

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

1. Mental Health in Youth
2. Mental Health in Marginalized Communities
3. Mental Health in Seniors
4. Mental Health Supports and Services
5. Addiction Supports and Services

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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?

As a city councillor, I would have limited control or say what is taught in schools in the city. I would, however work with school trustees on the issue and encourage open dialogue between the school boards and council.

This being said, Council has a responsibility to provide whatever support that is needed outside the school setting to help ALL residents in the city when it comes to mental health. One of the options is to work with different youth groups and church outreach programs to encourage our youth to reach out to peers and leaders in these groups if they need help. Sometimes all we need is someone to listen. These groups could refer them if necessary to the appropriate professional. We all know that there is a severe delay in getting mental help and that funding is mainly a provincial responsibility- but that doesn't mean the City of Hamilton can't or shouldn't get involved. Staff and Council must continually identify new programmes and push for expanding existing initiatives that can be enhanced to help youth access mental health and substance abuse support.

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

I would work with the different groups, hospitals, etc., to ensure we can provide the services we need.

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, 110%

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?

We need to reach out to all segments of society- especially those in marginalized groups. We do this by reaching out and working with them to ensure they get the help they need.

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?

More effort must be made to reach out to these groups. The best way to do so is by working with group leaders to see what we can do to help- and then follow through with their ideas.

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 will be a challenging segment to help- but we must do it. Previous generations had misconceptions about mental health, thinking it was a 'weakness'- many, especially men, refused to acknowledge the problem. This requires a little different approach, maybe working with church groups- and other outreach programs to have group 'coffees' on various issues (death, aging, losing memories, etc) so that they can begin getting the help they need in a non-threatening environment.

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?

As I mentioned in my previous answer- 'tough nut to crack'. The best way again is to have non-threatening group sessions as mentioned above- or maybe one-on-one peer chats where they can talk about their concerns without them coming across in their mind as a weakness or the chats as a therapy session.

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?

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?

To be honest, not exactly sure how to make this work since a lot of the treatment programs are a provincial responsibility- except to say- ANY WAY I CAN

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?

Waiting two years for mental health assistance is an insult to the people of Hamilton- and Ontario. That being said, the people who voted in the last provincial election gave the government a clear majority – and their ‘style’ in dealing with the issue. They have attempted to increase the nursing staff –hopefully, that may help. I can lobby the government in any way I can to increase funding to get the people the help they need when they need it.

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?

This is highly frustrating- in many cases if you or your child has a Child Psychiatrist- you are often out of luck once you turn 18. An excellent resource for kids with issues is Contact Hamilton- but they only take on youth between 6-18. Again- once you turn 18- good luck. We need to work with groups like Contact Hamilton to create a transitioning database available to anyone to help those who have or are about to turn 18 with a list of available services for the individual would have some idea where to turn. We should be encouraging those dealing with teens to start explaining the transitioning period when they turn 16- so they will have some idea where to turn. Again, this is an area where we need to work with our provincial and federal partners to do whatever we can to help those who need it.

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

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

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

I support the concept of safe injection sites- in an area where it's most useful.

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?

Some great groups- such as the Student Overdose and Education Network (SOPEN Hamilton)- offer courses on overdose prevention and how to use naloxone. I would encourage the school boards to contact SOPEN to arrange a seminar.

Additional

Is there anything else that you wish to add?

We need to take mental health far more serious than we presently do- and I pledge that I will do anything I can do to help,

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