programs, services and education, we have a vision of mentally healthy people in a healthy society. **For more information about your local CMHA, visit [www.cmha.ca/find-your-cmha](http://www.cmha.ca/find-your-cmha).**

To make mental health matter in Alberta, it takes all of us. This toolkit was developed to help anyone advocate for better mental health in their communities. Individuals, organizations, non-profits, government officials and advocates will find this toolkit useful in demonstrating the importance of positive mental health in Alberta.

Whether you are interested in improving mental health in your home, workplace or school, or you have a vision of mentally healthy communities everywhere, this toolkit will help you make mental health matter. This toolkit has been designed to give you a quick summary of important mental health issues, research that supports it, solutions to the challenges, and examples of projects that help impact that particular issue. You can use the entire toolkit, or pick and choose topics that are important to you.

Use the information provided to help localize your concerns and advocate for mental health in municipal, provincial and federal elections. Remember to identify the issue you want support on, like housing, support for families and caregivers, access to treatment or any other important topic; identify something that is working well—like a pilot program, evidence or approach used by other jurisdictions; and make your request specific. You can use the information provided to make mental health a priority where you live, work, play and pray.

**To help you advocate for mental health, you can download CMHA's Localize your Concerns worksheet at [www.alberta.cmha.ca/localizeyourconcerns](http://www.alberta.cmha.ca/localizeyourconcerns).**

**For more information on this toolkit, visit [www.alberta.cmha.ca/makementalhealthmatter](http://www.alberta.cmha.ca/makementalhealthmatter).**

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# Mental Health & Government Advocacy

The mental health of the population affects everyone's quality of life. The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) advocates for all municipal, provincial and federal governments—not just health—to play a role in mental health. This means acknowledging the need for cross-ministry and community investments to promote mental health and supporting programs, like Family and Community Support Services (FCSS), that provide critical local programs across Alberta. It is imperative that all orders of government work together to address mental health needs in the community. Often, unmet service needs that are officially the jurisdiction of one order of government create problems for another. In the case of municipalities, this can be seen through phenomena such as the addictions crisis, homelessness and social service needs that municipalities are forced to respond to when proper funding and programming from other orders of government is not in place.

In Alberta, six per cent of the provincial health budget is spent on mental health and addictions.<sup>1</sup> Based on a health-equity spending approach, the Government of Alberta and municipal government bodies throughout the province should be spending 12 per cent of the total health budget on mental health and addictions.<sup>2</sup> All levels of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) federation advocate for more funding towards treatment of mental illness and resources for mental health.

This chronic underfunding of health care is creating an environment which fosters a two-tier system of mental health care. In Alberta, we must promote open access to all; investment is needed to guard our public system. CMHA continues to advocate for the province to adopt a health-equity, or health-parity, lens. A health-equity approach would place mental health on the same standing of importance as physical health. For more information on health-equity in Canada, read *Mental Health in the Balance: Ending the Health Care Disparity in Canada*,<sup>3</sup> by the National office of the Canadian Mental Health Association.

If you wish to do more to help, please use the resources within this tool kit and contact your local Mayor, Councillor, Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) and/or Member of Parliament (MP).

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<sup>1</sup> Government of Alberta (2015). *Valuing mental health: The mental health review*. Retrieved from <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/valuing-mental-health-report-alberta-mental-health-review-committee-2015>.

<sup>2</sup> Institute of Health Economics (2008). *How much should we spend on mental health*. Retrieved from <https://www.ihe.ca/publications/how-much-should-we-spend-on-mental-health->

<sup>3</sup> Canadian Mental Health Association (2018). *Mental health in the balance: Ending the health care disparity in Canada*. Retrieved from <https://cmha.ca/ending-health-care-disparity-canada>

# Stepped Care is Best Care

In Alberta, we must support development and access to integrated and improved systems, like stepped care, across the lifespan. We need better systems, not more navigators.



## Issue Summary

In 2017, Albertans made almost one million appointments to discuss their mental health concerns with a doctor.<sup>4</sup> Further, 80 per cent of Albertans report they cannot afford to pay for psychologists' services.<sup>5</sup> Community care is a key element of our system. However, many of these concerns could have been addressed through peer support, community care or other, more appropriate care. Community care is a key element of our system. At the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), we believe primary care, clinical care, and community mental health need greater coordination.



## Solution

Stepped care is best care when it is done properly. That is, not templated or a one-size-fits-all approach where everyone gets the most basic mental health care only. Instead, Albertans need to be met where they are at, with the services that best support them individually.



# Stepped Care is Best Care



## Research

“A person-centered philosophy with a focus on needs, engagement and participation is a characteristic of effective system integration. Understanding the experiences of people who need to access services is central to creating system change.”

–*Here to Help*, BC Partners for Mental Health and Substance Use,<sup>6</sup> 2014



## Alberta Examples

A key element of stepped care is how people enter into the system. In Alberta, CMHA has provincial coverage of 211 information services, where people can call at any time of the day or night for system navigation and support. This single-source approach for information and referrals is an example of the government supporting a coordinated systems approach.

In Lethbridge, Integrated Coordinated Access is a network and community-wide effort that offers streamlined access and tailored supports to community members in Lethbridge. Individuals can more quickly connect to the right community services through consistent system navigation and referral processes.

