



Mental Health
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Roots of Hope

A Community Suicide
Prevention Project



Roots of Hope Case Studies

Spotlight on Hamilton, Ontario

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THE ROOTS OF HOPE MODEL

Roots of Hope is a community-based model that supports populations across Canada in reducing the impact of suicide in their local context. The model builds on community expertise as it implements suicide prevention and life promotion interventions.

In the first Roots of Hope cohort in 2018, eight communities across Canada became part of a research demonstration project. The aim was to support them as they built their capacity to reduce the impact of suicide and to gather evidence on the model's effectiveness with an eye to establishing best and promising practices for wider adoption in the future.

In the Roots of Hope model, communities tailor their suicide prevention efforts around its 5 pillars:

1. **Means Safety.** Identify “hot spots” and implement measures to limit access to the suicide methods being used.
2. **Public Awareness.** Create local educational campaigns (e.g., posters, brochures, social media).
3. **Research.** Set research priorities, surveillance, and monitoring and evaluation to increase the suicide prevention evidence base.
4. **Specialized Supports.** Develop a range of possible prevention, intervention, and postvention services (e.g., peer support, support groups, workplace interventions, and coordinated planning and access to services).
5. **Training and Networks.** Provide training and learning opportunities for community gatekeepers (e.g., physicians, first responders, nurses, HR staff and managers, and teachers).

ROOTS OF HOPE EARLY ADOPTERS (2021-23)

The second Roots of Hope cohort involved 11 additional communities — or Early Adopters — from coast-to-coast-to-coast. As the initial demonstration project continued, these new communities were eager to learn about the model's potential benefits and use it to support their own suicide prevention and life promotion projects, including those for specific groups such as youth, men, and Indigenous populations.

Early Adopters are scaling up Roots of Hope by advancing its implementation and testing how effective Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) supports are for sustaining the model.



THE HAMILTON EARLY ADOPTER COMMUNITY

The City of Hamilton, at the west end of Lake Ontario between Niagara Falls and Toronto, is Canada's ninth largest city, with a population of 767,000 (as of 2020). While the local economy has traditionally been led by steel and heavy manufacturing, it has shifted over the last decade toward the service sector and health sciences.

Hamilton is rich in services. It is home to two major hospital systems: Hamilton Health Sciences (HHS) and St Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton (SJHH). The HHS comprises six unique hospitals and a cancer centre. The SJHH, which includes Charlton, West 5th, and King Street locations, is the city's leading provider of adult psychiatric and addiction services, including inpatient, outpatient, and community-based services. Hamilton also has a multitude of community agencies that support or provide services in child, youth, and adult mental health. McMaster University,

Mohawk College, and Redeemer University train large numbers of health-care and community professionals in the city and surrounding areas.

Based on demographic sizes and statistical factors, our Roots of Hope suicide prevention initiative identified men and transitional-age youth as two priority populations to support. Higher suicide rates among men ages 50 to 59 and comparatively high levels of mental health problems and illnesses among youth and young adults (ages 20-29) led us to such a focus.

Our program leads, the Suicide Prevention Community Council of Hamilton (SPCCH) and the Canadian Mental Health Association Hamilton (CMHA Hamilton), share a desire that we ground our work in a coordinated, evidence-informed community suicide prevention model. With that in mind, our aim has been to build on existing community expertise and align ourselves with best practices.

COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

1. Training and Networks

Suicide prevention training.

Our suicide education efforts have included LivingWorks Start training, which was rolled out during the pandemic to staff in hospitals, community agencies, and primary care, as well as to members of the public with an interest. The SPCCH supported community agencies, hospitals, universities, hospices, local businesses, shelters, and community residents by purchasing training licenses and giving them to psychologists, nurses, physicians, and community mental health and agency staff

free of charge. So far, 500 licences have been distributed to 46 organizations with a focus on the city's "Code Red" community agencies.

Having the funding for two facilitator positions at CMHA Hamilton – to provide training in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), safeTALK, and Applied Suicide Interventions Skills Training (ASIST) – is also fortunate. Each of these programs is delivered about 13 to 15 times a year to both open and closed groups. Recent participants include teachers and crisis support, peer support, social service, and personal support workers. Over the past nine months, 218 people were trained in MHFA, 184 people in ASIST, and 64 people in safeTALK.



Although these are well-established programs, our goal is to target those that will have the greatest impact on our target populations. Next steps include distributing LivingWorks Start training licenses to community agency staff working in the Code Red area. We will also adopt a stepped-tiered model of accessible training to build on the fundamental knowledge LivingWorks has provided during the pandemic. As well, we are exploring the possibility of expanding safeTALK, ASIST, MHFA, and The ASK workshop for community members at accessible and affordable rates.

