

# 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).

## Sections

1. Mental Health in Youth
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Name \*

Robert Baboth

Ward Running In \*

Ward 12

Campaign Email \*

rob.baboth@gmail.com

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 set up a Task Force with an Executive Sponsor. This Team would be made up of representatives from McMaster Children's Hospital, students, teachers and parents. The goal of this task force would be to liaison with our schools and bring mental health awareness to the students and teachers. We need to give mental health awareness training to the 'front lines'. Set up safe space within the schools as well as setting up peer-to-peer check ins. Teach the students and teachers the warning signs, what to look for. We would get regular feedback from this Task Force and ensure their findings are presented to council on a regular basis. The main goal would be to reduce the stigma of mental health and bring awareness to the forefront.

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

Yes

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>)

Page 19 shows the implementation plan outline in 7 steps. This would become the road map for success. I would support this 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 would like to combine the next two questions:

Recent studies have shown that individuals from marginalized ethnic communities are less likely to use mental health care services. In order to help this group and reduce the rates of suicides we must reduce the stigma around mental health within this community. Many times a language barrier exists. We need to establish a multilingual task force to be able to speak with individuals in their own language.

Take from the legal aid model which provides legal advice for anyone from a marginalized community. Adapt this funding model to allow individuals who otherwise could not afford to access mental health care services.

We need to find a way no knock down cultural barriers and assist individuals, no matter what background they come from. People who experience systematic discrimination will not seek the help they need to deal with mental illness. We must change this paradigm and proactively reach out to this group.

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?

Please see above

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 will combine the next two questions:

US statistics show that while older adults make up 12% of the population they make up 18% of the suicides rate (Michael Smith: What To Know About Suicides In Older Adults, March 21/2021).

We need to be able to look for the warning signs: loss of interest in daily activities; withdrawn from family & friends; neglect hygiene. Trying to monitor this group of individuals presents its challenges. We need to set up a program with our mental health advocates to connect with our seniors. This can be done by partnering with our senior centers, reaching out to family members as well as neighbours. For example our neighbour is 96 and does not have family close by. We, along with our neighbours have established regular check ins to monitor his health.

Without family individuals can feel isolated, this has been made worse during the pandemic.

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?

With any substance dependencies you need to create awareness with the supports networks such as families, health care professionals (particularly those who do home visits) as well as seniors recreation centres and those volunteers and staff working at them. One indicator is when individuals give up recreational activities or become absent from social activities. People need to know what signs to look for and who to call for help.

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?

Start with grass root supports, asking our health care professionals how can we help? We did this personally by reaching out to McMaster Children's Hospital asking what we can do help with this issue, especially among our youth. These conversations lead to us supporting the creation of the Mental Health Therapeutic Area within the hospital. This is a private outdoor area that patients can connect with family members. The results have been an overwhelming success.

An option could be to reach out to other hospitals and find out what programs they have had success with and possibly emulate them.

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?

I would to commit to working with all levels of government to reduce our wait times. A two year wait can have devastating consequences.

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 to do bridge this gap in service for young people?

It is important to understand that mental health issues do not dissipate because of age. Transitioning from youth to adult services will usually mean a change in facilities, mental health workers as well as doctors. We need to ensure that we implement transition protocols to bridge any gap in care. We would need to coordinate the implementation/transition plan with McMaster Children's Hospital along with our adult facilities.

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

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### 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

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

Yes

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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?

According to the Ontario government teachers are central to any curriculum development. Changing or adding to high school curriculum can be a daunting and time consuming task. It may be easier to add an after school enrichment class. Once this proves successful the next steps would be look at adding it to the curriculum. As a councilor I would lobby our school trustees as well as their respective Chairs. First steps would be, if it hasn't already been done, have Naloxone available in our schools for emergencies.

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Additional

Is there anything else that you wish to add?

Without the proper support mechanisms, those suffering from mental health illness, along with family members/caregivers will experience great suffering. There is also the economic costs associated with this illness. Communities need preventative programs and support services to address this growing issue. Mental health services continue to be underfunded and have long wait times. We need our city council to be an advocate for changing this paradigm. If elected I will work with all levels of government, community advocates and our school boards to address this major issue facing all of us.

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