

Board of Health Briefing Report

To: Chair and Members of the Board of Health
Date: May 3, 2023
Topic: **Mental Health Promoting Policies**
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RECOMMENDATIONS

1. WHEREAS mental health is an integral part of overall health and well-being,
2. AND WHEREAS physical health and mental health are interrelated,
3. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Timiskaming Board of Health supports the concept of parity of esteem, which means equally valuing mental and physical health, by endorsing the Parity of Esteem Position Statement (*Appendix A*).
4. AND THAT the Timiskaming Board of Health supports the Act for Mental Health campaign by signing letters (*Appendix B*) addressed to federal leaders: Prime Minister, Minister of Health, Minister of Finance, and Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Overview

- Boards of Health play a critical role in enhancing population mental health.
- Parity of esteem means to equally value mental and physical health.
- Endorsement of the Parity of Esteem Position Statement will demonstrate commitment to intentionally enhance the mental health and well-being of residents, regardless of mental illness.
- Residents of rural and remote communities have worse mental health and substance use outcomes than those living in urban settings.
- Act for Mental Health is an advocacy campaign that raises awareness on the lack of access to universal mental health and substance use care across Canada. The campaign petitions have a direct impact on population health.

Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS) & Timiskaming Health Unit (THU) Strategic Plan 2019-2023

This work directly contributes to meeting requirements and expected outcomes in the OPHS (2018) and supports the following THU Strategic Directions:

- We use the best available information, including local lived experience, to inform local programs and services.
- We nurture positive and effective relationships with community partners to improve public health. We advocate for policy changes that make a difference in local communities.

Background

Parity of Esteem

The first Director-General of the World Health Organization powerfully expressed the critical role that mental health has in well-being by stating “without mental health there can be no true physical health”¹. More importantly, it highlights the interconnectedness of these components and the holistic view of health. The Ontario Public Health Standards include mental health promotion; thus, reinforcing that public health is more than physical health *and includes* mental health. **Good mental health, like good physical health, is a resource that leads individuals and communities to develop and flourish.**

Parity of esteem means to equally value mental and physical health. The last decade has seen increased awareness of the need to focus on mental health with the same impetus, resources, and priority as with physical health. Boards of Health play a crucial role in enabling change in the area of population mental health.² In 2019, the Board of Health for Public Health Sudbury & Districts approved a motion to endorse the Public Mental Health – Parity of Esteem Position Statement.³

A recent report highlights challenges in distinguishing and understanding population mental health concepts and public health approaches.⁴ Establishing a common language and shifting paradigms relative to mental health have been identified as part of public health’s role.² By endorsing the Parity of Esteem Position Statement, the Timiskaming Board of Health will:

- Reinforce that mental health *is* public health,
- Fulfil the recommendation stated in the Mental Health Promotion Guideline, that the public health workforce recognize and address mental and physical health equally and holistically,⁵
- Contribute to the understanding of population health approaches to mental health,
- Demonstrate commitment to intentionally enhance the mental health and well-being of residents, regardless of mental illness.

Act on Mental Health Campaign

The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion establishes that a variety of coordinated and integrated strategies and methods must be implemented to increase the effectiveness of health promotion.⁶ Implementation should follow a socio-ecological framework and address the corresponding protective and risk factors across the lifespan and settings.⁷ Mental health advocacy and policy development are examples of upstream strategies that seek to change the determinants of mental health and foster greater equity; “public policies that are favourable for mental health [...] can be considered as a core element of intervention to improve mental health.”⁸ p1.

The implementation of coordinated and innovative solutions to promote mental health is of great importance to Timiskaming residents. People in rural and remote communities have worse mental health and substance use outcomes than those living in urban settings (e.g., poor mental health outcomes, higher rates of death by suicide). This difference is the result of intersecting social determinants of health, e.g., lack access to comprehensive mental health, social, and addictions services, the digital divide etc.⁹ Sixty per cent of Timiskaming residents aged 12 and older rated their mental health to be good or excellent, which was the lowest across all Northern Ontario Health Units¹⁰ and statistically lower when compared to 69% in Ontario.¹¹

Statistics indicate that the pandemic has led to population mental health decline¹²⁻¹⁴ and this impact has been amplified in rural and remote communities.⁹ Supporting campaigns that aim to expand access to mental health and substance use programs and services and address the social determinants of mental health can help address the situation. In 2022, the Canadian Mental Health Association launched the Act for Mental Health advocacy campaign. The campaign raises awareness on the facts that mental health

care is basic care and that not all Canadians have access to it. It invites Canadians to ask federal leaders to take meaningful action and invest in mental health and substance use health care.¹⁵ The campaign petitions have a direct impact on population health:

1. Create a permanent Canada Mental Health and Substance Use Health Transfer,
2. Create a Canada Universal Mental Health and Substance Use Health Act,
3. Work to create the social and economic conditions that contribute to good mental health,
4. Decriminalize substance use and increase investments in substance use prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery services.

