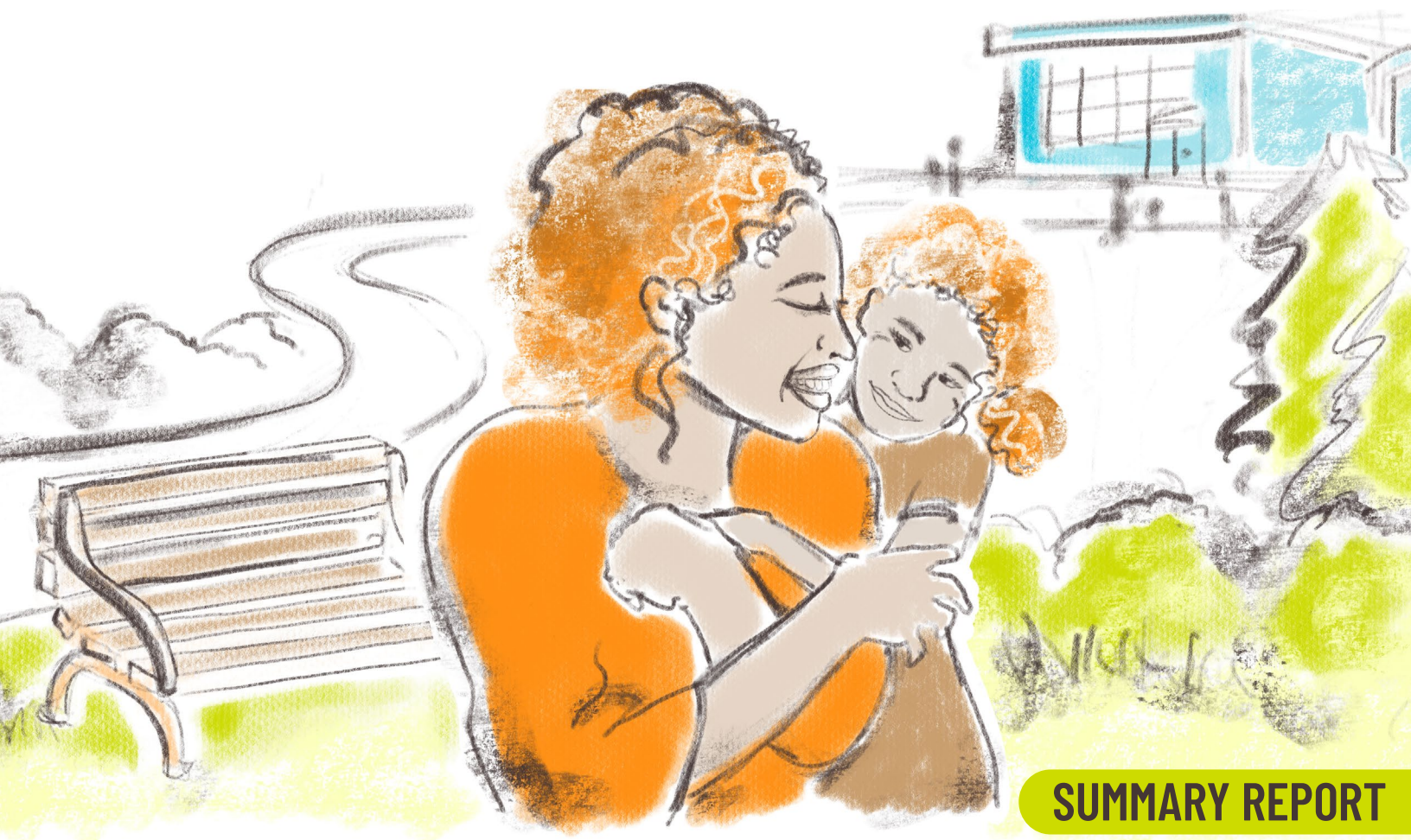


Cohesive, Collaborative, Collective: Advancing Mental Health Promotion in Canada



SUMMARY REPORT

MAY 2019



Canadian Mental
Health Association
Mental health for all



years of
community

MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION

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.

Mental health promotion is guided by a commitment to helping people from all walks of life to enjoy life, deal with life's challenges, improve their emotional and spiritual well-being and build long-lasting social connections and respect for the principles of culture, equity, dignity and social justice. MHP enhances individual coping strategies, help-seeking skills, and resiliency. It builds cohesive and inclusive communities by supporting social inclusion, effective parenting, and friendship building. It also supports the cultivation of mentally healthy workplaces through programs that support employee well-being. If implemented effectively, evaluated regularly, and sustained over the long term, MHP has the potential to reduce mental illness and mental health expenditures.

