

Hamilton City Council Candidate Survey

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

As a candidate for Hamilton 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 Hamilton 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 ymhmcanada.ca/Hamilton.

Sections

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Mental Health in Youth

A report by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health found 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 highschools within Hamilton, but all schools?

Many municipal services can support youth (and everyone) with overall mental health. Connectivity opportunities are key for many. Having places to go, that are safe, to connect with others. Perhaps this is through local community centres or libraries, focused on age specific guidelines. Simply being with others is often a tremendous help for youth suffering from mental health issues. Improved transportation in Ward 12 Ancaster/West Flamborough and throughout the city is also critical. Our youth are limited with being able to secure good parttime jobs, connect with friends who attend other high schools, and create healthy social independence due to a lack of public transportation.

From an educational perspective I believe that we need to ensure that our schools are SAFE places for our students to receive guidance, support and resources within the school and out into the community. Our schools currently do a Safety Survey that the students feel (or at least the students in my own home feel) is not listened to. How do we ensure students feel heard? Perhaps implementing focus groups to really hear from varied demographics (age, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, etc.) what would truly make a difference to them!

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

Free youth programming for socialization and networking, improved transit, opportunities for inexpensive or free active lifestyle opportunities (gym times, yoga, volunteer led sport specific training, etc.). Good physical health also leads to improved mental health, so nutritious food in schools needs to be a priority.

If elected, would you support the recommendations for youth mental health and addictions set out by the City of Hamilton Youth Strategic Plan that was created by HamOntYouth?

<https://www.hamilton.ca/city-initiatives/strategies-actions/youth-strategy>

Absolutely. As a mother for 4 young girls aged 11-17 I have first hand experience with the impacts of Mental Health on the community and on families. This recommendation and plan would be very high on my support which falls into my SAFE COMMUNITIES aspect of my platform.

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?

Safe Communities does not start and end at traffic and property safety. Safe Communities MUST include ensuring that all members of the community, particularly those who are marginalized, feel safe and protected by leadership both municipally and at other levels of government.

Conversations must be had at City Hall to ensure that we are meeting the needs of the marginalized communities and we must be looking to those who identify with marginalized groups to understand the impact of previous efforts and what we must do moving forward.

I also believe that understanding and awareness starts from the inside out and I would encourage City Hall to undergo Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) audits and training for all elected officials and staff. If we do not start there how are we possibly equipped to truly manage the needs of our marginalized communities?

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 Hamilton?

Step One with relation to Indigenous suicide rates is to continue down the path of reconciliation. Embrace the culture, language and community that has been taken from the First Nations people of Hamilton and encourage it to be fostered. When people feel connected they also feel less likely to want to remove themselves from their communities by means of suicide.

We must ensure that the City promotes inclusivity for all LGBTQ+ people across the city. Flying the Pride Flag, offering Ally pins to staff to promote safe places within City Hall to go for support, and being general supporters of the community internally but showing it in external ways.

Again - starting with the City on DEI training and awareness. I strongly believe that the culture of the organization can do very little if it is not operating the way we wish to support others.

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?

This issue was pressing pre-Covid and has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Seniors, particularly those living alone, are prone to depression due to isolation. It is in our human nature to need to connect with others and all opportunities to connect, even in retirement residences was limited or completely removed.

We now have people who are so unused to going out and being social who have given up all their activities and are not going back out again.

Senior's Centres are few and far between in the City and we should be looking at both the number of centres but also the accessibility to them! We, in Ward 12, have a lovely centre, located in Alberton, with no public transit. Older adults who have had to give up driving, never drove, or have lost their driving spouse, are too far removed to participate in the services available to them. Location - transportation - cost are all factors we need to consider in making senior programming accessible.

Also, offering some sort of program that is over the phone, encourages conversation, thinking, and engagement with others whether it be for isolated adults or during poor weather, with wonderful guest speakers, singers, storytellers, politicians, community partners....just about anyone who can share and connect with the older adult community would be beneficial.

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?