Over 5,000 individuals and a network of Canadian organizations have already demonstrated their support. The Timiskaming Board of Health can contribute by signing a letter addressed to federal leaders: Prime Minister, Minister of Health, Minister of Finance, and Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. To further amplify the reach of the campaign, THU staff will:

- Encourage staff to support the campaign, and
- Share on social media THU's support for the campaign and invite the public to participate.

Related BOH Work

MOTION #13R-2023 to endorse the adoption of the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health & Safety in the Workplace to promote and protect the Psychological health and safety of Timiskaming Health Unit staff. – March 2023

References

- ¹ World Health Organization. (1954). As quoted on Kolappa, K., Henderson, D. C., & Kishore, S. P. (2013). No physical health without mental health: lessons unlearned? *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 91(1), 3–3A. <https://doi.org/10.2471/BLT.12.115063>
- ² Mantoura, P. (2022). *The Roles of Public Health and Population Mental Health and Wellness Promotion. Synthesis Document*. National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy.
- ³ Public Health Sudbury & Districts. *Position statement: Parity of esteem*. Public Health Sudbury & Districts. (2019, July 25). Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <https://www.phsd.ca/health-topics-programs/mental-health/position-statement-parity-of-esteem/>
- ⁴ Canadian Public Health Association. (2021). *A Public Health Approach to Population Mental Wellness: Position Statement*. Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <https://www.cpha.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/policy/positionstatements/2021-03-population-mental-wellness-e.pdf>
- ⁵ Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. (2018). *Mental Health Promotion Guideline*. Toronto, Ontario: Queen's Printer for Ontario.
- ⁶ World Health Organization. (1986). *Ottawa charter for health promotion*. Retrieved April 25, 2023, from Public Health Agency of Canada website <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/population-health/ottawa-charter-health-promotion-international-conference-on-health-promotion.html>
- ⁷ Mantoura, P. (2014). *Defining a population mental health framework for public health*. Montréal, Québec: National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy.
- ⁸ Mantoura, P. (2014). *Briefing Note: Framework for healthy public policies favouring Mental Health*. Montréal, Québec: National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy.
- ⁹ Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2021). *The Impact of COVID-19 on Rural and Remote Mental Health and Substance Use*. Ottawa, Canada.
- ¹⁰ Kvas, M. (2020, August 18). *Northern Ontario's state of Mental Health and Why*. Northern Policy Institute. Retrieved April 20, 2023, from <https://www.northernpolicy.ca/northern-ontario-mental-health>

- ¹¹ Statistics Canada. Canadian Community Health Survey 2017/18. Share Files, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.
- ¹² Statistics Canada. (2022, March 10). *COVID-19 in Canada: A Two-year Update on Social and Economic Impacts*. Catalogue no. 11-631-X. Retrieved April 27, 2023, from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2022001-eng.htm>
- ¹³ Strong Families and Children. (2020). *Ontario Parent Survey: Findings and Results*. [Infographic]. Retrieved April 27, 2023, from <https://strongfamilies.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/OPS-EN-Infographic-FINAL.pdf>
- ¹⁴ Ipsos, Children's Mental Health Ontario, & Addictions and Mental Health Ontario. (2020). *Ontario COVID-19 child, youth and adult mental health and addiction survey*. Retrieved April 27, 2023, from <https://cmho.org/wp-content/uploads/IpsosSurveyCovidMentalHealth.pdf>
- ¹⁵ CMHA National. (2022). *A Federal Plan for Universal Mental Health and Substance Use Health: Background Paper*. Act for Mental. Retrieved April 20, 2023, from <https://www.actformentalhealth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/AfMH-White-Paper-EN-FINAL.pdf>

Appendix A: Timiskaming Health Unit Parity of Esteem Position Statement

The Timiskaming Board of Health recognizes the interrelated relationship between physical and mental health. We acknowledge that these components create a holistic perspective of health, and that mental health is an integral part of well-being. This position statement represents our support for the concept of *parity of esteem*, which means to equally value mental health and physical health.

Our commitment...

Timiskaming Health Unit commits to promote and protect the mental health and well-being of its residents.

What this means...

