



Advancing Equity in Mental Health: An Action Framework

Canadian Mental Health Association Ontario
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Canadian Mental
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Ontario

Why Does Equity Matter in Mental Health?

Equity issues in mental health have a significant and often negative impact on the people, communities, and health system of Ontario. The issues are wide-ranging, complex, touch diverse regions and populations across the entire province. Consider that our lesbian, gay bisexual and trans (LGBT) youth are over four times more likely to attempt suicide than their straight peers. That people with mental health and addictions issues face discrimination in employment, housing and many other essential and health-promoting areas of life. That Northern Ontarians face the highest rates of depression, hospitalization and medication use, but have access to less comprehensive, available and accessible mental health and addictions services and supports.

To help us better understand these issues, the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario has developed a framework called **Advancing Equity in Ontario: Understanding Key Concepts**. In this framework, we identify three dynamic and overlapping relationships between equity and mental health:

- 1. Equity matters for mental health** - Due to decreased access to the social determinants of health, inequities negatively impact on the mental health of Ontarians. Marginalized groups are more likely to experience poor mental health and in some cases, mental health conditions. Marginalized groups also have decreased access to the social determinants of health that are essential to recovery and positive mental health.
- 2. Mental health matters for equity** - Poor mental health and mental health conditions have a negative impact on equity. And while mental health is a key resource for accessing the social determinants of health, historical and ongoing stigma has resulted in discrimination and social exclusion of people with lived experience of mental health and addictions issues.
- 3. Equity and mental health intersect** - People often experience both mental health issues and addictions and additional inequities (such as poverty, racialization, or homophobia) simultaneously. Intersectionality creates unique experiences of inequity and mental health that poses added challenges at the individual, community and health systems level.

These issues disproportionately impact three clusters of populations: People with lived experience of mental health and addictions issues; people who experience marginalization related to the social determinants of health such as sexual orientation, poverty, racialization and disability; and people with lived experiences who also experience additional marginalization related to the social determinants of health.

Challenging inequities related to mental health requires action at the service delivery, organizational, policy and planning levels. Based on a literature review and stakeholder consultations, CMHA Ontario has identified ways that the mental health and addictions sector can begin embedding equity into our work.



At the Service Delivery Level

Embed Equity in Service-Delivery and Planning, and Improve the Evidence-Base for Equity Issues in Mental Health

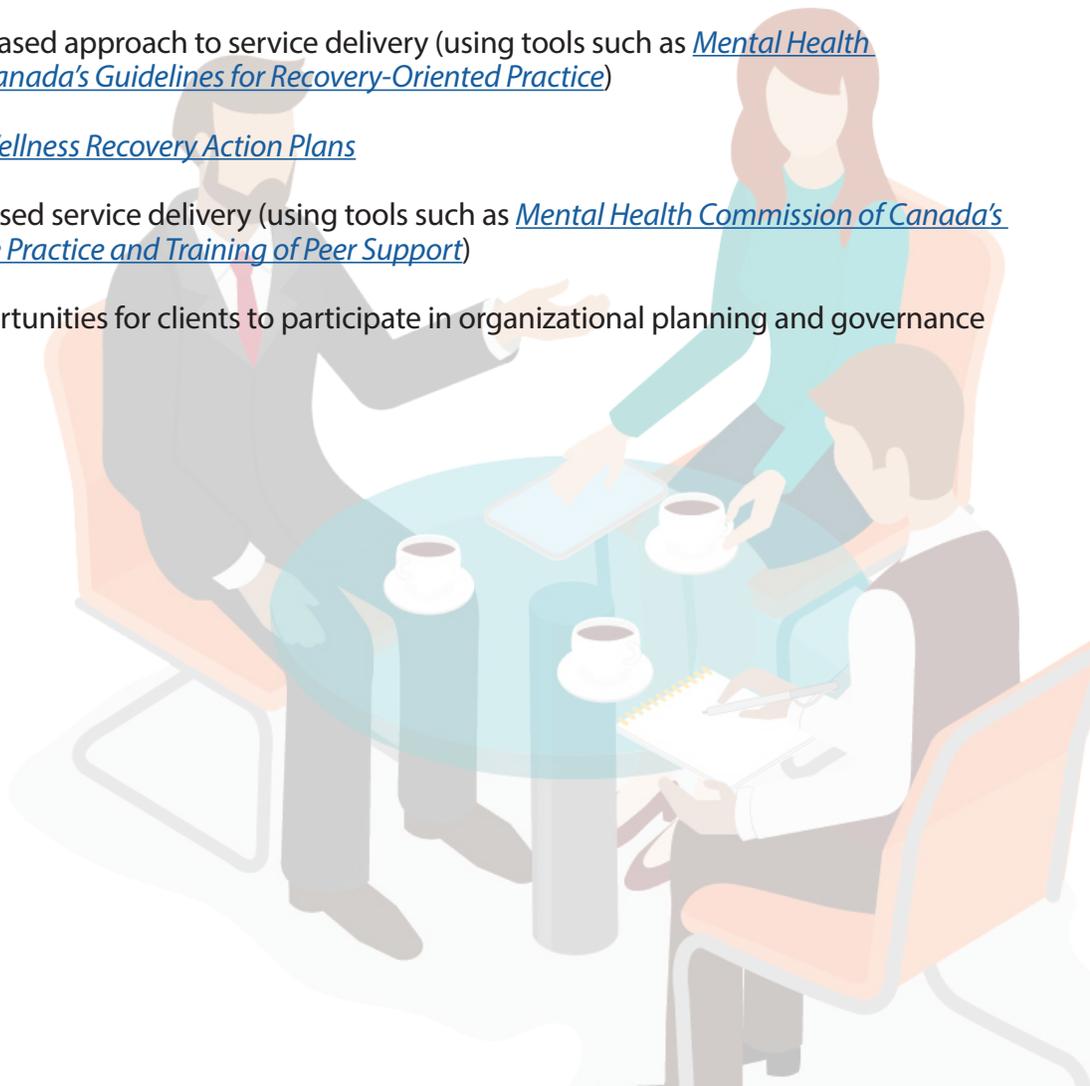
- Ask about and validate experiences of stigma, discrimination (on the basis of mental health and addictions, race, Aboriginal status, sexual orientation, gender identity and other relevant factors) as well as challenges in accessing the social determinants of health
- Collect client [socio-demographic data](#) to better understand who is being served at your agency
- Use a trauma-informed service delivery approach