2. Means Safety Reducing suicides by creating a safer home.

CMHA Hamilton developed means safety training in response to a demonstrated need and request in the community. This program is meant to complement ASIST and offer front-line clinicians' practical tools to reduce the risk of a death by suicide. CMHA also created a brochure out of the Reduce Suicide by [Creating a Safer Home infographic](#), provided by the MHCC, which is given to ASIST-trained individuals who complete the training. Together, the SPCCH and CMHA incorporated emergency, crisis support, local resources, and information on suicide-specific training into the brochure. The 5,000 copies now printed are being distributed to hospital and community agency staff to use with their clients. So far, about 70 staff members from various community agencies have completed the means safety training. We have also asked the MHCC create a second infographic to reflect the demographics of our city – an urban setting surrounded by various high-rise buildings. Once modified, the brochure would be updated to reflect the living situation of many Hamilton residents.

Next steps for 2023 include hosting the means safety training for ASIST-trained individuals on a rolling basis (in addition to offering pre-booked sessions). Distinct versions of the training will be

made available for professionals and families. We will follow the structured marketing plan we created to deliver the training and distribute the brochure.

3. Research Advancing priorities.

Under this pillar, we have expanded our research capacity and collaborations to promote evidence-based suicide prevention initiatives and evaluate the effectiveness of our Roots of Hope initiative. CMHA Hamilton has a close working relationship with the Advanced Research on Mental Health and Society (ARMS) team at McMaster University. They collaborated on the Emotions Matter study to examine the effects of the pandemic and how best to support employees at CMHA's regional branches and staff at the Hamilton Public Library. Now working on the project's second phase, these teams will provide peer support for front-line CMHA staff (see item 5).

In addition, the SPCCH works closely with McMaster University and St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton on innovative research to reduce suicidal risk. This includes the Brief Intervention and Contact (BIC) program, introduced as a comprehensive follow-up for at-risk patients following hospital discharge. The World Health Organization endorses the BIC approach for reducing suicide risk, and (with an SPCCH research grant at St. Joseph's mental health department) the program showed a clear improvement in patient outcomes. Such promising results have led to a larger clinical trial, which is now in progress as we explore ways to initiate a community-based BIC program.

CMHA Hamilton's mental health promotion and resiliency program (MHPR) conducts an annual environmental scan to keep track of population demographics, suicide statistics from the Ontario coroner's office, and the number of trainers across the LHIN (Local Health Integration Network) in Mental Health First Aid, safeTALK, and ASIST. The scan also includes a training report from the MHPR



program, which indicates the number of sessions delivered by two facilitators according to region (Hamilton, Burlington, Haldimand-Norfolk, Niagara, and Brant). This document was last updated in the summer of 2022 and will be used to inform our research moving forward. For the 2023 scan, we plan to prioritize communications with law enforcement, hospital staff, and the coroner's office to get specific information on suicide attempts and suicide deaths in Hamilton. This information will be used to guide future projects under corresponding Roots of Hope pillars.

4. Specialized Supports Building Bridges to Support Transitional Youth project.

Since its involvement with Roots of Hope, CMHA Hamilton has become a member of YSAN (youth-serving agencies network), through which more than 40 community agencies collaborate to promote positive youth development. At the spring 2022 quarterly meeting, we presented an overview on Roots of Hope (keying in on the specialized support pillar) and led focus groups to gather evidence about members' perceptions of service gaps and areas of need related to youth mental health.

In 2023, CMHA Hamilton and members of the Black Health Alliance's Pathways to Care project will work together to provide workshops for Black youth and their families on mental health literacy and wellness-based mental health (in addition to MHFA training). Next steps include creating a task force with community youth and YSAN representatives to improve transitions between youth and adult mental health services. As CMHA Hamilton is an adult-serving agency, it is imperative to consult youth and youth-serving agencies when looking for service gaps (a top priority for the task force). YSAN is also interested in having its members trained in MHFA or ASIST in 2023. Another objective with the Pathways to Care project is ensuring that all young people in our community have access to supports and training related to mental health.

5. Public Awareness Life promotion initiative.

The SPCCH has provided a variety of community educational initiatives such as Cable 14 Let's Keep It Together (program aired on May 7th and 8th, 2020) and partnerships with community agencies and school boards on community mental health and well-being sessions. Targeted educational resources, such as the *Cultivating Hope: Helping Our Youth Thrive During the Pandemic* — a webinar with child psychiatrist, psychologist, and nurse practitioner panellists — offered the community practical information.

