

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.

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Name *

Bina Shah

I'm running for *

Mayor

Councillor

If Councillor, what Ward are you running in?

Kanata South, Ward 23

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 are in a mental health crisis. As an educator for over 20 years with the OCDSB, I've worked with vulnerable Ottawa youth first hand along with being a member and ally of the 2SLGBT+ community. As a Learning Support Teacher (LST) and mathematics teacher, I have witnessed anxiety and mental health problems grow and the Pandemic has certainly exacerbated these problems. Many students pre-Pandemic needed learning accommodations for their mental health and the rise of their debilitating anxiety. Building strong communities of acceptance within our classrooms and beyond within all schools, including school clubs like gay-straight alliances (GSAs) for example, should be supported, encouraged and funded. Schools have the ability to shift the stigma associated with youth mental health and normalize it, but it takes a community. It is critical for educators to get ongoing training to help our young people out so everyone finds a good balance to openly discuss with our youth and school communities that our mental health is just as - if not more important - than our physical health. We must also educate parents/guardians about the warning signs of suicide and to help equip them with the next steps to seek out available help and further resources. Our educators are at the front line and need tools and support to help our young people out. Under the direction of OPH, Ottawa School Boards and the Ministry of Education should continue to prioritize funding programs and support for our young people's mental health in what has been an unprecedented, challenging time and will undoubtedly be for years to come if we don't act now.

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

If elected, we need more training for professionals working with our youth, more funding to support programs, and better access to and more resources for our youth. Working with OPH and our school boards to provide professional development in our schools - targeting vulnerable groups like the 2SLGBT+ students and having access to a plethora of supports that are tailored to these individuals within our schools is a start. Continuing to offer and encourage school-wide assemblies and workshops (like GET-REAL) to establish a sense of belonging and connectedness is critical. These workshops also discuss and introduce perspectives that show we share more commonalities than not - so youth can be exposed to various groups within their school communities and develop empathy with one another by bridging gaps pertaining to the differences amongst us that have traditionally caused division.

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, if elected, I would support the creation of a City of Ottawa Youth Mental Health Plan to better support our youth and their mental health.

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?

Our growing elderly population and seniors need ongoing mental health support. Human interaction is critical for them and pursuing programs where young people are more involved with and connected to our aging population can be mutually beneficial. Ensuring the senior population has regular check-ins, providing a wide variety of affordable programming that will meet their interests and needs in our City and recreation facilities as well. With a relative in long term care, I have seen the devastating effects of isolation brought on by the Pandemic and we need to ensure our marginalized community's needs are attended to, met and not set aside. To counteract the effects of mental health-related disorders, our aging population also needs access to green space and other outdoor activities like gardening. Aging with dignity and being part of a community through connectedness goes a long way.

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?

Our marginalized groups (indigenous and LGBTQ youth) struggle and the suicide rates within these youth communities is alarming. We know it and I've witnessed and experienced it. We need to ensure these groups have a variety of special supports from their individual communities so they are working towards their betterment and self-care and have a network of support from their communities that they can access - which we know is best for these marginalized groups. Local community members should be supported further to take action and provide real solutions for their respective communities. At the same time, ongoing funding, promotion of local community members and training for professionals that work within and are part of our marginalized communities should continue. The creation of safe spaces and identifying allies should always be considered and normalized. These groups have experienced trauma that need deep work to address the root causes so the cycle of trauma can end.

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?

If depression and loneliness go unchecked they can lead to suicide and other mental health disorders. Our growing elderly population and seniors need ongoing mental health support. Human interaction is critical for them and pursuing programs where young people are more involved with and connected to our aging population can be mutually beneficial. Ensuring the senior population is regularly checked up and providing a wide variety of programming that will meet their interests in our City and better access to recreation facilities as well. With a relative in long term care, I have seen the devastating effects of isolation brought on by the Pandemic and we need to ensure our marginalized community's needs are attended to, met and not set aside. To counteract the effects of mental health-related disorders, our aging population also needs access to green space and other outdoor activities like gardening. Aging with dignity goes a long way.

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?

Raising awareness and advocating for older adults - like men in particular to prevent suicide - is paramount. Again, ensuring solid community connections and programs that are tailored to our senior males' needs are necessary along with education of this vulnerable segment of our population so that preventative measures can be taken to ensure we reduce senior suicide and self-harm in our communities.

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?

To help combat the growing but neglected issue of substance misuse and dependence among older adults would be to ensure there are programs that can be accessed to provide ongoing counselling and support to community members in the way that is tailored for the individual. Addressing the underlying root cause is critical and this only happens with regular, long term and consistent support.

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?

If elected I will be working towards ensuring our hospitals have proper support (staffing, programs and treatment) by the City to help provide those who are seeking mental health supports have regular and long term solutions which are clearly needed immediately to handle the backlog for these types of programs and treatment.

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?

When I hear wait times in Ontario for mental health services can be as high as 919 days it is very disheartening. I would commit to working with all levels of government to ensure that people within my ward and in Ottawa are able to access services within a shorter amount of time. This means ensuring the funding for programs and treatment is intact.

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, a National 988 Suicide and Mental Health Crisis Line has been needed for a long time. I do support such a number and if elected, I will commit to working with all levels of government to help ensure the number is rolled out and implemented effectively in November 2023. OPH would certainly lead the charge and be supported by my office if elected.

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?

Since there are little to no supports for youth transitioning from youth mental health services to the adult sector, I would like to help bridge the gap by encouraging our province to restore services like the online therapy program that was introduced during the Pandemic and was cut by 85%. Programs like this one can be the support that is needed for our transitioning youth and our medical professionals should prioritize and continue to refer our transitioning youth to adulthood with this type of service.

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, if elected, I would commit to working with and listening to mental health advocacy groups in Ottawa to help aid in giving input to mental health policies for the city.

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, if elected, I would commit to working with and listening to addiction and harm reduction advocacy groups in Ottawa to help aid in giving input to addiction policies for the city.

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

Yes, I support safe injection sites in Ottawa and in my 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?

The high school curriculum is set by the Ministry of Education under the provincial government with consultations along the way. I will always always advocate for better education in our high schools about substance abuse in a non-judgemental safe space.

Additional

Is there anything else that you wish to add?

We need to support our vulnerable populations further in their mental health and well being. We need to restore funding for programs that help people deal with trauma and identify root causes as there is a lack of mental health facilities in our city to provide adequate support.

We should continue to fund other resources like the Kids Help Phone, the variety of resources available at the Youth Services Board, our School Boards and Student Success programs, connecting with allies within the Children's Aid Society and all of the mental health care professionals who work in our hospital programs, retirement residences and LTC. But action needs to happen now as we are in crisis and any further delays will lead to more harm and loss.

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