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<sup>4</sup> Canada-Alberta Home and Community Care and Mental Health and Addiction Services Funding Agreement (2019). Government of Canada. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/corporate/transparency/health-agreements/shared-health-priorities/alberta.html>

<sup>5</sup> Albertans Want Improved Access to Psychologists (2021). Psychologists Association of Alberta. Retrieved from [Albertans Want Improved Access to Psychologists - Psychologists' Association of Alberta \(psychologistsassociation.ab.ca\)](https://www.psychologistsassociation.ab.ca/albertans-want-improved-access-to-psychologists)

<sup>6</sup> Visions (2014). *BC's Mental Health and Addictions Journal*, 10(1). Retrieved from <https://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/sites/default/files/visions-system-navigation-vol10.pdf>



# Children & Youth are a Priority

Investment in quality community and school-based supports and services directly affect children's ability to build resilience and thrive while living with mental health concerns. These early interventions are proven to be most cost-effective and provide youth with the early skills to support their mental health.



## Issue Summary

Youth ages 12 to 24 are among the most underserved population in regard to mental health and addictions in Alberta.<sup>14</sup>



## Solution

The development of promotion, prevention and early intervention for children and families in communities across Alberta provides a long-term solution to improving community mental health.



# Children & Youth are a Priority



## Research

“There is strong evidence that promotion, prevention and early intervention targeted at children and families can produce significant net cost benefits.”

–Making the Case for Investing in Mental Health, Mental Health Commission of Canada,<sup>7</sup> 2016



## Alberta Examples

Youth Hubs Alberta are prevention-focused environments that offer peer support, social services and primary health care to youth and young adults.<sup>8,9</sup> This evidence-based, people-centred initiative is designed to be tailorable to the unique social, cultural and health needs of each community. The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Alberta Division, with support from the Government of Alberta and Policy Wise for Children & Families, supports Youth Hubs as an integrated part of Alberta’s communities in schools and safe spaces.

CMHA Calgary’s YouthSMART (Youth Supporting Mental Health and Resiliency Together) integrates collaborative, youth-initiated mental health learning opportunities in local junior and senior high schools. YouthSMART knows that students are incredibly influential amongst their peers, within their schools, families and communities. As such, YouthSMART approaches youth as valuable peer contributors actively involved in the programming and opportunities that directly impact their wellness, and works with youth leaders to transform the culture of their school surrounding mental health.

Other children and youth initiatives in Alberta include the Alberta Health Services (AHS) school-based Mental Health Capacity Builders program, which provides support to students within their learning environments. Additionally, the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative provides resources and science exploring early brain development and its connection to lifelong physical and mental health, including addiction.

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<sup>7</sup> Mental Health Commission of Canada (2016). *Making the case for investing in mental health in Canada*. Retrieved from [https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/2016-06/Investing\\_in\\_Mental\\_Health\\_FINAL\\_Version\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/2016-06/Investing_in_Mental_Health_FINAL_Version_ENG.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Integrated Youth Hubs (n.d.). *Canadian Mental Health Association*. Retrieved from <https://alberta.cmha.ca/integrated-youth-hubs/>

<sup>9</sup> Salt, V., Parker, N., Ramage, K., Scott, C. (2017). *Community-based Mental Health Services Hubs for Youth Environmental Scan*. PolicyWise for Children & Families. Retrieved from <https://policywise.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/2018-01JAN-04-Integrated-Hubs-EScan.pdf>

# Alberta's Suicide Prevention Work Must Continue

Investment in suicide prevention training and education will help reduce suicide rates in Alberta.



## Issue Summary

Suicide rates have continued to be a large mental health concern for Alberta, showcasing the need for a continued push for suicide prevention.



## Solution

Investment in suicide prevention training and education is a large step in preventing suicide.<sup>10</sup> Further, easy and open access to mental health care, responsible media reporting and reducing access to lethal means can prevent suicide in communities across Alberta.



## Research

In 2018, 630 people died by suicide in Alberta.<sup>11</sup> That's more than double the number of Albertans who died in motor vehicle accidents in 2016.<sup>12</sup>



## Alberta Examples

Centre for Suicide Prevention (CSP) is an education centre that equips Canadians with the information, knowledge and skills necessary to respond to people at risk of suicide.<sup>13</sup> Their library of over 45,000 suicide-specific items, the largest English-language collection of its kind, informs the work CSP does. As a branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association, CSP has been saving lives through suicide prevention by equipping people with the knowledge and skills to respond to those at risk for over 40 years.