Many of the things we would do to support youth and marginalized communities can also be implemented with seniors. There are many factors leading to the increase in suicide in older adults but isolation and loss of loved ones are two huge factors.

A suicide hotline and communication of that resources to Seniors through their doctors, and seniors' centres would be a first step. Then having a connection beyond the emergency services, something like Distress Centre of Halton, that has trained volunteers contacting those at risk and staying in touch would be a tremendous resource in the older population.

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?

Sadly, our healthcare system is quick to prescribe, over prescribe and prescribe again. Seniors do tend to have more pain and other ailments that require medications and to improve quality of life, doctors are prescribing whatever is needed to help them "feel better".

We need to work with the province on improved healthcare first and foremost.

Secondly, by improving access to Senior's Centres we will in turn be able to find more natural ways such as seated yoga, Tai Chi and other gentle fitness options to improve overall health and in turn likely reduce the misuse of substances.

Community is almost part of the solution!

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?

Maintaining funding to the LHIN and the support services they offer will reduce many of the ER calls and triage them more appropriately.

Cutting funding to the LHIN is a scary idea in all areas of mental and physical health care and we need to ensure community support services are not cut, and instead ideally funded more. Without fiscal reporting it is difficult for me to further elaborate.

Wait times in Hamilton for mental health services can be as long as 710 days. If elected, would you commit to working with all levels of government to ensure that people within your ward and Hamilton are able to access services within a shorter amount of time?

Absolutely. Those who do not have the means to pay for mental health services are left with nothing and often until it's too late. We need to find ways to reduce wait times for all health care but particularly our mental health wait times for both children and adults.

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?

988 is equally as important as 911 services. By implementing such a number and the supports that come with it, we take a huge first step and telling our community that they matter, that we take mental health issues seriously and whether you are suffering from chest pain or suicidal tendencies Hamilton is here to help.

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?

Here in Hamilton I know there is work being done through McMaster University Hospital. We need to work actively with our provincial government officials to ensure funding is allocated to these services that both support and educate on the transition from youth to adult services.

Continuing to support Hamilton Health Services as a leader in medical research in any way possible will continue and enhance the work that is already being done by doctors such as Dr. Coutourier and Dr. Johnson in the Eating Disorder Program at McMaster as an example.

I believe that a transitional program would be beneficial for 16-21 year olds as they begin to identify as more independent young adults and have more responsibility in their healthcare but are still often living at home, or attending school. Working alongside our post secondary institutions as well as our high schools to ensure students are aware of what services are available in the community and the community is aware of what the colleges and universities can provide with regards to peer to peer support groups, or other services.

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

Not only would I listen but I would eagerly sit on committees and working groups who prioritize mental health. By combatting mental health we reduce the costs and challenges that impact the rest of society's systems (courts, hospitals, jails, etc.)

Addiction Services and Supports

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

Absolutely. Addiction rates have skyrocketed due to the Covid 19 Pandemic and deserve tremendous attention, particularly now. Again I would be interested in being very involved in these advocacy groups.

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

Safe injection sites are sadly part of the reality of the needs of our communities with our current opiate epidemic. My concern with safe sites is maintaining safety of the rest of the community and ensuring that the sites are truly doing more good than harm. The list of pros and cons of safe injection sites is long. If a Safe Injection Site is run well, it can most definitely add tremendous value to the community, reduce HIV and AIDS transmission rates, reduce accidental drug overdoses and reduce needles disposed of improperly in communities.

However, the best sites are also well connected with addiction services and in an ideal world, promote recovery among their participants.

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 like to believe that if the schools are educated on this topic they will share it! It is the responsibility of City Public Health to ensure we are equipping schools with all the tools and knowledge to successfully lead the conversations.

Offering workshops and services to schools, bringing in guest speakers who have first hand experience to tour or schools or do a live stream presentation would likely help students understand the severity and risk involved in participating in any illegal drug activity today.

Additional

Is there anything else that you wish to add?

I hope that this is thorough enough. I feel very strongly about DEI, mental health and the overall health of the community.

Megg Markettos

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