The Government of Canada has, over the past several years, supported the creation and growth of MHP in schools and communities across the country. Recent evaluations demonstrate that these efforts improve mental health awareness and health outcomes for those who participate, and CMHA applauds the government for this work. However, MHP programs have yet to see the consistent and long-term investment needed to ensure that they are comprehensively and consistently implemented in all settings, reaching all people in Canada. As the mental health crisis in Canada unfortunately escalates, there is a need for action through upstream measures.

Analyses of MHP demonstrate its positive impact and cost savings potential; therefore, policies and programs that promote mental health must be recognized and adopted as part of primary prevention. Canada's MHP landscape requires strategic and social investment to streamline effort, measure impact and progress, and increase uptake.

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), guided by its National Public Policy Working Group in conjunction with its Board Reference Group and its National Council of Persons with Lived Experience, has created this document to propose evidence-informed recommendations for government, policy makers, educators, community leaders, and community health organizations to advance MHP through the development of public policy and programming that will strengthen the social determinants of mental health. Below, we present six recommendations for action. To read the full 60-page document, please visit www.cmha.ca.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Involving people with lived experience (PWLE) in policy planning and program development engenders better population mental health outcomes; initiatives led by PWLE have proven particularly successful in ensuring that new programs are accessible, accommodating, relevant and acceptable in relation to the experience of mental health problems, mental illness and addiction. The participation of PWLE should be a standard in all levels of program development, including design, implementation, and evaluation.

MHP efforts must recognize the unique and often intersecting experiences of non-majority and vulnerable communities. Policy planning and program development and evaluation around MHP should be carried out in consultation with these populations—newcomers, women, members of the LGBT2SQ+ communities, low-income communities, rural communities, communities without reliable Internet, people with disabilities, older adults, youth, and Indigenous communities—and with organizations that provide health care and social services for non-majority populations should be grounded in culture and in supports that are community-controlled and culturally safe. This will assist the social services and mental health care sectors to support health outcomes for these communities and to become allies in efforts to advance the social determinants of mental health.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Revive and implement a National Mental Health Promotion Strategy and develop a framework for mental health analysis to ensure that the mental health implications of current and forthcoming federal policies and programs are considered.

Although the development of MHP strategies and programs in Canada has been extensive and robust over the past two decades, MHP has yet to be systematically implemented in the same way as physical health promotion interventions, due to the lack of an easily understood and practical framework to facilitate implementation. A formal National Mental Health Promotion Strategy can leverage the principles of MHP to address the mental health inequities attributable to socio-economic status, geographic location, social isolation and/or marginalization. A National Mental Health Promotion Strategy must not only provide clear direction for the implementation and evaluation of MHP initiatives in Canada, it must also outline a framework for mental health analysis, which would apply a mental health lens to examine the mental health impact of current and future policies.

2

Strengthen the evidence base for mental-health-promotion-based policy-making by supporting research that draws on economic analysis and program evaluation; in the medium- to long-term, boost research funding to support the collection and analysis of epidemiological and economic data to identify key priorities for MHP programming.

The growing evidence base for the effectiveness of MHP programs profiles high-impact efforts through evaluations and cost-benefit analyses. Experts in Canada, the US, the UK, Australia, and the Netherlands have produced considerable and compelling evidence that makes the social and economic case for MHP. However, precise examination of the economic return on investment suffers from methodological challenges, limited capacity for evaluation, and a lack of longitudinal and diversity data. Although evidence shows these programs to be effective, critical evaluations that consider the long-term impact of MHP programs are scant. Canada has a burgeoning but less developed conceptual and evidence base for MHP, which has led to its limited integration into the settings known to cultivate the social determinants of mental health. Investments in research and evaluation to collect and analyze epidemiological and economic data are important so that population and community-level benefits can be measured and key priorities for program replication and scaling can be identified.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3

Increase from 7.2% to 9%, the funding allocation for mental health in Canada, allocating specific funds to support enhancement, streamlining, and partnership development in the MHP landscape.

Despite a growing body of literature and increased political attention to upstream measures, the settings where MHP has the greatest potential to thrive (e.g., education) are under-resourced to support MHP, hindering achievement of MHP's whole-of-society objectives. An overall increase of about 2% is urgently needed to improve and protect the mental health of people in Canada; concurrently, a share of this 2% increase must specifically support enhancement, streamlining, and rigorous evaluation of MHP initiatives across settings. Specific funding can introduce MHP into communities and settings that are currently not being reached; funding is also vital to facilitate existing programs' long-term sustainability. Enhanced and ongoing investment in MHP would ensure that interventions are sufficiently resourced, well-equipped for assessment and improvement, and robust enough to validate policy and advocacy efforts. It could especially bolster those initiatives designed to include underserved populations by leveraging appropriate models, implementation strategies and outcomes measures.