<sup>10</sup> What additional resources are needed to prevent suicide? (n.d.). Centre for Suicide Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.suicideinfo.ca/resource/additional-resources-needed-prevent-suicide/>

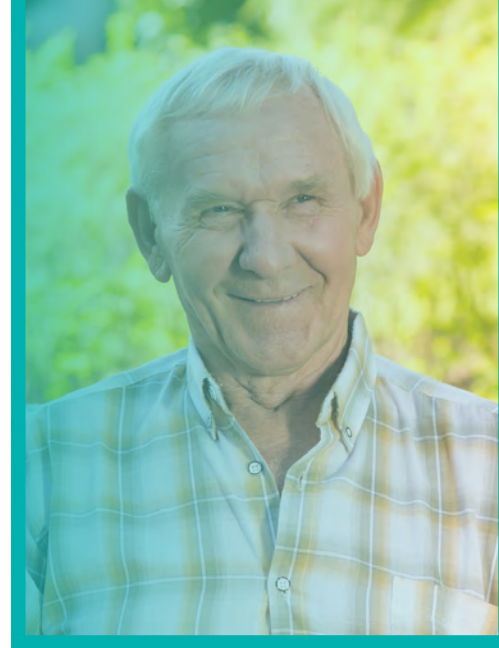
<sup>11</sup> Alberta suicide stats by region and age (2021, January). Centre for Suicide Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.suicideinfo.ca/resource/alberta-suicide-stats-region-age/>

<sup>12</sup> Government of Alberta (2018). *Alberta Traffic Collision Statistics 2016*. Retrieved from <https://www.transportation.alberta.ca/Content/docType47/Production/AlbertaCollisionStatisticsSummary2016.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> About Us (n.d.). Centre for Suicide Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.suicideinfo.ca/about-us/>

# Mental Health of Seniors is a Priority

As the Albertan population ages, the mental health of senior citizens must be a priority.



## Issue Summary

Alberta's senior population is growing faster than any other age group. As of June 2021, over 680,000 Albertans are over the age of 65, and that number is expected to double within the next two decades.<sup>14</sup> Depression and social isolation are critical mental health issues faced by Alberta's senior population.<sup>14</sup>



## Solution

Invest in community-led support programs for seniors that support those who are facing depression, social isolation or other issues specific to ageing.

# Mental Health of Seniors is a Priority



## Research

“The mental health of older adults can be improved through promoting active and healthy ageing. Mental health-specific health promotion for older adults involves creating living conditions and environments that support wellbeing and allow people to lead a healthy life. Promoting mental health depends largely on strategies to ensure that older people have the necessary resources to meet their needs.”

–The World Health Organization,<sup>15</sup> 2017



## Alberta Examples

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), Edmonton Region provides the Seniors Abuse Helpline in the Edmonton Metro Area. The helpline provides confidential, non-judgmental and short-term crisis intervention, emotional support and resources to those who are experiencing or concerned about someone else experiencing seniors’ abuse.

CMHA, Alberta South Region (Lethbridge) is a member of the Seniors Community Services Partnership. This collaborative offers an integrated agency staffing model for seniors and their families. Services include information and referral, outreach, assessment services, case management, service development, system advocacy and community engagement.

<sup>14</sup> Resources to help seniors age in their community (n.d.). Government of Alberta. Retrieved from <https://www.alberta.ca/seniors-resources.aspx>

<sup>15</sup> Mental health of older adults. (2017, December). World Health Organization. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-of-older-adults>

# Workplace Psychological Health & Safety is Important

Employee mental health is a top priority for Alberta employers. Building mental health capacity in all workplaces will reduce the financial cost of mental illness on the economy.



## Issue Summary

In Canada, 500,000 employees are unable to attend work due to mental illness, and employees report stress as the primary cause of their mental health problems.<sup>16</sup> It is important for employers to consider the 13 psychosocial factors that affect the mental health of all working Albertans.<sup>17</sup>



## Solution

Employers and employees need to be educated and empowered to make changes in their workplace that will benefit the mental health of the workforce. Further, investments in mentally healthy workplaces should be a priority.

# Workplace Psychological Health & Safety is Important



## Research

“It’s critical that employers consider the mental health of the entire workforce and develop a strategy that addresses all levels of mental health programming, including preventative measures to keep employees healthy, early intervention to navigate through challenges, and supportive policies to aid in effective transition back into the workplace.”

—Shepell, Mental Health Commission of Canada,<sup>16</sup> 2018



## Alberta Examples

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), Alberta Division’s Certified Psychological Health and Safety Advisor Training is a groundbreaking certification program for individuals and consultants who want to help organizations improve psychological health and safety in their workplaces. After completing the training, Advisors can address employers’ challenges, obstacles and needs, while creating more safe, healthy and productive places to work.

For more information on workplace training and conferences, please visit [www.workingstronger.cmha.ca](http://www.workingstronger.cmha.ca).

<sup>16</sup> Canadian employees report workplace stress as primary cause of mental health concerns (2018, July). *Mental Health Commission of Canada*. Retrieved from <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/news-article/13522/canadian-employees-report-workplace-stress-primary-cause-mental-health-concerns>

<sup>17</sup> 13 Factors: Addressing Mental Health in the Workplace (n.d.). *Mental Health Commission of Canada*. Retrieved from <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/13-factors-addressing-mental-health-workplace>

# Understanding Depression

Depression is a common mental illness, and its impact on our society is considerable. Advancing discussions of depression and other mental illnesses will decrease stigma and increase treatment options for those with mental illness.



## Issue Summary

Around the globe, more than 264 million people suffer from depression, and it is a leading cause of disability worldwide.<sup>18</sup> In Alberta, many people who suffer from depression do not receive the support or treatment they need.

