

CMHA moves forward on urgent mental health care centre

The Canadian Mental Health Association of York Region and South Simcoe is moving forward with a new mental health hub for the community, following an "incredible" commitment from the Province of Ontario.

On Thursday, the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) welcomed an investment from the Ministry of Health of up to \$200,000 to make their long-held vision of the York Region Mental Health & Addictions Crisis Centre a reality.

Once borne to fruition, the hub will serve as a resource for people experiencing mental health or addiction crises 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and will serve as an alternative to hospital emergency departments.

"The York Region Mental Health and Addictions Crisis Hub will make a significant difference for our community in York Region by targeting specific gaps in mental health and addiction services," said Christine Elliott, Ontario's Minister of Health, in a statement. "Supporting innovative projects like this is part of our government's plan to build a comprehensive and connected mental health and addictions system that offers Ontarians better access to high-quality care, when and where they need it."

From the perspective of Rebecca Shields, Executive Director of the CMHA York Region and South Simcoe, it is an "incredible commitment" that will lead to a "best-in-class" facility for the community.

"People are now going to have a 24/7 dedicated specialized facility where they can walk into a place that is welcoming, provides care for them or their loved ones who might be in crisis, [and] it is going to help individuals twelve and up," says Ms. Shields. "We know lots of times mental health starts in their youth, so this will have specialized care for youth and will be able to help people."

"The other part of this is for crisis. [People are] coming in through paramedics and police now and they can come to this facility, which means they are not in the general hospital, but come into a truly welcoming [environment that] supports their recovery and gets them connected immediately to community services because we're all going to be right there on site to make sure people get what they need."

The investment of up to \$200,000 from Ontario's Ministry of Health means that the CMHA can begin moving forward on planning, including retaining architects and engineers to get the job done. Coupled with finding a location and developing their suite of clinical expertise, they hope to have the 20-bed facility opened in the next two years.

"We're now going to move as quickly as we can because now we have the support to know that we can start to build and draft the plan," says Ms. Shields. "We will be consulting with the community partners and people with lived experience all along the way to make sure that we're building something that truly meets the needs of residents."

This mental health and addictions hub was first envisioned by the CMHA more than two years ago, long before a new global pandemic was ever a thought. From the outset, among their concepts for the facility were individualized rooms with private bathrooms. That was a must to give people in crisis the respect and privacy they need to heal. Now, with new health protocols ever-present, they are now somewhat ahead of the game.

"What we're aware of, since the pandemic, is we realized the volumes are going to be much higher because we're seeing [the pandemic take its toll] on mental health," says Ms. Shields. "For people in our community, we want to make sure when people need care, they can walk in and get it right away. The one other thing that has changed [due to the pandemic] is we will be re-looking at what the needs are in the community."

"We will be working with all our community partners and we're excited to open up a conversation with our community around this to make sure it is going to meet the needs of our community members and their families to reflect the diversity of our region. We just hope for everyone's support and everyone believes mental health is health, and we really do need to make sure that nobody is

suffering. We're so privileged to work on behalf of our community to help build this much-needed service.?

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter