

Working Together to Improve our Wellness: Recommendations from Ontario's Big City Mayors to improve mental health and addiction services in Ontario

We need action on Mental Health and Addiction

As Mayors of Ontario's Big Cities, we see the suffering caused by mental health and addiction every day. These issues have been a long time in the making.

The transition of mental health services from institutional to community-based settings has brought many improvements, but significant gaps still remain in the services available to those in need of mental health services. These gaps have put increasing pressure on services like income support, social and supportive housing, and policing.

Addictions, new and old, continue to ravage Ontario communities. According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), from 2019 to 2020, emergency department visits for opioid poisonings are up 16% and hospitalizations are up 13%. Alcohol related emergency department visits are up 5%. The Ontario Drug Policy Research Network reported 2,426 opioid-related deaths in 2020, a 60% increase over 2019, making 2020 the worst year on record for opioid-related death since tracking began.

The provincial government is responsible for funding and coordinating mental health and addiction supports, but all levels of government have a role to play in improving services for our residents. Gone are the days when anyone in government could say the mental health of our residents was "not our department."

- Ontario municipalities deliver community health, income support and social services, recreation, housing, and policing services, all of which connect to mental health. Mental health and addiction cause some of the most serious challenges in our communities, and those who suffer from them are among those in greatest need.

It is our role to advocate for the resources needed to meet the needs of our residents.

It is also our role to convene the many health care and community partners who work to serve our populations, to try to identify gaps in the system, connect services, and improve community well-being.

OBCM supports Ontario's Roadmap to Wellness

The provincial government has recognized these gaps and has committed to an ambitious \$4 billion, 10-year, *Roadmap to Wellness* plan to build a more complete

mental health system in Ontario.

Ontario's Big City Mayors propose a series of recommendations to support and complement the *Roadmap to Wellness* plan.

These recommendations include:

- Structural recommendations to improve mental health services and ensure more Ontarians get the help they need, when they need it, and where appropriate;
- Support that helps improve and connect municipal services with community mental health services;
- Legislative and regulatory changes that reduce the harm of substance use and support system change, and
- Municipal leadership opportunities.

Structural recommendations to ensure more Ontarians get the help they need, when they need it, and where they need it.

1. Develop common assessments and coordination of services in mental health, substance use and homelessness based on acuity and need.
2. Develop a prioritized wait time strategy that focuses on consistent care, faster care, easier to access care, and transparent care to address a wide scope of mental health and addiction needs.
 - Focus on at risk populations first, including racialized and Indigenous persons, children and youth, survivors of intimate partner violence, and men facing homelessness.
3. Municipalities are key partners in the delivery of mental health and addiction services. Municipal expertise needs to be included in the development of policy. Additionally, include municipal members in the Ontario Mental Health and Addiction Centre of Excellence to ensure it benefits from municipal experience.
4. Increase social assistance funding to above the poverty line and tie future increases to appropriate economic indicators.
5. Expand mental health and PTSD support to all first responders (police, fire, ambulance, nurses).
6. Continue to fund broadband infrastructure to make web-based services available to more Ontarians – while acknowledging that web-based services are not a replacement for in-person care.

Support that helps improve and connect municipal services with community mental health services

1. Ensure the client experience is seamless across the continuum of care. The Integrated Care Hub model coordinates all the agencies serving a geographic area, to make it easier to navigate the full spectrum of programs. In this day and age, service models should ensure individuals about to be discharged from hospital settings should already be set up with access to the community supports needed to make their transition a success.
2. Move from incident response to prevention. Break down the silos among different system actors to better anticipate issues and prevent their escalation. Utilize the experience of the “situation table” model in community policing to facilitate inter-agency information sharing that can promote opportunities for prompt, preventative intervention and de-escalation.
3. Improve digital health records to create a single record for primary care providers and community-based care providers to address gaps in mental health information. Ensuring all care providers have access to care histories which can be incorporated into plans for ongoing treatment. This can be integrated with the by-name list Ontario is implementing to help alleviate homelessness.
4. Increase the supply of supportive housing by:
 - Building a minimum of 30,000 units of supportive housing over 10 years as recommended by the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) and others in the sector.
 - Introducing legislation to mandate that 15% of RGI housing be supportive housing.
 - Developing a coordinated plan to align operating and capital funding with the relevant ministries and local delivery agencies.
 - Identifying a lead to deliver coordinated funding.
 - Providing additional funding for supportive housing for complex needs, including intensive, ACT level supports.
 - Working with OBCM Mayors to secure equitable and equal federal funding under Reaching Home and the National Housing Strategy for all communities in Ontario for all Ontario communities.
 - Working with OBCM Mayors to secure additional provincial investments in supportive housing based on an assessment of need.

5. Prioritize recreation and infrastructure funding to priority neighbourhoods that require more and better public assets.
6. Fund and implement an Ontario Opioid Strategy to support local community response to the opioid crisis.
 - OBCM supports AMO's recommendations to implement the Ontario Opioid Strategy.
 - This plan should include funding naloxone for all municipal first responders.
 - Increased access to additional opiate replacement therapies – some of which do not require special medical training to administer.
7. Review municipal Community Safety and Well-Being Plans to identify areas for coordination and funding.

Legislative and regulatory changes that reduce the harm of substance use and support system change

1. As part of the Public Health Modernization review, ensure that Boards of Health/Public Health Units are properly funded and resourced to collaborate with the mental health promotion as outlined in the Health Promotion and Prevention Act and corresponding Standards and Guidelines.
2. Work with OBCM and the federal government to decriminalize more controlled substances to better protect people struggling with substance use, reduce societal trauma associated with deaths, and take profits away from criminal syndicates.
3. Update the Police Standards Manual to provide clear and up to date guidance to police officers regarding interactions with individuals experiencing a mental health and/or addiction-related crisis.
4. Implement the police to hospital transition framework.
5. Mandate and fund Mobile Crisis Response Teams, which combine policing and mental health professionals. Funding should also be provided for community mobile teams that respond to low-risk crisis calls and wellness checks. These teams can be created in partnership with front line service providers and policing and mental health and addiction experts.

Municipal leadership opportunities

1. OBCM members will implement best practice mental health and addiction supports for their own employees across all divisions.
2. OBCM Mayors will convene health care, supportive housing, community services providers, police, and community development professionals to identify and solve local barriers to success.
 - OBCM Mayors will create a coordinated table to help coordinate across city departments that have an impact on mental health and addiction.
3. OBCM members will use their oversight role in policing to help implement proactive measures to support mental health and addiction.
4. OBCM Mayors will work with their Councils to help fund the development and evaluation of evidence-based best practices like safe consumption sites.

Moving Forward

Ontario's Big City Mayors understand that solving problems proactively requires upfront investment and making hard decisions. OBCM is ready to support the full implementation of the province's *Roadmap to Wellness*.

By building a complete system, working together and taking bold action Ontario can help more people overcome the mental health and addiction challenges they face.

Let's keep working together to improve our collective wellness.