



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

**Written Submission for Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of
the Upcoming 2025 Federal Budget**

Submitted: August 2024

Recommendation: The Government of Canada invests \$50 million over five years in a Community Mental Health Fund, to build capacity for mental health organizations to better serve people impacted by mental illness and to support care providers.

Summary

The healthcare system is in desperate need of support. Imagine waiting 6, 8, or even 10 hours in an emergency department because you don't have a family doctor, or enduring agonizing months to see a psychiatrist while you or a loved one struggle with mental illness. These prolonged and distressing waits highlight the dire state of our mental health care system. It's a silent crisis affecting families across the country, leaving them in vulnerable and heartbreaking situations while they seek essential care.

It's no secret that there is a brewing mental health crisis in Canada, and governments of all levels need to step up to meet the increased needs of the millions of Canadians who are seeking mental health treatments and support. At present, our healthcare system is not meeting Canadians' mental health needs adequately. We know that many face unacceptable, long wait times, have difficulty accessing vital services, and are even being turned away due to many providers being over-capacity.

Mood Disorders Society of Canada (MDSC), An organization founded on the insights and contributions of People with Lived Experience (PWLE), knows first-hand the gaps that exist in the healthcare system for Canadians seeking mental health treatment. As a non-profit organization offering support and resources for Canadians with depression, bipolar disorder, PTSD, and other mental illnesses, we are often the first stop for those looking to find help. Community mental health organizations work hard to offer services to patients, many of whom are unable to get treatment elsewhere. However, without new dedicated funding from the government, mental health organizations are severely limited in their abilities to meet the needs of Canadians.

Mental illness impacts a significant number of Canadians. Over 10 percent of Canadians have a mental illness; 8 percent of Canadians will experience depression in their lifetime; 12 percent of Canadians will experience an anxiety disorder in their lifetime; Canadians under 20 years of age have the highest rate of depression symptoms while those between the ages of 20 to 29 have the highest rate of anxiety symptoms.¹

Mental illness, as a leading cause of disability in Canada, continues to be one of the most costly and unaddressed areas within our healthcare system and in the Canadian workplace. According to a recently released GreenShield Canada (GSC) Health Outcomes report: ²

- 62% of missed workdays can be attributed to poor mental health with an average of 12 days lost per employee per year.
- 50% of full-time employees have quit their jobs for mental health reasons, with higher occurrences in millennials (68%) and Gen Z (81%).
- Since the onset of the pandemic, mental health claims by Canadians have increased by 132%, with women and younger generations accounting for most mental health services accessed.

By the time Canadians reach 40 years of age, 1 in 2 have – or have had – a mental illness.³ The consequences of this impacts all Canadians. If you are experiencing a mental illness, or have a loved one who is struggling, you know the wide-ranging, stressful, and often devastating daily challenges you must

¹ MDSC Quick Facts on Mental Illness & Addiction in Canada <https://mdsc.ca/edu/quick-facts-on-mental-illness-addiction-in-canada/>

² Health Outcomes Report, https://greenshield-cdn.nyc3.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/perm/2024/eml/hlth_HO_HealthOutcomesReport_jun_19_en_v1.pdf

³ Smetanin et al. (2011). *The life and economic impact of major mental illnesses in Canada: 2011-2041*. Prepared for the Mental Health Commission of Canada. Toronto: RiskAnalytica.

navigate and fight through. In most mental illnesses, this is a prolonged struggle, lasting years, and for far too many, it lasts decades.

According to Statistics Canada, more than 1 in 3 (36.6%) of those with mood, anxiety, or substance use disorder report unmet or only partially met health and mental health care needs⁴.

Community mental health organizations work tirelessly with people who experience every mental illness and can significantly diminish wait times for patients while meeting individuals where they are. These organizations have risen to the challenges faced in their communities and have created novel approaches to meet the differing needs of their clients. These organizations rely on the support of grants, private funders, and the generosity of the community, and thus are perpetually underfunded⁵ or receive funding only on an inconsistent basis. This strain is evident in the rising number of individuals experiencing homelessness who have mental health issues. Without adequate community support, many are left to navigate the streets alone, their conditions worsening.

It is time for Canada to step up and better support, utilize, and evaluate the programs and supports of these mental health organizations as part of a multi-year research project.

MDSC believes that community mental health NGOs, which provide essential front-line services and support to Canadians affected by mental illness, are integral to community care and need adequate funding. Despite their crucial role, these organizations have been underfunded for decades, leading to an overburdened system where only about one-third of those in need receive mental health services.

Mood Disorders Society of Canada (MDSC) submits this budget 2025 recommendation for the government to recognize this crucial healthcare need on a pan-Canadian level and target dedicated funding to build the capacity of community mental health organizations to increase their ability to implement research-based, data-informed processes in partnership with their local physicians, clinics, and emergency departments (EDs). Primary care and hospitals, while essential, often lack the individualized services and community integration that NGOs provide. Investing in community mental health organizations not only addresses immediate mental health needs but also alleviates pressure on primary care and hospital systems, leading to a more efficient and effective overall healthcare system.