“Depressive Disorders are among the most diagnosed mental illness. An estimated one in every four Canadians has a degree of depression severe enough to need treatment at some time in his or her life.”

–Canadian Mental Health Association, Alberta Division,<sup>19</sup> 2019



## Solution

A stepped, coordinated model of care offers varying levels of service depending on the needs of those seeking support. Continued efforts to destigmatize depression and other mental illnesses will decrease barriers to seeking out care.



# Understanding Depression



## Research

Research concluded that Albertans feel there are limited treatment options through the public system. “Barriers to receiving these treatments include wait times, appointment scheduling and service locations. Nearly all participants (86.7%) reported experiencing financial difficulties since their diagnosis. In the focus groups, high out-of-pocket treatment costs and gaps in social funding support were the main reasons identified for financial distress. Expanding the publicly-funded treatment options would reduce the out-of-pocket expense and improve participants’ supports.”

– “*Do I want to live like this?*”, the Canadian Mental Health Association, Alberta Division,<sup>20</sup> 2019



## Alberta Examples

Alberta’s Recovery Colleges offer peer support to individuals seeking help for mental health concerns, including depression. Recovery Colleges help people recognize and develop their own resourcefulness and awareness to support themselves or their loved one’s recovery journey. All courses are developed and delivered in partnership with peer supporters who are experts by experience: they have their own story of a mental health or substance use concern or are supporting a loved one.

<sup>18</sup> Depression (2020, January). *World Health Organization*. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression>

<sup>19</sup> Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) Research Project (2020, June). Canadian Mental Health Association. Retrieved from <https://alberta.cmha.ca/mdd/>

<sup>20</sup> Canadian Mental Health Association (2019). “*Do I want to live like this?*” Retrieved from <https://alberta.cmha.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Major-Depressive-Disorder-Research-Project-PDF-CMHA-Alberta.docx-1.pdf>

# Mental Health Promotion

Better mental health begins with health promotion for all Albertans. These are “upstream” approaches to a mentally healthy society, such as building resiliency, awareness and development. Mental health promotion is proven to be a low-cost solution with high returns on society's health.



## Issue Summary

Early intervention and education can reduce overall demands on the health care system.<sup>21</sup> Investments made in community-level programs strengthen mental health and wellbeing across the population.<sup>22</sup> In Alberta, disparate mental health promotion activities undertaken provincially lack strategic coordination.

Public education is fragmented between providers such as Alberta Health Services, the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) and other not-for-profits with little to no harmonization.



## Solution

Coordinated service and funding can ensure that mental health promotion in Alberta is as effective as it can be, both in cost and impact.

# Mental Health Promotion



## Research

“The considerable and growing annual cost of treating mental health problems and mental illness in Canada— \$42 billion nationwide and \$6.3 billion in workplaces—has brought increased attention to the early and continuous development of positive mental health. Through interventions in communities, workplaces and schools, mental health promotion (MHP) cultivates positive mental health for all people, including those living with and without a mental illness.”

—Cohesive, Collaborative, Collective: Advancing Mental Health Promotion in Canada,<sup>23</sup> CMHA



## Alberta Examples

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), Alberta Division’s Healthy Campus Alberta (HCA) is an example of a successful mental health promotion initiative. HCA is a community of practice that serves to partner with campuses and stakeholders interested in post-secondary mental health and addiction from across the province.

HCA’s vision<sup>24</sup> is to “educate, collaborate, and advocate; transforming culture and creating caring campus communities throughout the province of Alberta.” The project is committed to achieving the mission through accessible and sustainable program ideas, sharing best practices and research, and fostering a culture of support and compassion for all post-secondary institutions across Alberta. This work is done while recognizing the unique needs for success.

CMHA Calgary’s YouthSMART (Youth Supporting Mental Health and Resiliency Together) integrates collaborative, youth-initiated mental health learning opportunities in local junior and senior high schools. YouthSMART knows that students are incredibly influential amongst their peers, within their schools, families, and communities. As such, YouthSMART approaches youth as valuable peer contributors who are actively involved in the programming and opportunities that directly impact their wellness. YouthSMART works with youth leaders to transform the mental health culture of their schools.

<sup>21</sup> Canadian Mental Health Association (2018). *Mental health in the balance: Ending the health care disparity in Canada*. Retrieved from <https://cmha.ca/ending-health-care-disparity-canada>

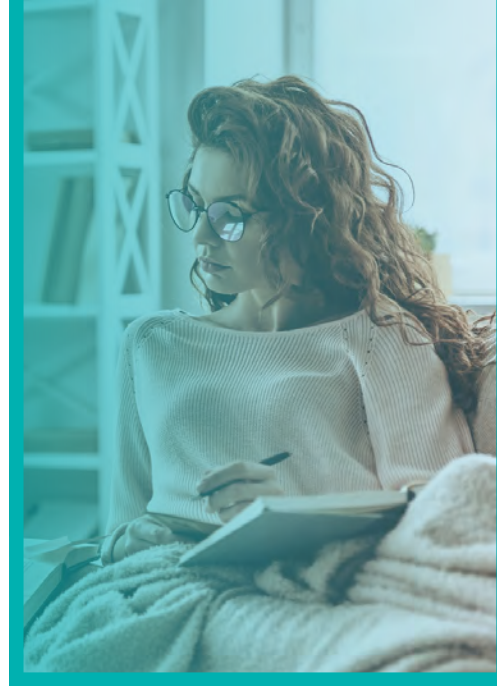
<sup>22</sup> World Health Organization (2004) *Promoting Mental Health: concepts, emerging evidence, practice: summary report*. Retrieved from [https://www.who.int/mental\\_health/evidence/en/promoting\\_mhh.pdf](https://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/en/promoting_mhh.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Canadian Mental Health Association (2019). *Cohesive, collaborative, collective: Advancing mental health promotion in Canada*. Retrieved from <https://cmha.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/MHP-Summary-Report-FINAL-EN.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Our approach (n.d.). *Healthy Campus Alberta*. Retrieved from <https://www.healthycampusalberta.ca/about-us/our-approach/>