4

Replicate, scale, and make sustainable population-based programs that have been evaluated as accessible, culturally safe, and intersectional, and that account for the social determinants of mental health.

Mental health is a multi-dimensional phenomenon determined and constituted by the social context in which people and communities exist. Efforts must be made to replicate, scale and make sustainable MHP initiatives that address mental health as an experience immediately and intimately connected to the socio-economic context. This means bolstering programs that are inclusive to Indigenous peoples in Canada, newcomers (including immigrants and refugees), girls and women (including pregnant women and new mothers), older adults, members of the LGBT2SQ+ community, unemployed persons, and people with disabilities. Doing so does not require investments in distinct or new programs; rather, it requires building intersectionality—via program design, implementation, delivery and evaluation—into programs that work. In addition, individualized strategies to manage emotions, encourage help-seeking, and build resiliency in vulnerable populations cannot eliminate the racism, discrimination and systemic inequity that continue to impact mental health. In turn, MHP efforts must be complemented by meaningful policy and social changes that ensure freedom from violence and discrimination and that promote social and economic inclusion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

5

Enhance the impact of MHP in Canada through investment in social marketing campaigns that enhance mental health awareness and reduce stigma.

Experiences of mental illness or serious mental health problems are frequently complicated by stigma, the social discrimination and injustice experienced by people who live with mental illnesses. The social endorsement of stereotypes about and prejudice against people who live with mental illnesses generates counter-factual ideas about mental illness and mental health. Specifically, if MHP is to achieve its transformational goals, ending stigma must be a central component of MHP efforts. In the Canadian context, several national and provincial-level interventions have been very successful in enhancing mental health awareness and reducing stigma. Further investment would help bridge the information deficit about mental health, creating opportunities for individuals, social and professional communities, and workplaces to address mental health, learn about and share strategies, successes, and challenges and mobilize action on the implications of stigma.

6

Increase overall social spending by 2% above current levels to support social infrastructure that not only addresses the social determinants of health but also addresses burgeoning socio-economic challenges that impact individual and community mental health.

Canada faces several accelerating socio-economic challenges that adversely impact individual and community mental health: an aging population, the technologization of social life, and a changing employment landscape all generate stress, uncertainty, precarity and exclusion for people and communities. Unfortunately, mental health problems or mental illnesses are often treated as individual issues distinct from broader socio-economic and environmental issues. MHP, with its focus on skill development, unintentionally but disproportionately makes individuals responsible for their own resilience; it must be bolstered by a broader, social commitment to build equitable social, economic and political environments in support of mental health.

RECOMMENDATIONS

An increase of 2% in social spending is necessary to address persistent challenges such as poverty and unemployment, but also to better connect to older adults, youth, and unemployed and underemployed persons who are at the heart of emerging trends in Canada that impact mental health:

OLDER ADULTS

As Canada's population of older adults grows, MHP programs for seniors will also need to grow. The long-term effectiveness of these efforts depends on investments that meet the specific needs and diversity of older adults, such as financial security, social inclusion, and home care.

YOUTH

The impact of social media on youth mental health is considerable, with excitement about social media's benefits tempered by concerns around its ability to instigate feelings of loneliness, low self-esteem, symptoms associated with depression, and a reduced sense of social connectedness. From Fear of Missing out (FoMo) and cyberbullying to an image-saturated culture, social media can have potentially devastating consequences for all youth, but especially for girls and young women. MHP efforts must begin to help youth integrate into supportive environments and cultivate healthy personal and interpersonal relationships with social media.

UNEMPLOYED AND UNDEREMPLOYED PERSONS

The rapid and dramatic shift in work arrangements also impacts mental health. Recent studies show that casual and "gig" workers report extremely high rates of depression and anxiety and experience stress due to social isolation and pressure to be well-rated by customers. Future investments to adapt or develop MHP programs ought to also consider the underrepresented population of gig and temporary workers in Canada.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The recommendations included here call for greater federal attention to and investment in mental health promotion, which can generate: a streamlined and intersectional MHP effort, underlined by a cohesive understanding of MHP; more and better data; long-term investment to support program longevity; and longitudinal studies to evaluate population-level and economic impact. All of this can support increased uptake of MHP as well as specialized focus that ensures MHP is evidence-informed and equipped to meet the needs of vulnerable and non-majority populations. It has emphasized the importance of intersectional MHP that accounts for a set of emerging socio-economic challenges across Canada.



Founded in 1918, the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is the most established, most extensive community mental health organization in Canada. Through a presence in more than 330 communities across every province and one territory, CMHA provides advocacy and resources that help to prevent mental health problems and illnesses, support recovery and resilience, and enable all Canadians to flourish and thrive.

Visit the CMHA website at

[WWW.CMHA.CA](http://www.cmha.ca)