



## *Emergency Departments aren't the cure for our mental health crisis but there's nowhere else to turn*

*Act for Mental Health calls for the promised Canada Mental Health Transfer now*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Ottawa, ON (November 14, 2022)** – With rising mental health care needs and Emergency Departments stretched past their limits, Canada must act now to cover mental health care, both before and after people are in crisis. So says the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) with a coalition of Canadian organizations as they launch [Act for Mental Health](#), an advocacy campaign calling for the creation of the promised Canada Mental Health Transfer.

Mental illnesses and substance use disorders will affect one in three Canadians in their lifetime, and research shows the pandemic made things worse.<sup>1</sup> Of those millions of people, one in three can't get the care they need. Some will wind up in Emergency Departments.

“When someone is in a mental health crisis, all roads lead to a hospital,” says Margaret Eaton, CMHA National CEO. “There is often nowhere else to turn, but Emergency Departments aren't the cure for our mental health crisis.” Eaton goes on to say: “We're also failing people once a crisis passes. Often, they're discharged without the care they need because it either does not exist, or it isn't covered.”

Under the Canada Health Act, mental health care is only covered by public health insurance when it is provided by physicians and/or in hospitals, Millions of Canadians don't have a family doctor<sup>2</sup> and can wait months, or more, to see a psychiatrist. Family doctors face challenges in caring for patients with mental health concerns, and publicly funded referral options are scarce.

As a conservative estimate, Canadians pay over \$1 billion every year on private psychological services alone. While some free mental health and substance use health services exist, persistent underfunding to community-based agencies means wait lists are long and services are limited. When we can't afford to pay, often we don't get the care we need, which can lead to crisis and to hospital.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/datalab/mental-illness-blog.html>, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-624-x/2013001/article/11855-eng.htm>, <https://www.camh.ca/en/driving-change/the-crisis-is-real>, <https://cmha.ca/brochure/summary-of-key-findings-ubc-4/>, <https://heron-mandarin-jxzs.squarespace.com/covid-data-portal>, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f31a311d93d0f2e28aaf04a/t/62fbbdfc8d13100a5a91c27/1660665824434/MHRC+Understanding+Mental+Health+of+Canadians+Through+COVID-19+and+Beyond++Poll+13+Report+Final.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://angusreid.org/canada-health-care-family-doctors-shortage/>



“The government has promised major investments in mental health, but we have yet to see real action,” says Eaton. “They need to act now to cover mental health care. We all have the right to care that is publicly funded.”

**The Act for Mental Health** campaign is supported by a coalition of Canadian organizations and calls for the promised Canada Mental Health Transfer in the next federal budget as a first step towards true and universal public mental health care.

Canadians are encouraged to Act for Mental Health by visiting [www.actformentalhealth.ca](http://www.actformentalhealth.ca) and getting involved. Together we will press the government to provide all Canadians with access to universal mental health care.

### About the Canadian Mental Health Association

Founded in 1918, the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is the most established, most extensive community mental health federation in Canada. Through a presence in more than 330 communities across every province and the Yukon. CMHA provides advocacy, programs and resources that help to prevent mental health problems and illnesses, support recovery and resilience, and enable all Canadians to flourish and thrive. For more information, please visit [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca).

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### For media inquiries:

Deb Wise Harris  
National Manager, Communications,  
Canadian Mental Health Association  
Phone: 514-922-6513 | [dwiseharris@cmha.ca](mailto:dwiseharris@cmha.ca)