

Mental Health Association seeks public input on new Strategy

The Canadian Mental Health Association of York Region and South Simcoe is looking for the community's input in developing its new Strategic Plan.

As the organization's (CMHA-YRSS) current Strategic Plan nears the end of its life, the service provider has launched a community-wide survey which, they say, will be important in 'shaping the future of mental health and addiction care' in the communities they serve.

The survey will be open until 5 p.m. on July 30 and all feedback is confidential and anonymous.

'We're really doing our best to hear from the community about what they need for community mental health and addiction services and CMHA in particular,' says Rebecca Shields, CEO of the CMHA-YRSS.

Shields says they are proud of their outgoing Strategic Plan, which had a major focus on 'operational excellence', thought leadership in the community, and, most importantly, boosting access to mental health services. All of this culminated with the announcement earlier this month that the York Region Mental Health Community Care Hub was moving closer to reality.

'It's time to say, what's next?' says Shields. 'We will be building up the hub and we need to understand where we were going? what our engagement was six years ago led us here and now what's next? I am excited to hear from people about what they think the community needs for community mental health and addiction services are for the future. What do they want us to focus on? We're here to serve our community, so we really need to hear from our people to make sure we're doing the right things.'

'The questions are really about vision; they're really about what's important. We can't be everything to everybody, but we want to do the right things, the most important things, the things that make an impact in people's lives, and make sure we are responding to the needs of the community. That is what this is about and that will be the foundation of our next 2026-2028 three-year plan.'

A mandate of the CMHA-YRSS is to be there to support an individual not only from a treatment and recovery from mental illness perspective, but also wellbeing and resiliency in the community.

Through the outgoing Strategic Plan, the CMHA-YRSS expanded its BounceBack in Ontario Structured Psychotherapy program, with a special focus on youth through the lens of cognitive behavioural therapy. They launched a wellbeing program for newcomers and refugee populations in multiple languages, gender-affirming healthcare and specialized services for the 2SLGBTQ community, and continued to advance its mobile mental health unit, MOBYSS, to serve youth where they are.

'We really looked at providing meaningful access to people,' says Shields. 'I am so proud of the incredible team that once again people say, 'This is what we want you to do, CMHA.' And you can trust that we're going to put all of our effort, enthusiasm and bright minds and hard work into achieving that. We really understand the needs are still growing and we want to make sure that we're meeting the need and we're also making it with the York Region Mental Health Community Care Hub. The vision and focus of that is, what needs to be changed so somebody's first crisis is their last crisis? It's not just to provide care, but how do we actually solve [the issue] so people are able to recover, they're not in the cycle of crisis, that we're actually providing solutions, that we're innovating? those are the things that are really important, so that when people receive care from us, it is actually to help them achieve their desired outcomes.'

'There are wonderful ideas out there and we really want to hear from the community and understand what is important for people, and what should we focus in on? How can we make community care even better for our community? We're a leading branch [of the CMHA, so] how do we continue to lead and demonstrate that we're here and supporting and working with our community?'

To take part in the short survey, visit www.surveymonkey.com/r/VR7SQN7.

All feedback is confidential, anonymous, and managed by the CMHA-YRSS' partner, Santis Health.

By Brock Weir