



Rural Micro-Grant in Action: Waitlist Coordinator

With support from West Fraser, CMHA Fort Frances created a new Waitlist Coordinator position for their District Mental Health Services for Older Adults Program (DMHSOAP). This position provided necessary system navigation and care to seniors waiting for DMHSOAP services. The Waitlist Coordinator also improved staff morale and significantly streamlined the program's administrative procedures.

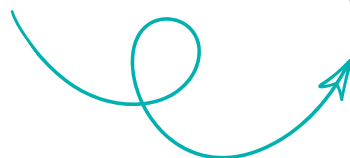
The need

CMHA Fort Frances manages the DMHSOAP, a community-based mental health service for seniors in Ontario's Kenora and Rainy River districts. The program serves older adults (65+) and caregivers/care providers of seniors with dementia or serious mental illnesses.

The DMHSOAP was grappling with significant waitlists, primarily due to growing needs in the community, and a lack of other services in the area. This increased demand had stretched the program's resources, causing stress for existing staff who already had full workloads, and created a long waitlist for seniors.

The grant in action

Funding allowed CMHA Fort Frances to hire a dedicated Waitlist Coordinator who was responsible for triaging clients, offering vital interim support to individuals, responding to calls, and providing essential short-term case management. This new role was designed to expedite referrals, address mental health challenges for seniors while they waited, and ensure clients and their caregivers on the waitlist stay connected to care.



The impact

An evaluation found that the new Waitlist Coordinator position had significant benefits for both clients and the organization.

1. Improved sense of support

The Waitlist Coordinator supported seniors and their caregivers by regularly checking in with individuals on the waitlist. This ensured they felt supported and received the necessary care.

"I could talk with someone, could talk about how I was feeling."

– a Participating Senior

2. Improved system navigation

The Waitlist Coordinator was able to help seniors and their caregivers understand and navigate the system. Clients shared that the Waitlist Coordinator helped them understand how the mental health system works.

"I learned how the system works. Learning the little things I could do to help her was useful."

– a Caregiver



3. Reduced staff stress and guilt

The dedicated Waitlist Coordinator significantly reduced stress and guilt for Geriatric Mental Health Workers. Previously, these workers experienced anxiety and worry about the mental health of waitlisted clients who lacked support. With the Coordinator actively monitoring and supporting these individuals, the other staff reported feeling significantly less concern, knowing that a consistent and skilled professional was managing the waitlist.

"Yeah, it feels like they're not out in the cold waiting all alone with nothing. They're more in the lobby with a cup of coffee and a magazine with someone to talk to [...]"

– Geriatric Mental Health Worker

4. Improved streamlining of administrative tasks

The Waitlist Coordinator's role was crucial in reducing the administrative burden on Geriatric Mental Health Workers. By handling incoming referrals, completing initial documentation, and acting as the main contact for clients awaiting service, the Coordinator allowed the staff to focus on core mental health services.

"It feels like that aspect of the job is taken care of. When I go into someone's file, after I take them on, I'll see that a lot of the stuff's already done and it's a nice surprise."

– Geriatric Mental Health Worker

CMHA acknowledges the full evaluation of CMHA's West Fraser Rural Mental Health Micro-Grant Initiative: Mitri, K. & Newberry, J. (2025). From Isolation to Connection: Evaluating the Impact of the West Fraser Rural Mental Health Grant Initiative. Evaluation report submitted to the Canadian Mental Health Association [CMHA]: Taylor Newberry Consulting. For more information, contact ruralandremote@cmha.ca.



Canadian Mental
Health Association
Mental health for all