



Canadian Mental
Health Association
Ontario

Association canadienne
pour la santé mentale
Ontario

Statement from CMHA branches several weeks after COVID-19 began impacting service delivery

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) network consists of nearly 30 branches across the province that provide community-based clinical and social services to Ontarians living with mental health and addictions issues. Like every other health provider, we have spent the past few weeks adjusting to a new reality created by COVID-19 and are continually examining and altering our service delivery in the wake of ongoing developments associated with this pandemic. We are following the advice of local, provincial and federal health authorities as we aim to strike a balance between abundant caution to help stop the spread of the coronavirus and providing appropriate support for the individuals we serve.

For clients and their families, CMHAs across Ontario are an essential part of the health care system and are still here to provide help but you may experience changes to the services you're receiving. For example, many programs have moved to virtual platforms or are now delivered via the phone while other services may have been temporarily postponed. We ask for your patience as we provide alternative service delivery and work to provide essential mental health and addictions services that support our most vulnerable, high-risk clients and those in immediate crisis. We will continue to monitor all the developments of COVID-19 and hope to return to regular service levels as soon as possible.

For the general public who typically do not interact with CMHA branches, we ask that you take a moment to consider your own mental health during these challenging times. Social distancing, self-quarantining and isolation in order to protect public health and safety is a new norm. These new circumstances may lead to heightened symptoms of anxiety and depression for many people.

Take time to practice self-care, absorb news only from reliable sources and connect – over the phone or virtually – with friends and family to help you gain a sense of calm and balance amid the turmoil. If you find that you're struggling more than usual, we encourage you to try BounceBack (<https://bouncebackontario.ca/>), a free skill-building program managed by CMHA designed to help adults and youth over 15 manage mild to moderate depression and anxiety, stress or worry. Or, you can always reach out to a CMHA in your community. Find your branch on CMHA Ontario's website (<https://ontario.cmha.ca/>).

As this ongoing crisis unfolds, we encourage our provincial government to consider the vital role that community mental health and addictions plays in the broader health care sector. Our work will keep people out of the hospital emergency department, away from the justice system and on the job or happy at home. As the government has stated, mental health and addictions care should be on the same footing as physical health care in all respects. Therefore, any operational or capital investment to help the broader health sector manage in the fallout of COVID-19 must include dedicated and appropriate funds or resources for mental health and addictions care. This is a message that our provincial body, CMHA Ontario, together with Addictions and Mental Health Ontario and Children's Mental Health Ontario continues to deliver at Queen's Park.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the nearly 4,000 dedicated staff and volunteers at CMHAs across the province. As the backbone to CMHAs in Ontario, our staff and volunteers have exhibited poise, flexibility and incredible willingness to put client needs ahead of themselves. Many of our employees are practicing social distancing and working from home while trying to support service users who are struggling to cope. Their contribution is immeasurable. On behalf of all CMHA branches and CMHA Ontario, we thank our staff and volunteers for their commitment to mental health and addictions care during this difficult time.

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