Tackle the Social Determinants of Health

- Use evidence-based assessment tools such as the [Ontario Common Assessment of Need](#) to ask about the social determinants of health; ask follow up questions to better understand needs related to social determinants of health
- Refer/connect individuals to supports or assistance with accessing social determinants of health and follow up to see if the referral has happened

Challenge Discrimination and Foster Participation of People with Lived Experience of Mental Health and/or Addictions Issues

- Use a recovery based approach to service delivery (using tools such as [Mental Health Commission of Canada's Guidelines for Recovery-Oriented Practice](#))
- Explore use of [Wellness Recovery Action Plans](#)
- Support peer-based service delivery (using tools such as [Mental Health Commission of Canada's Guidelines for the Practice and Training of Peer Support](#))
- Encourage opportunities for clients to participate in organizational planning and governance



At the Organizational Level



Embed Equity in Service-Delivery and Planning, and Improve the Evidence-Base for Equity Issues in Mental Health

- Collect client [socio-demographic data](#) using a standardized tool across your agency
- Provide staff with training about a range of equity-related topics (e.g. asking the right questions about sexual identity; trauma informed service delivery; working with racialized or Aboriginal populations, etc.)
- Train staff on how to effectively use the [Ontario Common Assessment of Need](#) and use the data for organizational planning
- Identify and explore how to outreach effectively to underserved populations in your catchment area
- Conduct community-based needs assessments to better understand local needs of diverse and/or marginalized populations in your community
- Explore partnerships with organizations that have relationships or effectively serve diverse and/or marginalized populations in the catchment
- Use the [Health Equity Impact Assessment](#) tool to support organizational planning and decision making
- Hire people with lived experiences and people from underserved or marginalized communities for service delivery and program planning

Tackle the Social Determinants of Health

- Use the [Ontario Common Assessment of Need](#) to identify and respond to trends in client unmet needs related to the social determinants of health
- Develop cross-sectoral partnerships to develop strategies for addressing needs in your community

Challenge Discrimination and Foster Participation of People with Lived Experience of Mental Health and/or Addictions Issues

- Acknowledge that a one size fits all approach will not work for all populations
 - Hire people with lived experiences from a range of populations for service delivery and program planning
 - Develop partnerships with peer-based organizations
 - Recovery based approach (using tools such as [Mental Health Commission of Canada's Guidelines for Recovery-Oriented Practice](#))
 - Explore and create opportunities for client participation in organizational governance and operational planning
 - Explore development of a Client Bill of Rights
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At Regional Planning and Provincial Policy Level

Embed Equity in Service-Delivery and Planning, and Improve the Evidence-Base for Equity Issues in Mental Health

- Use the [Health Equity Impact Assessment](#) for decision making at regional planning or policy initiatives
- Mandate and facilitate collection of [socio-demographic data](#) in service delivery and utilization in your region
- Develop and embed equity-related targets using a range of mechanisms including accountability agreements

Tackle the Social Determinants of Health

- Adopt a 'Health in All Policies' and inter-ministerial approach to mental health and addictions policy
- Ensure there is adequate support and resources for the community-based mental health and addictions system

Challenge Discrimination and Foster Participation of People with Lived Experience of Mental Health and/or Addictions Issues

- Ensure there is adequate support and resources for peer-based organizations and peer support programs in your region
- Create opportunities for people with lived experiences to participate in regional planning and public policy initiatives
- Identify and embed performance indicators and targets related to the experiences of people with lived experiences in the mental health and addictions system
- Collect data related to discrimination and human rights in health care delivery and other publicly funded services such as housing and social assistance to better understand community issues and needs