It is crucial to understand that emergency services should be the last steps in the pipeline of mental health care services. The focus must be on prevention, treatment, wellness maintenance, and supporting individuals to live independently. Community organizations are uniquely positioned to provide these preventative services, such as mental health literacy, early intervention programs, counseling, peer support, employment support, and ongoing care to help individuals manage their conditions and maintain their independence. By prioritizing these community-based approaches, we can prevent crises from developing and reduce the burden on emergency and primary care services, creating a more sustainable and effective mental health care system in Canada.

⁴ Mental Disorders in Canada, Statistics Canada, 2022, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2023053-eng.htm>

⁵ Canadian Community Mental Health Organizations Roundtable Report, 2022, https://mdsc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/MDSC_Canadian-Community-Mental-Health-Organizations-Roundtable-Reportdigital.pdf

Recommendation: The Government of Canada invests \$50 million over five years in a Community Mental Health Fund, to build capacity for mental health organizations to better serve people impacted by mental illness and to support care providers.

Mental illness strikes over seven million Canadians directly and impacts almost every single household in the country. There are very few Canadians who are not worrying about someone who is struggling.

We must strategically provide more resources within the mental healthcare system to alleviate some of these backlogs and pressure points. Mental health organizations across Canada provide crucial services and offer ongoing service and support for Canadians impacted by mental illness, lessening demands on overburdened service points such as doctors, therapists, and psychiatrists, and reducing wait times for these higher-cost services that have been experiencing backlogs due to high demand.

With decades of working within the mental health sector and through our roundtables and consultations, MDSC was shocked to find that many physicians and other healthcare providers remain unaware of the programs and resources community organizations offer, nor their ability to refer patients to them.

We can bridge this gap by increasing support to these organizations to build their capacity while fostering better integration of care through direct engagement between mental health organizations and these healthcare service points/ providers. These organizations desperately need sustained funding to meet the need for their services. This funding will build system capacity, collaborations, program efficiencies, and will measure and report on outcomes, which will lead to alleviating the burden on primary care physicians and other providers who often struggle to find suitable sources for referrals, while reducing pressure on hospitals and healthcare institutions while decreasing wait times, ensuring more timely and efficient treatment for those in need.

The new Mental Health Program Funding should aim to build capacity within these mental health organizations while fostering close working partnerships with healthcare providers to support more patients, and researchers to develop and implement a research protocol and data capture/ tracking to measure and report on the impact and effectiveness of this program.

MDSC advocates for this investment to be accessible to non-profit community mental health organizations through two streams:

- **National Projects Approach:** National organizations partnering with at least three provincial or territorial organizations, building networks and capacity.
- **Regional Community Organizations:** An open call for proposals to support region-specific deficiencies.

The funding should promote multi-organizational partnerships and collaborative approaches.

This program *could* fit well under programs through Employment and Social Development Canada's two funding streams: Social Development Partnerships Program⁶ and Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities⁷. This could also fall under PHAC funding streams such as the Innovation Strategy⁸. This fund should be flexible and allow for organizations to apply for funding that fits their community's needs, as they are most intimately aware of what those needs are. This funding should allow for:

⁶ <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/social-development-partnerships.html>

⁷ <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/opportunity-fund-disability.html>

⁸ <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/innovation-strategy.html>

- 1) Administrative and core operational funding costs
- 2) Program costs to deliver, sustain, and expand existing or new initiatives
- 3) Direct program costs
- 4) Partnerships and collaborations support
- 5) Staff recruitment and training support
- 6) Research and evaluation efforts supporting evidence-based program development, expansion, and validity

Investments and improvements must support health equity and equal access to therapies, treatments, programs, services, and supports. Aligned with the government's commitment to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), the program must ensure that diverse perspectives across gender, race, and other intersecting identities are fully integrated using a GBA+ lens. During this incredibly challenging time in their lives, all Canadians need to be able to access the treatments, therapies, and support they require to return to and maintain their health and wellness and fully participate in school, employment and/or community engagement.

This funding must support research activities to enable organizations to adequately measure the success and effectiveness of their programs. The program funding will provide tools, resources, and collaboration opportunities to help organizations develop and implement robust evaluation protocols. This funding will support evidence-based decision-making by offering standardized metrics, shared best practices, and access to specialized research expertise.

Using an evidence-based 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.

It is MDSC's submission that through this innovative funding, the mental health needs of individuals, businesses, and healthcare providers will be greatly supported by increasing the capacity of community mental health organizations to work in conjunction with practitioners in primary or emergency care settings to alleviate pressures & demand for services. This gap requires a strategic effort for improved services (including prevention services), and community resource-sharing, which continues to challenge the ability of our healthcare system to reduce the number of patients at overburdened service points and reduce wait times while providing mental healthcare services and support.

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, voluntary, and non-profit sectors throughout Canada. MDSC has led and managed many national projects in partnership with the Government of Canada and other 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.