Our role will focus on promoting mental health and preventing mental illness, this includes early identification and provision of referrals.¹ Mental health promotion work will be guided by best-practices, applicable legislation, and latest evidence. It will be grounded in the understanding of local cultural, social, economic, political, and physical environment, and will be responsive to community needs.

Timiskaming's Health Unit ultimate and overarching objectives are to:

- Identify and embed mental health promotion strategies across our programs and services;
- Promote and leverage existing mental health promotion programs and services to increase their reach;
- Develop new sustainable mental health promotion programs and services to bridge identified gaps.

Our work will be informed by the following principles, strategies, and approaches:

- **Population mental health approach.** Take actions that aim to enable all residents to flourish. Encompass the entire population across the lifespan, regardless of mental illness.
- **Strength-based approach.** Acknowledge and capitalize on individual, family, and community strengths.
- **Determinants of health and equity.** Address risk and protective factors associated with mental health across the various levels of influence, e.g., individual, social, and structural and environmental. Improve the broader determinants of health, which are the conditions in which people grow, work, and age².
- **Health promotion approach.** Implement a wide range of strategies to increase the effectiveness of interventions, e.g., skills development, policy development, create enabling environments.
- **Multisectoral collaboration.** Creating positive environments goes beyond local public health agencies and requires meaningful and trusting relationships with other partners. We will foster relationships with other relevant sectors.

¹ Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. (2018). *Mental Health Promotion Guideline*. Toronto, Ontario: Queen's Printer for Ontario. Retrieved April 20, 2023, from https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph_standards/docs/protocols_guidelines/Mental_Health_Promotion_Guideline_2018.pdf

² World Health Organization. (n.d.). *Social Determinants of Health*. Retrieved April 20, 2023, from https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health#tab=tab_1

Appendix B: Act on Mental Health Letter

Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister)
Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Finance)
Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health)
Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Mental Health and Addictions)

Dear Prime Minister, Minister Freeland, Minister Duclos and Minister Bennett,

Mental health is a fundamental human right.¹ Historically, resources have been prioritized to protect and promote the physical health of Canadians. The effects of such unequal esteem are evident when treatment for physical ailments lead to clear pathways of covered healthcare services and a supporting system, but the same cannot be said about mental illness and high risk substance use. As Boards of Health, we support the notion that mental and physical health should be equally valued, and advocate for access to mental and substance use health care that is **truly** universal. We exhort you to take meaningful action by following the recommendations outlined in the [Act for Mental Health campaign](#).²

The provision of universal, accessible, culturally safe, and appropriate mental and substance use health care is an equity issue. Canadians pay \$1 billion a year for private counselling,² but many do not have the means to afford it. Canadians who live with low income, live in rural or remote communities, are Indigenous, immigrants, 2SLGBTQ+, among others who experience intersecting inequities, are less likely to have access to the services they need to recover and thrive. Rural and remote communities face unique challenges on the social determinants of health which have contributed to significantly worse population mental health outcomes, e.g., poorer mental health, higher rates of death by suicide, etc.³ Sixty per cent of Timiskaming residents aged 12 and older rated their mental health to be good or excellent, which was the lowest across all Northern Ontario Health Units⁴ and statistically lower when compared to Ontario.⁵

The pandemic has further exacerbated the pre-existing population mental health and substance use concerns. To recover from this crisis, adequate and sustainable funding is needed to implement comprehensive community mental health and addictions programs and services that effectively cover from primary to tertiary prevention. The 2023 Federal budget will not be sufficient to address the need that already exists.

As a Board of Health, we believe that it is time to *act for mental health*. We join the network of Canadian organizations and the thousands of individuals who have demonstrated their support for the *Act for Mental Health* campaign. We urge you to take action.

Sincerely,

Timiskaming Board of Health Chair

¹ World Health Organization (n.d.). *The Right to Health. Fact Sheet No. 31*. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights..

² CMHA National. (2022). *A Federal Plan for Universal Mental Health and Substance Use Health: Background Paper*. Act for Mental. Retrieved April 20, 2023, from <https://www.actformentalhealth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/AfMH-White-Paper-EN-FINAL.pdf>

³ Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2021). *The impact of Covid 19 on rural and remote mental health and substance use*. Ottawa, Canada.

⁴ Kvas, M. (2020, August 18). *Northern Ontario's state of Mental Health and Why*. Northern Policy Institute. Retrieved April 20, 2023, from <https://www.northernpolicy.ca/northern-ontario-mental-health>

⁵ Statistics Canada. Canadian Community Health Survey 2017/18. Share Files, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.