

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

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Name *

Theresa Kavanagh

I'm running for *

Mayor

Councillor

If Councillor, what Ward are you running in?

Bay Ward

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?

As a former school board trustee, I am very committed to the young people in Bay Ward and their mental health. As City Councillor, I regularly visit Woodroffe High School and speak to young people about the resources available to them in their community. I chair a Bay Ward Youth Task Force which brings together the youth-serving organizations in the ward to identify issues , gaps in service and opportunities for collaboration. The schools are always invited to participate in the meetings, and do so as they are able. Mental health is always identified as a key issue for young people, especially those in vulnerable neighborhoods.

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

I will continue to keep regular communication with the schools in my ward through special events, as invited, and through the Bay Ward Youth Task Force. As a member of the Community and Protective Services Committee on City Council, I am a strong supporter of funding for agencies providing services for vulnerable young people. In addition, I believe that City Council's work toward a Mental Health Strategy for Ottawa should include a strong youth component, and I will work toward that goal.

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, I believe this should be a component of Ottawa's new Mental Health Strategy

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?

I support the goal of dedicating the majority of Ottawa's community services funding to people who are the most vulnerable among us, including youth. As a member of the board of directors of Ottawa Community Housing and Ottawa Public Health, I will continue to support evidence-driven initiatives to meet the needs of young people in crisis

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?

I am very supportive of Ottawa's new Gender and Race Equity, Inclusion, Indigenous Relations and Social Development department, whose mandate is to ensure that equity-seeking groups will have access to opportunities and City services which reflect their experience and needs. The risk of suicide has been identified as a critical one for youth in marginalized communities, and I support initiatives to address this critical issue

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?

Bay Ward has the greatest proportion of seniors of Ottawa wards. The pandemic was especially devastating for seniors, and many reached out to local services for the first time. I work very closely with The Olde Forge, the seniors' resource centre in Bay Ward. I was pleased to see the speed and responsiveness with which The Olde Forge and other community agencies pivoted to meet seniors' needs in new ways. I am supportive of Ottawa's first Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC) in its ongoing development, as it enables seniors to age at home for longer in the way they choose.

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?

I believe that adequate affordable housing, accessible health supports and programs to break isolation and promote health are the best responses for preventing and addressing risk of suicide and self-harm in seniors. I support City of Ottawa and Ottawa Public Health programs which whole-person approach to service planning and delivery.

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?

I support funding for community-based, person-centred health care for seniors. Services which address primary mental health issues as well as isolation are priorities for me. The Mental Health Strategy which Ottawa City Council will endorse in the coming term will be an important guiding document for a strong way forward

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?

As hospitals are largely a provincial responsibility, I believe that my responsibility is to work closely with my counterparts at the provincial and federal levels to advocate for more and better mental health programs that reflect local priorities. As a member of the Ottawa Public Health Board, I have regular briefings on local mental health issues that require attention. Also, I maintain close contact with Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre, which works with the other community health centres in Ottawa to advocate for and promote addiction and mental health supports to meet emerging needs, such as the opiate crisis in Ottawa

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?

I am optimistic that the problems caused by funding and ministry silos can be addressed as part of the development of Ottawa's mental health strategy. The need for greater co-ordination among services has been identified as a key issue to address in implementing Ottawa's Community Health and Well-Being Plan. I will be watching to ensure this issue is addressed as the CSWBP moves into implementation.

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, consultation and participation of community stakeholders will be part of the implementation of the Community Safety and Well Being Plan and Ottawa's Mental Health Strategy.

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, consultation and participation of community stakeholders will be part of the implementation of the Community Safety and Well Being Plan and Ottawa's Mental Health Strategy.

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

Yes

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?

I would work with school board trustees and schools in my ward to discuss the best ways to introduce drug safety as a part of the curriculum

Additional

Is there anything else that you wish to add?

Mental health for all people in Bay Ward is an important priority for me. I will continue to support programs that promote quality of life for all residents of Bay Ward, including the most vulnerable among us. Affordable housing, availability of safe outdoor spaces and reliable, affordable transit are also critical to ensure quality of life and resilience in mental health.

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