# Community Development is Important

Communities need an opportunity to identify what mental health and addiction supports they need. It is important to invest in community development strategies for rural, remote and Indigenous communities. This approach will improve access and supports related to mental health and addictions in these underserved communities.



## Issue Summary

Accessing addiction and mental health services is challenging, especially in rural and remote areas. Frequently individuals must travel long distances to receive treatment and support for mental health and addiction issues. Sadly, some choose not to seek help because of these barriers.



## Solution

As much as possible, individuals should be able to receive services within their own communities.

# Community Development is Important



## Research

“A social determinants of mental health approach that includes the life-course perspective would require long-term and sustained policies that focus on reducing inequalities in health through community development, capacity building, partnerships, and local institution building across the life-course.”

–Social Determinants of Mental Health, World Health Organization,<sup>25</sup> 2014



## Alberta Examples

CMHA, Alberta Division’s Rural Mental Health Project is a community development project focused on the growth of local mental health community action plans in 150 communities across the province. Local community Animators in participating rural and remote communities convene local stakeholders, including community members and elders, agencies, educators, and community associations, to collectively scan the current mental health and addictions landscape.

Together, communities can set direction, generate solutions, and implement a transformational roadmap dedicated to supporting a mentally healthy community. Roadmaps will identify existing services, community strengths and opportunities, promising practices and a set of key strategic activities to consider as communities strive for better mental health.

For more information on the project, please visit: [www.ruralmentalhealth.ca](http://www.ruralmentalhealth.ca).

<sup>25</sup> World Health Organization (2014). *Social determinants of mental health*. Retrieved from [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/112828/9789241506809\\_eng.pdf?sequence=1](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/112828/9789241506809_eng.pdf?sequence=1)

# Access to Services Must Improve, Especially for Indigenous Communities

Indigenous communities are chronically underserved. Awareness and investment in Indigenous mental health and addictions treatment must increase.



## Issue Summary

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities in Alberta encounter unique circumstances, challenges, needs and opportunities. Many of the addiction and mental health issues faced by Indigenous populations are rooted in intergenerational trauma, historical and current socio-economic inequalities and discrimination.<sup>26</sup>



## Solution

Supports, culturally informed by Indigenous communities, must be made available and delivered by and for community members. A coordinated approach from multiple sectors can support and advance efforts in this critical area.

# Access to Services Must Improve, Especially for Indigenous Communities



## Research

“Services need to respond to the unique needs of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit people and communities, and the increasing diversity in our province. Out of this awareness emerged the priority of better meeting the needs of all Albertans, regardless of culture, geography, language, gender, sexual orientation, age or disability.”

–*Valuing Mental Health: The mental health review*, The Alberta Mental Health Review,<sup>26</sup> 2015



## Alberta Examples

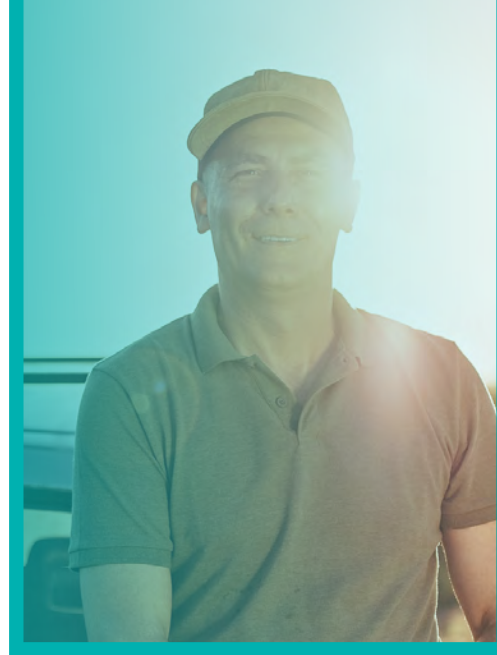
Youth Hubs are people-centred resources that respond to community needs and work to engage both youth and families. The resources provided assist youth with managing their health and gaining access to specialized services. The programs are designed, developed and implemented based on the needs and vision for each unique community, including Indigenous-focused supports. The evidence-based, integrated model of care provides a framework that supports a true collaborative approach to improving coordinated access to existing services, increase accessibility and increase alignment with youth services provincially.

