

# 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](http://ymhmcanada.ca/Hamilton).

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Name \*

Nrinder Nann

Ward Running In \*

Ward 3

Campaign Email \*

info@ourward3.ca

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?

- I would want to ensure the Hamilton Youth Strategy integrates these needs with recommended programming and action. The City can play a key role by leveraging our existing recreation centres and libraries to be spaces to increase availability for youth focused programming and access to therapy and support circles. It will be important to get the online/in-person balance right in terms of access.

- As a Board of Health member, I have already asked for a post-pandemic strategy to address youth health needs. It is essential this work addresses the needs of youth, families and their caregivers across all neighborhoods in Hamilton.

- And finally, as a Councillor, I would talk openly and honestly about mental health to reduce stigma.

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

-Youth in Hamilton need mental health supports that are accessible to them in the place, time, and delivery method that works for them. We also need strong advocacy and action as we address upstream factors that give rise to mental health challenges in youth: in particular, factors that bear on Adverse Childhood Experiences, the socioeconomic environment our children and youth are being raised in, and the discrimination and hate that some children have to contend with.

-We can improve action on Adverse Childhood Experiences through: strengthening economic supports to families, building up strong school-based mentoring and afterschool programs, being advocates against oppression and adversity and promoting social norms of inclusion and welcoming diversity, and thinking of the whole family in service provision, for example.

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>.)

-Yes. It is important to create new and enhance existing avenues for prevention to further develop the services in Hamilton. Sports and arts are key in giving youth a positive outlet to focus on their assets and self-expression - both key in supporting a sense of worthiness, well-being and confidence. Expand on the City's youth internship and apprenticeship programs to ensure student living wage rate that enables youth to have meaningful skill development and employment trajectories in the public sector while being mentored by leaders.

-The Hamilton Community Safety and Well-being Plan also has specific recommendations that as a Council we need to ensure are enacted with a youth focus.

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?

- Youth in Hamilton need mental health supports that are accessible to them in the place, time, and delivery method that works for them. We also need strong advocacy and action as we address upstream factors that give rise to mental health challenges in youth: in particular, factors that bear on Adverse Childhood Experiences, the socioeconomic environment our children and youth are being raised in, and the discrimination and hate that some children have to contend with.

- We can improve action on Adverse Childhood Experiences through: strengthening economic supports to families, building up strong school-based mentoring and afterschool programs, being advocates against oppression and adversity and promoting social norms of inclusion and welcoming diversity, and thinking of the whole family in service provision, for example.

- A health equity framework in action is key. Building off the models used during the pandemic with the vaccine network which led to IBPOC-led and hosted clinics, I would support the application of the same model to mental health-related supports where the organizations and communities are resourced to reach and care more fully for their youth.

- Healthy active living and access to healthy food options are both protective factors against mental health issues, and we can see that communities that have been marginalized are often concentrated in areas of the city that are food deserts, or that don't have the same kind of safe roadways or green space/tree canopy that wealthier parts of the city have. I would leverage the new Brightside Park, the Gage Park Children's Garden, Depave Barton projects and the community gardens at JC Beemer, Powell Park and across from the Birge pool are inclusive spaces for youth to engage in food justice work as well.

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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?

- Statistics like these speak so clearly to the effects of continued inequity and discrimination, the burden of trauma, and the need for interventions that specifically empower communities that have experienced marginalization.

- Fostering a sense of belonging is also set by elected leaders speaking out when incidents of hate are experienced or targeting specific communities. I will continue speaking out and demanding more from a hate prevention and mitigation approach to ensure every city service worker is an active ally on the job, equipped to respond.

- I also will continue to support the work towards city-supported safer spaces for Indigenous, 2SLGBTQ+, Black, Racialized, Muslim and Jewish people. Specifically, I look forward to the transformation of the former King George School in Ward 3 becoming a new hub for the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre (HRIC).

- And again, as a Board of Health member, I will continue to advocate for a health equity in action framework to ensure funding for Hamilton based suicide prevention programs reaches indigenous and 2SLGBTQ+ youth specifically.

- Partnerships with De dwa da dehs nye s, HRIC, Rainbow Health, The Well, etc are key to ensure the organizations that serve their communities are best resourced to meet the needs of their youth.

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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?

- I know this reality very well. I relocated my mom from BC to come live with us. And her mental health was seriously impacted by the isolation of the initial lock downs during the pandemic.

- I will continue to advocate for increased provincial funding for senior focused mental health care.

- I will continue to support expanded outreach based senior programs that link isolated seniors to people who can support resocializing and ensure our recreation centres and libraries are welcoming places with senior specific programming.

- I know other cities have sponsored programs that couple youth who need affordable housing with seniors who have access space in their home as a way of providing mutual and multigenerational support for each other. I think this is worth exploring in Hamilton.

Trying to also help families create intergenerational homes through a tax rebate of a benefit program would be another incredible intervention that would benefit many.

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?

- Suicide is often a result of social isolation, loneliness, and a loss of pleasure. By ensuring there are accessible places where seniors can gather and meet, building a healthy sense of place, and providing avenues for engaging in meaningful activities, we can protect against the dislocation and disconnection many older adults feel. Investments in parks, community centres, and healthy neighbourhoods are key in this regard.

