



# “Real Talk”

## Mental health stories from across Canada

What are the real-life experiences of people in the mental health system? We went across the country asking them. Here's what they told us.



### Psychiatrists and doctors are hard to come by.

I did eventually see a nurse. She actually said, “You need to see a psychiatrist.” I never got that appointment. Nothing ever came of it. I just fell through the cracks.

*(Halifax, Nova Scotia)*

Here in Vancouver, you cannot find psychiatrists whatsoever. Waiting lists are two years or more. Maybe you never get one.

*(Vancouver, BC)*

Trying to get a psychiatrist in rural areas is next to impossible.

*(Grande Prairie, Alberta)*

I can't access a psychiatrist right now. I can't access a family doctor. So I don't have anyone following my medications anymore. I have to go to walk-in clinics for my psychiatric medications, so no one's overseeing or adjusting them.

*(Ottawa, Ontario)*



### Waitlists make people sicker.

I found out from my doctor that it was a three-year wait for therapy. Okay. I'm really on my own here.

*(Regina, Saskatchewan)*

We went back six times to Emergency. My partner's been on the waitlist for a doctor since we moved here. So two and a half years and he's still waiting. It's really bad.

*(Whitehorse, Yukon)*



## Private services, like psychologists and counsellors, are often out of reach.

I have to pick between therapy and eating.

*(Edmonton, Alberta)*

I can't afford \$100 for a therapy session. It's hard because some people want to go to therapy and can't afford it.

*(Charlottetown, PEI)*



## When there's a crisis, the traditional response is to send police. We need a community response through mental health crisis teams.

Sending guys in with guns, like we're in some wild west movie, does not solve the problem.

*(Edmonton, Alberta)*

I feel like every time I tried to attempt suicide, they sent the police, but I don't think the cops are trained to deal with it.

*(Edmonton, Alberta)*

If you talk to the hospital crisis team, they might bring police in. It could just escalate into God knows what, and as an Indigenous person, I don't need that at all.

*(Regina, Saskatchewan)*



## When people have nowhere to go for care, they wind up in the Emergency Department. But it is often a revolving door—or a dead end.

They're not listening to him, or to what his issue really is. They say: "We got him medication. He's fine." They release him after six hours. Well, guess what? He's coming back because it's not solved.

*(Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan)*

I needed help. I was told "Well, go directly to the Emergency" and then Emergency says like, "Oh, well, it's just your alcoholism. Stop drinking and go home."

*(Vancouver, BC)*

As an Indigenous person seeking help at the hospital, I would have to be really, really desperate to go, because I've heard too many stories about people who were in crisis and getting turned away and not getting the help they needed.

*(Regina, Saskatchewan)*



## Sometimes their mental health is minimized.

If you're not visible, you're invisible in the Emergency Department. You need to be bleeding from the wrists.

*(Edmonton, Alberta)*

You're sitting in the Emergency Room and you're told "It's really busy here because we're dealing with people who are sick."

*(Charlottetown, PEI)*



## It's a struggle to find mental health care in your community.

I found the system really hard to navigate. You almost have to be a clinician to be able to do things properly. It's just pure unfair.

*(Prince George, British Columbia)*



## People need help finding what's available.

I need someone to advocate for me, to come with me. Many people with mental health issues are struggling with communication, and the onus is on them to communicate. That's like you are having your baby and you give yourself your own epidural. It just makes no sense.

*(Winnipeg, Manitoba)*



## There is so much more to mental health care than doctors and medication.

I started going to the social programming. It was just as important to my treatment as going to my psychiatrist or taking my medication.

*(Halifax, Nova Scotia)*



## Even a doctor might not know what's out there.

I have gone to my doctor and asked for mental health services and he said, "Maybe you can investigate that." You just want someone to grab hold of your hand, and say "Can we do this together?" As opposed to "Do the research and let us know."

*(Guelph, Ontario)*



## Clubs and recovery groups— in-person or online— offer help and hope that complements clinical supports.

I spent many years thinking that counselling was the only option, and I couldn't afford that. I didn't know a lot about community services. I just show up at any one of the groups and they are relevant.

*(Guelph, Ontario)*



## Peer support is a mental health service that matches people with trained peers.

The best interaction I've had wasn't with a doctor. It was with a peer.

*(Edmonton, Alberta)*

Peer support has been the most important part of my recovery journey, bar none.

*(Guelph, Ontario)*

If my peer supporter doesn't hear from me, she'll call me or email me and say, "Hey, what's going on? Do you need to talk?" She'll notice if I'm slipping.

*(Charlottetown, PEI)*

Peer supporters can take all their lived experience and say, "Hey, I have schizophrenia, too. Hey, I was homeless, too. Hey, I was an addict, too — and it's not always gonna be like this." Sometimes that's all you need to hear.

*(Winnipeg, Manitoba)*



## Community organizations offer "stepping stones" to employment and housing that help people recover and stay well.

Being employed makes me feel important. It makes me feel that I'm giving back to society. It gives me a feeling that I have a voice. And it gives me a reason to live.

*(Charlottetown, PEI)*

I moved into transitional housing, and while there's been some bumps in the road, I've learned how to cook for myself. I keep my space clean. I'm proud of my space. It'd be nice to finally have my own spot.

*(Charlottetown, PEI)*

The people who use mental health services are the experts on what works. They're telling us how to do things differently. We really need to listen.

Everyone should be able to get the supports they need. Whoever they are, wherever they live, whatever they need. It is that simple.



Canadian Mental  
Health Association  
*Mental health for all*

### About the Canadian Mental Health Association

Founded in 1918, the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is the most established, most extensive community mental health organization in Canada providing services, programs and supports in 330 communities across all provinces and the Yukon.