



Key messages

Storytelling is a fundamental part of being human.

- Our stories make us human. They're how we pass down information, culture, language and ways of life. They connect us with our families and ancestors.
- Collectively and individually, we have multiple layers and stories that make us who we are and while each year 1 in 5 Canadians experience a mental illness or mental health issue, 5 in 5 of us – that's all people – have mental health.
- Stories can be shared in many different forms – written, spoken, or through music, art, movement, nature, and more.
- Sharing personal experiences and stories is not only valuable for promoting understanding – it can help us see the world from different perspectives.

Stories help build connection and stronger communities.

- When we connect with characters in a story, our brain releases oxytocin. Oxytocin is associated with empathy, a building block in helping us connect and deepen our relationships.¹
- Stories let us share information in a way that creates empathy which in turn promotes a feeling of emotional connection between individuals, groups, families and communities.
- While we don't all share the same experiences, we do all share a similar array of emotions, fears and hopes.
- These emotions, fears and hopes create a connection between the listener, the characters and the storyteller. That connection, the one that recognizes the ways that we're the same and promotes understanding despite our differences, is the foundation of building stronger communities.
- The sense of community that storytelling creates is more vital today than ever before.

¹ <https://www.verywellmind.com/how-storytelling-is-good-for-your-mental-health-5199744>



Storytelling supports mental health and reduces stigma.

- Sharing stories and experiences with each other, especially of difficult times and challenges, can benefit a person's mental health and help others feel like they are not alone.
- For those struggling with mental health challenges, hearing others' brave stories can offer a sense of comfort and solidarity that helps to reduce feelings of isolation.
- The vulnerability we show in telling our stories gives other people hope, courage and strength to overcome their own struggles.
- Research shows that using expressive writing (a method of storytelling) can help us deal with stressful and traumatic events and can even positively impact our health.²
- Sharing experiences with each other can help destigmatize mental health disorders. The more we share stories of the challenges and difficulties we've overcome, the easier it is to talk about such conditions and disorders.³
- By hearing, seeing and learning of others' experiences in the world through storytelling, we can destigmatize mental health and raise awareness of important issues, while encouraging individuals to seek help and support.

The campaign

The Canadian Mental Health Association's annual Mental Health Week looks to shift attitudes and perceptions about mental health. The 2023 theme is MY STORY.

- Each May, people across Canada rally around CMHA's Mental Health Week.
- Inaugurated by CMHA in 1951, May 1-7, 2023 marks the 72nd annual Mental Health Week in Canada.
- Mental Health Week is a social change campaign to educate the public and shift beliefs and perceptions about mental health. It helps promote behaviours and attitudes that foster well-being, support good mental health and create a culture of understanding and acceptance.
- Mental Health Week 2023 and MY STORY will shine a spotlight on community mental health care programs, communities and voices while showcasing the importance

² Opening Up by Writing It Down, Pennebaker, JW and Smyth, J.M., 2016

³ <https://www.calmsage.com/the-power-of-storytelling-on-mental-health/>



of securing universal mental health care, what it can look like and how mental health care can be expressed and nurtured.

- Visit www.mentalhealthweek.ca for more information and to download resources.
- Connect with us on social media using the hashtags #MyStory and #MentalHealthWeek.

Get involved

We all have different, yet equally valuable stories which can be used to share one key message: universal mental health care is important and needed now!

- We can harness the power of storytelling to help build connections and understanding between each other while strengthening our communities.
- Get involved:
 - Listen and support those who share their story with you, there is vulnerability, strength and benefits in these interactions;
 - Share your story with someone close to you, this helps destigmatize the mental health conversation;
 - Learn about different types of mental health supports and how they can be used to support you or someone in your community;
 - Understand (the differences between) mental health and mental illness;
 - Share a message of thanks for a community program or person who has helped you in your mental health journey.

Find support

If you or someone you know needs mental health support, there are free community programs and services available to help.

- To access free mental health and addictions programs, services and supports tailored to the needs of your local community, contact your local CMHA.
- For free resources and 24/7 counselling over the phone, visit the Government of Canada's Wellness Together portal.
- If you are thinking about suicide, call the Canada Suicide Prevention Service toll-free at 1-833-456-4566 (1-866-277-3553 in Quebec).



Create lasting impact

Canadians can join the fight for universal mental health care by supporting community organizations like the Canadian Mental Health Association.

- We all need care to thrive but as things are, only some of us will get it. Mounting mental health needs are straining our systems and for two out of three of us, care isn't available due to cost, wait times, location, or lack of equitable access.
- [Call on your local government representatives](#) to ensure mental health supports are available and funded outside of a hospital or doctor's office.
- [Donate](#) to the Canadian Mental Health Association to fund their work for a better future – one where everyone can access free and universal mental health care.