- Suicide is also often a result of poverty. Hamilton has long known the extent to which our socioeconomic disparity and health outcomes are linked: the Code Red studies showed clearly that where we live has an impact on many aspects of our health, including mental health/psychiatric outcomes.

- As a community we must support and facilitate conversations about men's mental health, many older men struggle with deep internal patriarchy where they don't speak about their feelings and are not socialized to process healthfully through deep feelings. This can lead to shame, anger, and powerlessness. It is important to destigmatize this and support health self expression.

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?

- Again, it is important to leverage best practices in overdose prevention and education geared specifically to seniors. And it is critical that the Hamilton Board of Health advocate to the province for increased funding to all addiction and mental health programming to meet actual needs versus an arbitrary increase devoid of population outcome measurements.

### 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?

- From hospital programs who use our parks and trail systems for mindfulness walks to policies that bear on upstream factors to mental illness, the City plays a key role in supporting our hospital healthcare system.

- We can also ensure that the city attracts and retains talented workers to staff our tertiary, primary, and public health systems. Hospital systems do not exist apart from healthy primary care, public health, and community mental health. Mental health care doesn't start when somebody enters the hospital, and doesn't stop when they're discharged. By building connections and fostering collaboration across all parts of the system we can relieve the burden on our hospital healthcare system and do our part to prevent the revolving-door phenomenon.

- Hospitals and healthcare centres across the country are finding unique ways to partner with municipalities to build health equity; Hamilton is no exception. Like KeepingSix and HAMSMRT in Hamilton, both provide direct outreach and focus on building relationships of trust with those who are unhoused or struggling with addictions. These programs need to be better understood and supported by Council.

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?

- Healthcare is provincially funded but locally delivered. We need effective collaboration across - and between - all levels of government. Ontario has a Minister of Health, a Minister of Housing, and a Minister of Mental Health and Addictions: we need to see these all as parts of a broader whole, rather than broken up into silos and failing to coordinate our efforts across the whole system. In addition to collaboration and partnerships, we also need strong advocacy to ensure not only that mental healthcare is a high priority for governments, but that they are also moving the needle on making improvements upstream, at the level of the social determinants of health.

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 and 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?

- There are gaps in service provision for youth transitioning to adulthood in some areas of mental health - particularly Developmental Services and Contact Hamilton - and we need ongoing advocacy to smooth out the continuity of care as people age out of services. However, there are wonderful examples of programs that extend their services well into adulthood (i.e. extending age cutoffs to 25 years of age and beyond), programs that serve people across this developmental spectrum (interventions in primary care), and a plethora of community agencies, not-for-profits, and drop-in programs that wrap around the family in its entirety. We need to build on these successes and replicate those programs that demonstrate effectiveness in avoiding people "lost to follow-up" or ageing out.

- However, the challenge we face is the limitation that health funding the City has to work with is based on provincial allocations. It is often necessary for Hamilton Board of Health and Council to advocate for increased resources to meet program gaps. I would certainly continue to raise the need to support such asks as part of the annual budgeting process and direct advocacy to the province.

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?

- Yes. To make improvements to the mental health system, we do need to hear from advocacy groups and people on the front-line. We also need to hear from the people who are directly served by these sorts of initiatives. Healthcare has historically been used as a tool of oppression against Indigenous and other racialized communities: it is critical that we include the voices of the client/patient/resident stakeholders to ensure we are not harming the very communities we are working to empower.

### 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?

- Yes. Hamilton, like many cities across Canada, are struggling to support and protect individuals who use substances. Collaborating with individuals with lived experiences, advocates, and experts is key to developing adequate and functional solutions in a timely manner.

- Anytime a group or residents delegate to Hamilton Board of Health or the Emergency and Community Services Committee with their personal experiences or subject matter expertise, I deeply value the perspective they bring to the decision making process. I will continue to encourage residents to have a direct say to their elected representatives through that forum.

- I also meet with different groups across the city in preparation for major policy work and deliberation of Council. I will continue building my relationship with addiction and harm reduction advocacy groups that centre those with lived experience.

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

- First and foremost, Consumption Treatment Services (CTS) save lives! These centres utilize best practices from around the world that have been proven to enable people who use substances to regain health and purpose in their lives.

- Ward 3 is slated to have its first CTS within the new Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Clinic in 2024. I support a model of CTS that provides full wrap-around supports and enables our residents who are working through their addictions to have a safe, trusting environment where they can connect to other needed services.

- The toxic drug epidemic touches every corner of the city and we need more CTS services in each ward. To achieve this, we must work with residents to determine strategic and impactful locations for these resources. We must also combat the stigma and roadblocks faced by organizations who save lives. CTS are key to improving the overall health of Hamiltonians.

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 will continue to work with the Ward 3 Trustees to ensure community-based and health organization partners can help the school boards to help expand education about harm-reduction and overdose prevention supports. There are fabulous partners in Hamilton like Marchese Pharmacy, The AIDS Network, Student Overdose Prevention and Education Network, and Public Health to support this work very well.

Additional

Is there anything else that you wish to add?

Thank you for drawing out candidate commitments and thoughts on such important topics of health and well-being for our residents across Hamilton. If you review my platform at [ourward3.ca](http://ourward3.ca) you will see other aspects of preventative measures that assist building healthier communities and a city where everyone belongs.

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