<sup>26</sup> Government of Alberta (2015). *Valuing mental health: The mental health review*. Retrieved from <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/valuing-mental-health-report-alberta-mental-health-review-committee-2015>



# Recovery is Possible

Everyone's mental health recovery journey is different. It is important to support individuals and their families throughout this process.



## Issue Summary

Peer support is undervalued in Alberta, despite knowing the recovery-oriented practice allows people to experience great improvements in their lives through relatively small investments. Peers help alleviate some of the pressure on the healthcare system by reducing the need for hospitalization and emotional distress experienced by patients.



## Solution

Support and implement peer-informed and peer-led support programs that contribute to improved mental health and well-being.

# Recovery is Possible



## Research

“Peer support programs can help alleviate some of the pressure on Canada’s strained healthcare system by reducing not only the need for hospitalization, but also the emotional distress experienced by patients. They also help people develop the skills they need to take charge of their lives. Yet despite these benefits, peer support is still undervalued by the mental health community... People can experience great improvements in their lives through relatively small investments in peer support but growing and sustaining such initiatives requires adequate funding.”

–Mental Health Commission of Canada,<sup>27</sup> n.d.



## Alberta Examples

Alberta Recovery Colleges provide training and education, equipping and supporting individuals with lived experience. Individuals with lived experience transcend traditional barriers between those seeking help and those offering support.

Caregiver Connections is an Alberta-wide family support initiative, where peers support others in their journey caring for a child, youth, or other dependents with a mental health concern or illness. CMHA Regions in Alberta, including Edmonton, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, Lethbridge, Camrose and Wood Buffalo, conduct this network of peer-to-peer family support services, sharing information and resources to assist caregivers in achieving wellness for themselves in their journey supporting their child or other dependents.

Alberta Addicts Who Educate and Advocate Responsibly (AAWEAR) is a group of people in Alberta with addictions.<sup>28</sup> “Through supporting each other, educating others in the community, and raising awareness of health issues, AAWEAR strives for an improved quality of life for those in the drug-using community.”

<sup>27</sup> Peer Support (n.d.). *Mental Health Commission of Canada*. Retrieved from <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/what-we-do/recovery/peer-support>

<sup>28</sup> Our Mission (n.d.). *Alberta Addicts Who Educate and Advocate Responsibly*. Retrieved from <http://www.aawear.org/about>

# Addressing Alberta's Opioid Crisis

Supporting those living with addiction is essential. Alberta needs more funding and resources to go towards address the provincial opioid crisis.



## Issue Summary

2020 saw a record number of deaths due to opioids, with more than 1,144 out of 1,316 drug-related deaths being linked to opioid use.<sup>29</sup> The first two months of 2021 saw a 153 per cent increase in opioid-related fatalities compared to 2020.



## Solution

**A multi-pronged approach must be taken to reduce opioid-related deaths and addictions in Alberta, including strategic areas such as:**

- Harm-reduction initiatives
- Treatment
- Prevention
- Enforcement and supply control
- Collaboration
- Surveillance and analytics

# Addressing Alberta's Opioid Crisis



## Research

“In response to surveillance data that showed a further increase in the number of fentanyl-related deaths, the [Government of Alberta] Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health began leading the urgent opioid response in October 2016 and implemented a range of new tools to address overdoses and deaths related to fentanyl and other opioids.”

–Grant Toolkit and Resources, Accelerating Change Transformation Team, Alberta Medical Association,<sup>30</sup> n.d.



## Alberta Examples

Alberta Health Service’s Opioid Dependency Program provides maintenance treatment for individuals dependent on opioids.<sup>31</sup> The program also helps those dependent on opioids find services they need to live healthy lives. When properly prescribed and dispensed, a person on an opioid dependency program is able to function normally with no drowsiness and no withdrawal symptoms.

<sup>29</sup> Smith, A. (2021, April 21). Alberta opioid deaths continue to spiral, with 228 in first two months of 2021. *Calgary Herald*. <https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/alberta-opioid-deaths-continue-to-spiral-with-228-in-first-two-months-of-2021>

<sup>30</sup> Grant Toolkit and Resources (n.d.). *Accelerating Change Transformation Team*. Retrieved from <https://actt.albertadoctors.org/PMH/organized-evidence-based-care/Opioid/Pages/Grant-Toolkit-and-Resources.aspx>

<sup>31</sup> Opioid Dependency Program For Youth and Adults (n.d.). *Alberta Health Services*. Retrieved from <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/services/odp.aspx>

# COVID-19 Recovery

As we begin to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and look towards recovery, better access to mental health supports in our communities and workplaces is essential.



## Issue Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted every Albertan. The province has experienced increased rates of isolation, anxiety, depression and substance use.<sup>32</sup>

## Solution

Albertans must continue to advocate for funding and access to community-based mental health supports as the province moves forward with reopening to address the mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

# COVID-19 Recovery



## Research

“The pandemic is taking an emotional toll on people in Canada, as 77% of adults report feeling so-called negative emotions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The five most common responses across Canada were ‘worried or anxious,’ ‘bored,’ ‘stressed,’ ‘lonely or isolated’ and ‘sad.’”

–*UBC and CMHA Study: Summary of Findings Mental Health Impacts of COVID-19: Round 3*, 2021



## Alberta Examples

BounceBack® is a free program from CMHA that helps individuals build skills to improve mental health. Free for all Albertans 15+ and available virtually, BounceBack®, provides access to a trained coach and skill-building workbooks that can be selected to fit individual needs.

