

**Northern Ontario CMHA branches focus on addictions for Bell Let's Talk**

(Jan 24, 2023) – With Bell Let's Talk Day this year focused on creating real change for mental health, Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) branches in northern Ontario are joining colleagues across the province to remind Ontarians to include addictions in the conversation.

While the yearly conversation by Bell Let's Talk has facilitated open and honest conversations about mental health issues, the stigma surrounding substance use and addictions remains. Stigma is one of the biggest barriers for people seeking and receiving treatment.

"The opioid epidemic alone shows the importance of focusing on addictions issues in northern Ontario," said Patty MacDonald, CEO, CMHA Sudbury/Manitoulin. "Rates of opioid-related deaths in the five largest cities in the north are more than triple the rest of the province."

Northern Ontario has been hit hardest by the opioid crisis. In 2022, there were an average of 60.1 opioid-related deaths per 100,000 population in northern Ontario's five largest cities compared to the provincial average of 17.6. Over the last 3 months of 2023 alone, there were 107 opioid-related deaths in northern Ontario.

"Outside of large cities in northern Ontario, the situation is just as troubling," said Charlene Strain, CEO, CMHA Fort Frances. "In the Rainy River District, emergency room visits due to overdose have increased 500 per cent since 2019, with highest rates here in Fort Frances."

The opioid crisis highlights the need for a corresponding increase in supports and services for those at risk. CMHA branches support full funding of harm reduction approaches so that individuals can seek the best option for reducing use.

"Our northern Ontario communities need more low-barrier harm reduction services, including more consumption treatment services sites which are currently capped in Ontario," said Paul Jalbert, CEO, CMHA Cochrane-Timiskaming. "We look forward to the province finalizing its review on this issue as several communities – including Timmins, Sudbury and Kenora – anxiously await approval and funding of much-needed programs."

In addition to the opioid crisis, there is greater access to other substances such as alcohol and cannabis, and more opportunities to gamble in Ontario.

"There is a strong link between addictions and mental health concerns," said Jalbert. "We encourage northerners to reach out for support if a behaviour or substance is disrupting their ability to maintain a healthy life."

**Fast Facts:**

- People with a mental health issue are twice as likely to have a substance use issue compared to the general population.
- More than 15,000 Ontarians have died due to opioids since 2013.



- Alcohol cost Ontario \$7.1 billion in 2020 due to lost productivity, healthcare, criminal justice and other direct costs.
- More than 300,000 Canadians are reported to be at risk of gambling-related harms.

### ***About Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario***

*Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), Ontario is a not-for-profit, charitable organization. We work to improve the lives of all Ontarians through leadership, collaboration and continual pursuit of excellence in community-based mental health and addictions services. Our vision is a society that embraces and invests in the mental health of all people. We are a trusted advisor to government, contributing to health systems development through policy formulation and recommendations that promote positive mental health. Our 27 local CMHA branches, together with community-based mental health and addictions service providers across the province, serve thousands of Ontarians each year.*

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CMHA branches in northern Ontario include Algoma, Cochrane-Timiskaming, Fort Frances, Kenora, Muskoka-Parry Sound, North Bay and District, Sudbury/Manitoulin, and Thunder Bay. If you'd like to connect with CMHA branch in your community, please contact:

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