Since our involvement with Roots of Hope, CMHA Hamilton has continued its dedication to health promotion and suicide prevention strategies across the region. Within our community, we have continued to provide Talking About Mental Illness (TAMI) sessions, featuring a speaker with lived and living experience and a focus on mental health awareness, stigma reduction, and available resources. These rolling sessions occur twice a month and are open to the public, in addition to those provided to the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board.

We have also developed a portfolio with over 25 presentations, which are free and able to be delivered virtually or in person. Topics include: stress and anxiety, how mental health affects us all, and managing difficult conversations. The need for these courses is demonstrated by the more than 6,600 attendees over the last nine months.

Recent trends have included excessive burnout among front-line health-care workers as a result of COVID-19. To address this need in our community, CMHA Hamilton partnered with McMaster University to develop an interactive, online, peer-to-peer course that focuses on managing emotions at work. The initial cohort, consisting of front-line staff from 10 CMHA branches across Ontario, began in January 2023. Once that cohort has completed its studies, the McMaster research team will conduct an assessment.



The SPCCH will also be adding a life promotion section to its website (which will incorporate Indigenous models of well-being) to facilitate its workshops in this area for the community, hospitals,

and agency staff. As part of the initiative, it is creating a coordinated social media strategy for life promotion that will be used by the SPCCH, CMHA, and other participating stakeholders.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

Advances in service gatekeeper training during the pandemic have helped change the cultural environment for discussing suicide and facilitating help seeking. After completing the LivingWorks Start training, all of the participants either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the following statements:

- I am willing to talk with someone who may be thinking of suicide.
- I believe I could recognize the signs that someone might be thinking of suicide.
- I know how and where to get help for someone who is thinking of suicide.
- I feel confident in my ability to help someone who may be thinking of suicide.

Other community training in MHFA, safeTALK, and ASIST have provided important opportunities to expand training networks and promote suicide prevention awareness.

The community is benefiting from a targeted means-safety initiative that includes training and a comprehensive infographic with crisis and mental health supports. Community agency staff are able to share these resources and engage in healthy discussions with clients about creating safe environments.

Important research priorities have been advanced including BIC and the Emotions Matter program. Our updated environmental scan also includes epidemiological and training data that helps our pillar project work.

To help build consensus on projects to support youth mental health, our Building Bridges to Support Transitional Youth project has worked with youth organizations and service providers. This work is ongoing and will build upon youth engagement.

In addition, CMHA Hamilton and SPCCH have advanced life promotion with a broad range of community educational sessions to provide community mental health support during the pandemic and beyond.

For World Suicide Prevention Day, gatekeeper training sessions were provided, alongside a community engagement event — a [butterfly release and remembrance ceremony](#) — to foster community engagement and promote the core concept that suicide prevention is everyone’s responsibility.



COMMUNITY TESTIMONIALS

LivingWorks Start:

“I finished the training today and want to express my gratitude for the opportunity to take it! It’s by far the most interactive suicide prevention training that I’ve taken and was a great refresher on the essential skills that I don’t often think (specifically) about anymore.”

“I think this a great course for those who may encounter these situations.”

“Very interactive, clear, and concise but very educational.”

“I like how interactive this was with real actors.”

ASIST training:

“I wanted to acknowledge your ability and capacity to facilitate such a difficult training as well as allowing yourself to be so vulnerable with strangers; it’s truly inspiring. You allowed me to feel confident and comfortable to share with you some of the struggles I can often

deal with daily. Through the training and your support, I was able to recognize the resilience within myself. I am grateful for the space you held for the group through the duration of the two-day training.”

“Mikaela and Allie did a wonderful job facilitating the training sessions. They were both knowledgeable and encouraging. They made everyone feel safe and involved and created an environment where we could all be vulnerable but still feel safe and supported. They encouraged authenticity and helped us see the value in applying the Pathways to Life model in every aspect of our lives.”

Means safety training:

“The information provided opened my eyes about how we need to think differently about our environment and the impact of what is available for people who are experiencing chronic suicidal thoughts.”
— Mary Ellen Ruddell, Director of Court Support and Peer Support Services at CMHA Hamilton





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Financial contribution from



Health Canada Santé
Canada Canada

Mental Health Commission of Canada

Suite 1210, 350 Albert Street
Ottawa, ON K1R 1A4

Tel: 613 683-3755
Fax: 613 798-2989

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[/1MHCC](#) [@theMHCC](#) [@theMHCC](#)

[/Mental Health Commission of Canada](#)

mhccinfo@mentalhealthcommission.ca

www.mentalhealthcommission.ca

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