OSI-CAN is a community-based peer support initiative facilitating conscious connections and group support for military, first responders and public safety personnel dealing with operational and post-traumatic stress, which is showing at higher rates since COVID-19 began.<sup>34 35</sup> The peer support initiative includes family group support, assistance with service dog acquisition and referrals to equine therapy programs. OSI-CAN began in 2016 as a partnership between the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) and The Royal Canadian Legion, Saskatchewan Command. OSI-CAN operates over 20 groups across Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba.

211 is an essential service that helps Albertans find the right resource or service for whatever issue they need help with at the right time. 211 is available 24/7 by phone, text and chat. The service is free, confidential and available in over 170 languages over the phone. During COVID-19, 211 helps connect Albertans with resources and supports.

<sup>32</sup> University of British Columbia, Canadian Mental Health Association (2021). *Summary of Findings: Mental Health Impacts of COVID-19: Round 3*. Retrieved from <https://cmha.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/CMHA-UBC-Round-3-Summary-of-Findings-FINAL-EN.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Mental Health Impacts of COVID-19: Round 3 (2021, May). Canadian Mental Health Association. Retrieved from <https://alberta.cmha.ca/news/mental-health-impacts-of-covid-19-round-3/>

<sup>34</sup> Bridgland, V. M., Moeck, E. K., Green, D. M., Swain, T. L., Nayda, D. M., Matson, L. A., Hutchison, N. P., & Takarangi, M. K. (2021). Why the COVID-19 pandemic is a traumatic stressor. *PLOS ONE*, 16(1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0240146>

<sup>35</sup> Currie C. L. (2021). Adult PTSD symptoms and substance use during Wave 1 of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Addictive behaviors reports*, 13, 100341. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.abrep.2021.100341>

# 2SLGBTQIA+ Mental Health

The mental health and wellbeing of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community must be supported through the creation of safe spaces at home, in schools and workplaces.



## Issue Summary

2SLGBTQIA+ individuals have higher rates of mental health challenges than the general population and often struggle with depression, anxiety, trauma and self-acceptance due to ongoing discrimination.<sup>36</sup>



## Solution

**Alberta can support the mental health of 2SLGBTQIA+ people by**

- Creating overarching multiagency priorities to improve wellbeing
- Increasing access to affordable, high-quality, non-discriminatory health care services and insurance benefits
- Promoting economic security and financial stability by fostering inclusive labour practices and workplace policies
- Fostering inclusive, safe, welcoming and affirming schools for youth



# 2SLGBTQIA+ Mental Health



## Research

2SLGBTQIA+ individuals are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and substance abuse<sup>37 38</sup> and are double the risk for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than heterosexual people.<sup>39</sup> Further, 2SLGBTQIA+ youth are more at risk for suicide than their straight peers, with these youth five times more likely to consider suicide and seven times more likely to attempt suicide.<sup>37</sup> Certain factors that 2SLGBTQIA+ people experience can place them at a higher risk for suicide than others. These risk factors may include discrimination, lack of support, and mental illness including depression, anxiety and substance use, among others.



## Alberta Examples

Brite Line is Edmonton's first mental health and wellness helpline dedicated to supporting people in Edmonton's 2SLGBTQIA+ community.<sup>40</sup> Created by members of the community for the community, Brite Line is a safe place to call to connect with hope, courage, support, understanding and the freedom to be who one is.

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<sup>36</sup> Visions (2010). *BC's Mental Health and Addictions Journal*, 6(2). Retrieved from [https://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/sites/default/files/visions\\_lgbt.pdf](https://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/sites/default/files/visions_lgbt.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> Centre for Suicide Prevention (2018). *Sexual minorities and suicide*. Retrieved from <https://www.suicideinfo.ca/resource/sexual-minorities-suicide-prevention/>

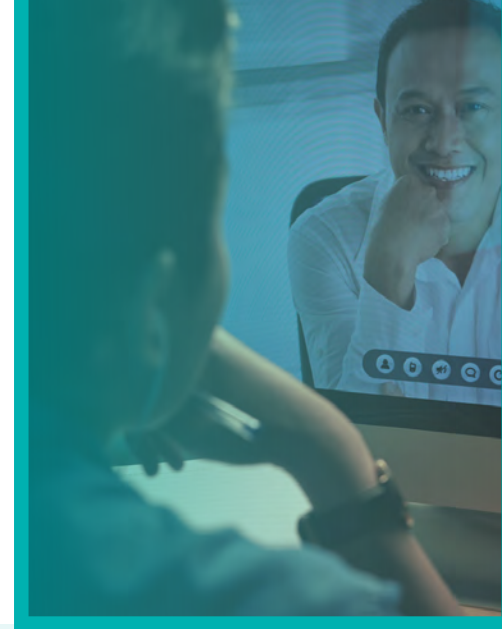
<sup>38</sup> Meyer, I.H. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay and bisexual populations: conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129(5), 674-697. doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1037%2F0033-2909.129.5.674>

