

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Stronger Communities. Smarter Systems. Simpler Journeys.**

### *CMHA Edmonton maps out future of mental health care with new strategic plan*

**EDMONTON, AB:** Seven months after hiring its new Executive Director, the Canadian Mental Health Association – Edmonton Region (CMHA Edmonton) has unveiled a bold Strategic Plan 2021 – 2024. It is a call to action to create a new system of community-based care and a “better normal” for families and individuals living with mental health and related challenges.

There is strong evidence for a decline in mental health and well-being throughout the region, largely shaped by the global health pandemic. Approximately 45 percent of Albertans report deteriorating mental health since the onset of the pandemic<sup>i</sup>, and 33 percent identify access to mental health supports as one of their top concerns for themselves or their community<sup>ii</sup>. Issues connected to mental health are also escalating, including overdoses<sup>iii</sup>, family violence<sup>iv</sup>, and homelessness<sup>v</sup>.

While recent findings are alarming, it is important to acknowledge access to mental health care has been a recurring issue for years. Too many have struggled to access mental health care for themselves and their families since well before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. These negative experiences are aggravated among people that face other barriers, including youth, racialized groups, Indigenous communities, among others.

“I’m hearing the same problems now that were voiced five, ten, even fifteen years ago. Families still struggle to get appropriate care for their children and loved ones. People in distress face a confusing maze of services instead of a simple, predictable path to recovery and wellness. The current approach to mental health care is not sufficient now and certainly won’t be as needs escalate. This is our time for change, to take this disruption and make it our moment to transform the system, our sector, and our organization for a better ‘normal’,” says CMHA Edmonton Executive Director Giri Puligandla.

A key priority within CMHA Edmonton’s plan is to evolve and grow its service continuum to reflect key priority and strength areas that will facilitate much stronger community-based pathways and supports. While this will reduce overreliance on formal health care and emergency services, it also strengthens communities to be able to respond

competently to mental health needs themselves. The goal is to simplify the steps to access services and supports when and how people need them.

The Strategic Plan is a living document that will continue to be shaped through collaboration with community organizations, government partners, staff, volunteers, and members of the public. CMHA Edmonton has committed to ongoing engagement to respond to the changing dynamics and needs of the community.

The Strategic Plan 2021 – 2024 can be viewed on the CMHA Edmonton [website](#). CMHA Edmonton looks forward to engaging with the community and welcomes interest from individuals and organizations who want to learn more and be part of a better normal for mental health supports in the region.

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## About CMHA Edmonton

The Canadian Mental Health Association – Edmonton Region (CMHA Edmonton) works within the community to support people experiencing mental illness and their families through advocacy, education, research, services, and programming. CMHA Edmonton works alongside community partners to service vulnerable and targeted populations who are living with or are at risk of developing mental health challenges. The organization provides education and training programs to various community actors and nurtures strong relationships within Edmonton through community-based services.



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<sup>i</sup> [Summary of Findings, Mental Health Impacts of COVID-19: Round 3](#), 2021

<sup>ii</sup> [Mental Health Impacts of COVID-19 in Alberta](#), 2021

<sup>iii</sup> [Boyle Street calls for emergency action plan for overdose crisis following death of three men in central Edmonton park](#), 2021

<sup>iv</sup> [Pandemic stress contributes to spike in domestic violence](#): EPS, 2021

<sup>v</sup> [Homeward Trust Program Data](#), 2021