



Mood Disorders Society of Canada
Société pour les troubles de l'humeur du Canada

**Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations of the
House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance in Advance
of the 2024 Federal Budget**

Submitted: August 2023

Recommendation: The federal government invest \$7 million over the next five years to increase the capacity of community mental health organizations by providing foundational seed funding for a pan-Canadian network of community mental health organizations, known as the Canadian Community Mental Health Network (CCMHN).

Summary

Mental health is integral to our overall health and well-being, touching every aspect of life, including physical, financial, and social health. Mental illnesses, such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, substance use disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), affect millions of Canadians directly and have far-reaching socioeconomic impacts on families, social groups, workplaces, healthcare systems, and the economy.

Community mental health organizations work tirelessly and many with minimal funding to provide services for those most vulnerable. These organizations have unique relationships within their communities and have the potential to significantly diminish wait times for patients while meeting individuals where they are. They strive to work in conjunction and/or partnership with practitioners in primary or emergency care settings to alleviate pressures & demand for services. A gap in national coordination for improved access to services (including prevention services), and community knowledge-sharing, continues to challenge the ability of these organizations to reach all appropriate clients.

Mood Disorders Society of Canada (MDSC) submits this pre-budget proposal to request the government's support of MDSC and our partnering organizations for the **Canadian Community Mental Health Network (CCMHN)**. This pan-Canadian collaboration aims to build the capacity of community mental health organizations in meeting increased demands for services. CCMHN is a platform for resource and program sharing, collaborative research in system improvements, community connections, and alleviating system silos on a national level. Our submission outlines our funding requirements, objectives, and expected benefits of the CCMHN. We have also prepared an in-depth 5-year business plan for the project which illustrates the integrated collaborative approach we are undertaking. This proposal addresses an identified need of the community following the comprehensive consultation with 48 community organizations from all 10 provinces and 3 territories.

Recommendation: The federal government invest \$7 million over the next five years to increase the capacity of community mental health organizations by providing foundational seed funding for the pan-Canadian network of community mental health organizations, known as the Canadian Community Mental Health Network (CCMHN).

Background

Before COVID, it was estimated that 1 in 3 Canadians would experience a mental health disorder.^{1,2} Now, in the wake of multiple years of grappling with a global pandemic, approximately half of Canadians indicate that their mental well-being has deteriorated, with members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community experiencing disproportionately higher levels of mental health challenges, including self-reported anxiety and depression.^{3,4,5} For those who have sought support, almost half of Canadians feel they did not receive adequate care.⁶

Canadian Physicians and other healthcare providers (HCPs) have been clear that we are experiencing a mental health crisis. Increased demand for mental health services contributes to overcrowding in emergency departments.⁷ Physicians themselves are reporting all-time high incidences of mental health decline with 6 in 10 physicians, medical residents, and medical students in Canada saying that their mental health is worse now than it was before the pandemic.⁸

Community mental health organizations provide vital, front-line services for Canadians impacted by mental illness, lessening demands on doctors and/or psychologists/psychiatrists, and reducing wait times and dependencies for higher-cost interventions such as emergency department attendance. These grassroots, peer-led organizations, born by the identified need in their communities, often work in local silos due to limited funding and resources, hindering their ability to collaborate, and/or communicate their service offerings effectively to others.

Over the past 18 months, MDSC hosted roundtable meetings with 48 community mental health patient group organizations from across Canada. These roundtables served as a forum for organizations to share their experience serving Canadians, discuss the challenges they face, and effective solutions.

The resulting recommendation from these consultations was for the development of a Pan-Canadian network of community organizations to support knowledge sharing, collaboration, and the pooling of resources.⁹ This proposal requests your support to establish this network.

Investing \$7 million to support the 5-year growth and expansion of the Canadian Community Mental Health Network (CCMHN) will lead to the coordination and unification of over 50 organizations that previously did not have a pan-Canadian connecting body. This will bring a unified and collective approach to capacity building, will provide key support for organizations, and a model for new resource sharing to address the vast mental health challenges we are seeing throughout Canada.

¹ Mood Disorders Society of Canada, "Mental Illness and Addiction in Canada," MDSC, Ottawa, 2019.

² C. Pearson, T. Janz and J. Ali, "Mental and substance use disorders in Canada," Statistics Canada, Ottawa, 2015.

³ Angus Reid, "Worry, Gratitude & Boredom: As COVID-19 affects mental, financial health, who fares better? Who is worse?," <https://angusreid.org/covid19-mental-health/>

⁴ CBC, "2 years into the pandemic, Canada's mental-health system is at a crisis point," <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/canada-mental-health-crisis-covid-19-pandemic-1.6382378>

⁵ Mental Health Research Canada, "Findings of Poll #15," <https://www.mhrc.ca/findings-of-poll-15>

⁶ Statistics Canada, "Self-perceived mental health and mental health care needs during the COVID-19 pandemic" <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2021001/article/00031-eng.htm>

⁷ Canadian Institute for Health Information. Health system resources for mental health and addictions care in Canada. <https://www.cihi.ca/sites/default/files/document/mental-health-chartbook-report-2019-en-web.pdf>.

⁸ Crist, Carolyn. "Canadian Doctors Face Worse Mental Health Due to Pandemic." Medscape, February 22, 2023. <https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/980260?form=fpf>

⁹ For more information, please see: https://mdsc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/MDSC_Canadian-Community-Mental-Health-Organizations-Roundtable-Reportdigital.pdf

Key Initiatives

The network's establishment would foster integrated coordination of efforts, eliminate operational silos, reduce duplication of development and efforts, and overcome the fragmentation of initiatives among grassroots and regional community mental health organizations leading to a more unified, effective, and impactful approach to mental health services nationwide.