<sup>39</sup> Roberts A.L., Austin S.B., Corliss H.L., Vendermorris A.K., & Koenen K.C. (2010). Pervasive trauma exposure among US sexual orientation minority adults and risk of posttraumatic stress disorder. *American Journal of Public Health*, 100(12), 2433-2441. doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.2105%2FAJPH.2009.168971>

<sup>40</sup> Here for you 24/7 (n.d.). *Brite Line*. Retrieved from <https://www.briteline.ca/>

# The Chronic Underfunding of Mental Health Services and Addiction Treatment in Alberta

A health-equity approach must be undertaken for mental health in Alberta, which means government spending targets for mental health and addictions should approach 12 per cent of the total health budget.<sup>41</sup>



## Issue Summary

Despite efforts made by different levels of government across the country, evidence shows we are not meeting the mental health needs of all Albertans. Programs and services are not as effective as they could be, and there are still long wait times for people to get the care they urgently need.



## Solution

All levels of government must invest in mental health and addictions treatment, along with wraparound supports such as recovery and resilience programs.

# The Chronic Underfunding of Mental Health Services and Addiction Treatment in Alberta



## Research

“In Canada, the estimated \$15.8 billion spent by the public and private sectors in 2015 on non-dementia-related mental health care represented approximately 7.2% of Canada’s total health spending (\$219.1 billion). This spending is well below that of other western countries. By comparison, the National Health Service in England spends 13% of its health spending on a similar set of services.”

—*Strengthening the Case for Investing in Canada’s Mental Health System: Economic Considerations*, Mental Health Commission of Canada,<sup>42</sup> 2017



## Alberta Examples

Recovery Colleges in Alberta provide a range of free, recovery-focused courses for individuals, families, workplaces and cultural and spiritual communities. Recovery Colleges provide transformational and progressive education through free, college-like courses, which are co-developed and co-facilitated with the community and peers. Alberta Recovery Colleges enable individuals to gain and retain hope, understand their strengths, engage in an active life, have personal autonomy, social identity, meaning and purpose in life.

<sup>41</sup> Institute of Health Economics (2008). *How much should we spend on mental health*. Retrieved from <https://www.ihe.ca/publications/how-much-should-we-spend-on-mental-health->

<sup>42</sup> Mental Health Commission of Canada (2017). *Strengthening the Case for Investing in Canada’s Mental Health System: Economic Considerations*. Retrieved from [https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/2017-03/case\\_for\\_investment\\_eng.pdf](https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/2017-03/case_for_investment_eng.pdf)

# The Need for Coordinated Investments to Promote Positive Mental Health

Given the widespread population impacts of mental illness, addictions and wellbeing, the Government of Alberta and municipal governments across the province must explore structural considerations to elevate the profile of mental health, mental illness and addictions across all ministries.<sup>41</sup>



## Issue Summary

Mental health affects all ministries, not just health. Education, Children's Services, Seniors and Housing, among many others, have a mental health aspect, as each population has their own mental health challenges. Further, local governments are tasked with addressing community issues like homelessness, addictions and affordable transportation. Without local coordination and cross-ministry investments, some populations are left without mental health support.



## Solution

In Alberta, the *Valuing Mental Health: Next Steps* report identifies an Executive Steering Committee.<sup>43</sup> This committee consists of the Government of Alberta Deputy Ministers and executive leadership of Alberta Health Services and Health Canada's First Nations and Inuit Health Branch. It exists as part of the governance structure in support of implementing the report recommendations, which was a promising first step. The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) in Alberta supports this cross-ministry approach to system improvement, including the blending of funding from multiple ministries.

# The Need for Coordinated Investments to Promote Positive Mental Health



## Research

“Over the coming years, multiple ministries and service agencies will be working closely together to better link our services to meet the needs of individuals and families. We recognize that a stronger cross-government approach is needed, working closely with clients, families, service partners, stakeholders and communities to incorporate their perspectives as we develop and improve our services and system –building on a strong foundation of cross-sectoral collaboration.”

–B.C.’s Mental Health and Substance Use Strategy,<sup>44</sup> 2017-2020



## Alberta Examples

Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) is a funding partnership between the Government of Alberta and participating municipalities or Metis Settlements.<sup>45</sup> FCSS receives its mandate from the Family and Community Support Services Act and the Family and Community Support Services Regulation and is an example of positive investment in mental health.

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<sup>43</sup> Government of Alberta (2017). *Valuing mental health: next steps*. Retrieved from: <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/9781460134771>

<sup>44</sup> Government of British Columbia (2017). *B.C.’s Mental Health and Substance Use Strategy*. Retrieved from [http://www.illbc.leg.bc.ca/public/pubdocs/bcdocs2017\\_2/681562/mental-health-substance-use-strategy.pdf](http://www.illbc.leg.bc.ca/public/pubdocs/bcdocs2017_2/681562/mental-health-substance-use-strategy.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> FCSS program overview (n.d.). *Government of Alberta*. Retrieved from <https://www.alberta.ca/family-and-community-support-services-fcss-program.aspx>

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## The Making Mental Health Matter in Alberta Tool Kit was created by the Canadian Mental Health Association in Alberta

E | [alberta@cmha.ab.ca](mailto:alberta@cmha.ab.ca)

