

Ottawa City Council Candidate Survey

Mental health has never been as important as it is now.

As a candidate for Ottawa City Council (HCC), we here at the YMHM Canada ask that you please complete the following survey to the best of your ability regarding mental health and what you would work to do to ensure mental health in Ottawa if you are elected this October.

Your answers as well as your name and ward, as well as your answers will appear on our website at www.yhmcanada.ca/ottawa.

Sections

1. Mental Health in Youth
2. Mental Health in Marginalized Communities
3. Mental Health in Seniors
4. Mental Health Supports and Services
5. Addiction Supports and Services

Name *

Shawn Menard

I'm running for *

Mayor

Councillor

If Councillor, what Ward are you running in?

Ward 17

Campaign Email *

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Mental Health in Youth

A recent report has shown that 1 in 5 students has a diagnosed mental health problem and that about 27% of students between grade 9-12 reported poor mental health and 16% seriously considered suicide in the past year. If elected, what are you going to do to ensure better mental health within not only highschoools within Ottawa, but all schools?

We will work with School Board trustees to have continuing mental health outreach and education, at the elementary school level as well as in high school. Mental health distress is exacerbated by environmental conditions - poverty, discrimination, poor planning and design decisions - and we have been working to address these factors at a systemic level though increased funding in affordable housing, better oversight of police, and greater participation in the planning process.

If elected, what would you advocate for better to ensure the mental health of youth in Ottawa?

Providing social infrastructure - community and recreation centers, parks and playgrounds - is vital for mental health. The benefits of physical activity for mental health, as well as increased green space and reduced air pollution are causes I have championed through the Environment Committee, as well as through my opposition of the urban boundary expansion.

If elected, would you support the creation of a City of Ottawa Youth Mental Health Plan to better support youth and their mental health?

Yes

Mental Health in Marginalized Communities

Members of marginalized groups are at a higher risk for mental health-related disorders, suicide, and more. If elected, what are you going to do to help ensure the mental health of those in marginalized communities?

We are committed to continuing to push a new approach which redirects resources from policing, which leads to the criminalization of poverty, drug use and mental illness with disproportionate effects on people experiencing intersecting marginalizations, and into public health and housing. We need referral and coordination services with civilian-led mental health teams that can de-task and offer wrap-around and connected services to assist people in need.

Indigenous rates of suicide can be as high as 9 times non-Indigenous peers, and LGBTQ youth can be as high as 14 times more at risk for suicide than straight counterparts. If elected, what are you going to do to reduce the rates of suicide within marginalized communities in Ottawa?

We need to take a much more thoughtful approach to how we support marginalized communities, not only with respect to their mental health, but more broadly. At a time when policing budgets are ballooning, too many residents are being left behind and basic public services aren't there when they need them. Our team will continue to advocate for properly funded public services, including affordable housing, to ensure that vulnerable residents are not left unsupported and left in despair.

Mental Health in Seniors

The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected the Senior population and has led to more people having feelings of depression and loneliness. If elected, what are you going to do to ensure the care of seniors and their mental health?

Enhancing social connectivity for vulnerable seniors is critical. We have learned so much for community organizations in the Ward, such as Seniors Watch Old Ottawa South. Ensuring our seniors have access to safe, affordable housing and have accessible opportunities for recreation and social engagement will go a long way. We will also continue to advocate for increased funding for mental health supports for people in crisis.

Older adults, men in particular, have among the highest suicide rates in the world according to the WHO. If elected, what are you going to do to help ensure the reduction of senior suicide and self-harm in our community?

please see above

According to CCSMH, substance misuse and dependency among older adults is a growing but neglected issue. If elected, what are you going to do to help ensure the reduction of senior substance misuse and/or dependency that could possibly lead to an overdose in our community?

The stigma and taboo around problematic substance use may act as a barrier to seniors seeking support when they need it. We will continue to work with public health officials and harm reduction workers to better understand how the city can better support seniors who misuse or have dependencies on alcohol or drugs.

Mental Health Services and Supports

If elected, what are you going to do to ensure that hospitals are properly supported by the city to provide help to people seeking mental health treatment or programs?

Our plan would see civilian mental health crisis workers in the community responding to people who are struggling with their mental health. Too often, folks are responded to by police which, unfortunately can then lead to an exacerbation of mental health conditions and incarceration. Our approach would see greater investments in wrap around supports for people who need them so they get the interventions they need before they end up in crisis. Properly trained mental health professionals would be better positioned than police to identify when hospitalization (or hospital treatment) is truly needed which would remove some of the burden hospitals are currently experiencing. We will listen to hospitals and advocates about what they need and fight for appropriate supports at the Council table.

Additionally, the City has an important role to play in providing appropriate supportive housing, particularly for folks who are ready to be discharged from the Royal Ottawa Hospital with appropriate supports in place. Currently there is an insufficient supply of supportive housing leading to catastrophic trickle down impacts where people who can safely be treated in the community are kept in the hospital, people who are in crisis or jail and need to be in the hospital are denied treatment because the hospital beds are full and the cycle continues. We can and must do better.

Wait times in Ontario for mental health services can be as high as 919 days. If elected, would you commit to working with all levels of government to ensure that people within your ward and Ottawa are able to access services within a shorter amount of time?

Yes

The House of Commons has approved a National 988 Suicide and Mental Health Crisis Line (as of 2020). Do you support such a number and if elected, will you commit to working with all levels of government to help ensure such a number is implemented?

Yes

There are little to no supports for youth transitioning from youth mental health services to the adult sector. If elected, what will you do to bridge this gap in service for young people?

We will listen to young people with lived experience with this transition so we can better understand where the gaps are and what City Council can do to assist in bridging them.

If elected, would you commit to working with and listening to mental health advocacy groups in Ottawa to help aid in giving input into mental health policies for the city?

Yes. In fact, prioritizing mental health supports for residents is one of the seven priorities of our campaign.

Addiction Services and Supports

If elected, would you commit to working with and listening to addiction and harm reduction advocacy groups in Ottawa to help aid in giving input into addiction policies for the city?

Yes. We have already been doing this work and continue to listen to and learn from harm reduction advocacy groups including folks with lived experience to better understand the policies and programs that they need.

Do you support safe injection sites in Ottawa and/or in your ward (if elected)?

We support safe injection sites anywhere in Ottawa they are needed, including in Capital Ward.

According to the Office of the Chief Coroner, in Ontario up to and including 2020 acute drug toxicity has been the number one cause of death in youth 15-24 years old since 2017. Education about overdose prevention and response with naloxone, harm reduction, and how to use drugs safely can reduce the number of overdose-related deaths in young people as they will have the knowledge and tools to make informed choices about drug use. If elected, how will you ensure that highschool curriculum includes better education about substance use in a non-judgemental safe space?

While a city councillor does not have direct input into high school curriculum, as a former school board trustee, I understand how important it is that young people learn the true facts about drug use and have the information they need to keep themselves and their friends safe. Ottawa Public Health has a role to play here and we can be counted on to advocate for non-judgemental approaches which recognize the basic dignity of all people.

Additional

Is there anything else that you wish to add?

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