When a person visits a doctor's office to describe their symptoms, it is often the first time they seek help for a mental health issue. At this point, doctors may not understand what resources are available to them. Through our roundtables and consultations, we have heard many physicians and other healthcare providers, are themselves unaware of the programs and resources community organizations offer, nor their ability to refer patients to them.

Without a working relationship between these local stakeholders, patients too often find themselves on long waitlists and don't receive information about these organizations. Increasing engagement between mental health organizations and healthcare providers, while expanding their capacity to serve their communities can help bridge this gap. Working with these organizations, researching system improvements and efficiencies, and measuring outcomes, will not only alleviate the burden on primary care physicians and other HCPs who often struggle to find suitable sources for referrals but will reduce pressure on local emergency departments and wait times, ensuring timely and effective treatment for those in need.

A core mandate of CCMHN is knowledge development and exchange. This will be achieved by bringing key programs, tools, and resources from these organizations together to create a knowledge pool, one which all members may draw from. This will greatly reduce program and resource development duplication costs to these organizations, and in turn, to funders.

CCMHN will also establish partnerships with healthcare and service providers, research, and the private sector, to advance access to CCMHN member programs and resources, and develop and implement training initiatives while supporting CCMHN member organizations to build capacity to serve rising needs within their communities.

CCMHN will be a new network of mental health community organizations, guided by people with lived/living experience, who partner with community physicians, researchers, community stakeholders, and other healthcare providers. This network will offer innovative and unique research opportunities for collaborative program expansion and development. CCMHN research will have two underpinning priorities; 1) to fully involve persons with lived/living experience (PWLE) within all areas of the research and leadership and, 2) to focus on research priorities that have the potential to bring an immediate real effect on people impacted by mental illness, and their families.

Additionally, the CCMHN will support research activities to enable organizations to adequately measure the success and effectiveness of their programs. The CCMHN will provide tools, resources, and collaboration opportunities to help organizations develop and implement robust evaluation methodologies. By offering standardized metrics, shared best practices, and access to specialized research expertise, CCMHN aims to build a culture of evidence-based decision-making. This research-driven approach will empower organizations to identify strengths and areas for growth, tailor interventions to community needs, and demonstrate the tangible impact of their work. As a result, community mental health organizations will be better positioned to

advocate for funding from diverse sources including public, private, and philanthropic, strategically allocate resources, and ultimately, enhance the mental well-being of Canadians through services that are proven to be effective.

CCMHN will develop and implement a long-term sustainability strategy, including leveraging collective experiences and seeking out grant and sponsorship funding to advance our mandate, objectives, and priorities.

CCMHN will host an annual *Community Mental Health Knowledge Exchange Conference*. The conference will bring together key stakeholders, including community organizations, people with lived/living experience, caregivers and family members, physicians, healthcare providers, researchers, clinicians, employers, and health policymakers to share knowledge and spotlight ongoing work and successes. This engaging collaborative platform will drive innovation in care delivery, present new research, elevate partnerships and encourage the evaluation of projects to determine their evidence-based efficacy and expand private sector engagement with CCMHN to support much-needed national coordination on mental health services.

Aligned with the government's commitment to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), the CCMHN will ensure that diverse perspectives across gender, race, and other intersecting identities are fully integrated into the planning and execution process of this project, from tip to tail, using a GBA+ lens. In alignment with our commitment to fostering reconciliation, our project will actively engage with Indigenous communities, integrating their perspectives, wisdom, and cultural heritage. We will adhere to the principles outlined in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, ensuring that our practices promote understanding, respect, and partnership. Through continuous consultation, collaboration, and reflection, we aim to create a project that not only meets its objectives but also contributes to the ongoing process of healing and reconciliation.

Defining Objectives

Community mental health organizations provide crucial support and programs. CCMHN will be created with a mandate to assist them in their missions - working together to create new tools and to enable all organizations to work more effectively with local health centers, clinicians, counsellors, schools, and employers.

Four essential objectives define CCMHN:

Enhanced Collaboration: Uniting community mental health organizations, local healthcare workers, researchers, persons with lived/living experience, family, caregivers, and other key stakeholders.

Integration of Lived Experience: Ensuring the perspective of those with lived/living experiences informs all activities. This is the cornerstone of CCMHN's work.

National Framework Development: Collaboratively defining a national framework for program sharing, capacity building, and knowledge development, evolving the mental health landscape.

Increased Access to Care for Canadians: The ultimate objective of the CCMHN is to help our members better serve Canadians, meeting them where they are, when they need support.

We can contribute substantially to the capacity of over 50 community mental health organizations through CCMHN. While these organizations have been doing incredible work without a national infrastructure, the more unity and support that is provided to these organizations, the more they can give back to their communities.

About Mood Disorders Society of Canada

Mood Disorders Society of Canada (MDSC) aims to improve access to treatment, inform research, and shape program development and government policies to improve the quality of life for people affected by mood disorders. Formally incorporated in 2001, MDSC is one of Canada's best-connected mental health charities and has a demonstrated track record of forging meaningful and sustained partnerships and collaborations with the public, private, and non-profit sectors throughout Canada. MDSC has led and managed many national projects in partnership with the Government of Canada and other national partners. Representing and led by PWLE, MDSC is engaged in a wide range of initiatives and has taken a lead proactive role in public policy and program development in many capacities on the national stage.