



Canadian Mental
Health Association
Nova Scotia
Mental health for all

NOVA SCOTIA

MENTAL HEALTH

RESOURCE GUIDE

The Canadian Mental Health Association Nova Scotia Division is dedicated to helping you navigate the mental health system. If you need help visit www.novascotia.cmha.ca.



Each year, 1 in 5 people in Canada experiences a mental illness or mental health issue, but 5 in 5 of us — that's all people — have mental health. And we all need to take care of it.

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About this Guide



Recovery is Possible

It is possible to enjoy positive mental health and live the life you want while dealing with mental illness and addictions. In fact, you can take steps toward a life of meaning and purpose today. The experience of recovery is rarely an event that happens in a single moment.

Most often, it is a journey that takes place over a period of time. Sometimes this journey is brief, other times it may be lifelong; however, it all starts with a single, hopeful step towards better health, managing change, reaching goals, and maintaining hope requires personal effort as well as support from knowledgeable and trustworthy connections.

The capacity of each and all of us to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face.

Mental Health Definition,
(Public Health Agency of Canada)

As you search through this document, our hope is that you find the opportunities, resources, and support you and your loved ones need to live well.

If you need help with navigating the mental health system, please do not hesitate to contact the Canadian Mental Health Association Nova Scotia Division via phone at 877.466.6606 ext.101.

About CMHA NS

Our Vision: A Canada where mental health is a universal human right.

Our Mission: To ensure that all people in Nova Scotia experience good mental health and well-being.

Mental Health for all

The Canadian Mental Health Association Nova Scotia Division [CMHA NS] is one of the oldest and most extensive community mental health organizations in Canada.

CMHA NS supports the resilience, recovery and well-being of people living with mental illness and those experiencing mental health challenges across the province.



Through programming, education and advocacy, we strive to create an environment of hope, to reduce stigma, and empower all Nova Scotians to flourish and thrive.

Our Impact:

- **Programming:** Programming and education in 36 communities across the province.
- **Systems Change:** At the division level, we advocate for mental health system change, educate, and influence societal beliefs and behaviours to create a climate of understanding and acceptance. Working with our allies and partners, we push for new systems, policies and practice that foster better mental health and well-being.
- **Advocacy:** And we advocate to improve the spaces, places and conditions that shape mental health.

People in Nova Scotia can rely on CMHA NS for:

- **Support:** We provide unwavering support to all people in Nova Scotia in their pursuit of mental health.
- **Knowledge:** We offer inclusive, evidence-based information on mental health.
- **Access:** We connect all people in Nova Scotia with mental health programs, services and support.
- **Protection:** We safeguard the right of all people in Nova Scotia to social and economic security, freedom from violence, harm and trauma and access to the mental health resources they need.

CRISIS SERVICES

Crisis is self-defined, but it can be:

- A time of difficulty or change
- A disruption or breakdown in your daily living pattern.
- A temporary inability to cope by your usual ways of problem solving.
- A feeling of being out of control.

If you or someone you know is in crisis and needs immediate assistance:

Call or Text:

- Provincial Mental Health Crisis Line: 1-888-429-8167 [toll-free]
- Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team: 1-902-429-8167
- Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868 | Text CONNECT to 686868
- Emergency: 9-1-1 or go to the Emergency Department of the nearest hospital

Going to the Emergency Department

Sometimes going to an emergency department is necessary. It can be a very distressing. Because it can be a distressing experience, we want to help you understand what will happen there.

When you arrive at the emergency department you will go through steps of care:

1. **Triage:** A nurse or paramedic will ask you why you are there and take your temperature.
2. **Registration:** Clerical staff will ask questions like where you live, do you have insurance.
3. You will then be placed in the queue; the sickest patients are seen first.
4. A nurse will also ask you questions about what is wrong.
5. An emergency physician will spend more time with you asking questions and examining you. You then may see a specialist if necessary.
6. Bring your health card with you (insurance card if from out of country), however, you will not be turned away without it.
7. Dress in layers and bring a sweater, it is sometimes cold.
8. Bring a book or magazine, sometimes the waits are long.
9. Bring some money for the vending machines or food vendors.
10. Bring your phone and charger if that is important to you.
11. To ensure you get the right care, you may have to speak to several healthcare providers in the department, the staff knows how taxing this can be and appreciate your patience.
12. If you are not sure of something, ask.
13. The physicians and nurses cannot share your health information without your permission so please be open and tell them everything; it's the only way they can provide good care.

(The Stay Connected Mental Health Project)

Community Supports and Services



- **211 Nova Scotia | Call or text 2-1-1 for in-person assistance or search the online 211 database. **You do not need to be in crisis to connect.****
- 211 is a 24/7 connection to the programs and services in the community. Their network includes everything from local community groups and non-profits to government departments across Nova Scotia. Services are available in over 150 languages.
- **211 Helplines **The Helplines are not crisis lines. If you are experiencing a crisis please call the 24-Hour Provincial Crisis Line at 1-888-429-8167 or call 9-1-1.****
- If you have concerns about your own well-being, or that of someone else, 2-1-1 can connect with a Helpline. The Helplines were created in partnership with the Eastern Shore Family Resource Centre. Anyone can access a variety of supports and services specific to their needs, including information, navigation, referrals and brief intervention counseling.
- **Men's Helpline | Call or text 2-1-1 | [Toll Free] 1-855-466-4994**
- A free, confidential service for adult men, and individuals who identify as men, who have concerns about their well-being, safety, and/or the safety of others. **Eligibility:** Men, and individuals who identify as men, can access a variety of supports and services specific to their needs, including information, navigation, referrals, and brief intervention counselling.
- **Women's Helpline | Call or text 2-1-1 | [Toll Free] 1-855-466-4994**
- A free, confidential service for adult women, and individuals who identify as women, who have concerns about their well-being, safety, and/or the safety of others. **Eligibility:** Women, and individuals who identify as women, can access a variety of supports and services specific to their needs, including information, navigation, referrals, and brief intervention counselling.

Community Supports and Services

The Goldberg Depression Scale

The Goldberg Depression Scale is an internationally known scale for screening for depression. This is just a screening tool and is not intended to diagnose depression. If a person rates high on this scale, a professional assessment can accurately diagnose whether or not the person has a clinical depressive disorder.

Depression Scale

Score one point for each "Yes" if the symptom occurs most of the time over the past 2 – 4 weeks)

- Have you had low energy?
- Have you had loss of interests?
- Have you lost confidence in yourself?
- Have you felt hopeless?
- (If yes with any question, go on to 5 – 9:)
- 5. Have you had difficulty concentrating?
- Have you lost weight (due to poor appetite)?
- Have you been waking early?
- Have you felt slowed up?
- Have you tended to feel worse in the mornings?
- People with a score of two (2) have a 50 percent chance of having a mental health problem. With higher scores the probability rises sharply.

- **All Genders Helpline | Call or text 2-1-1 | [Toll Free] 1-855-466-4994**
- A free, confidential service for adults of all genders, including non-binary and trans individuals, who have concerns about their well-being, safety, and/or the safety of others. Eligibility: People of all genders can access a variety of supports and services specific to their needs, including information, navigation, referrals, and brief intervention counselling.
- **Affordable Therapy Network | www.affordabletherapynetwork.com**
- The Affordable Therapy Network is an initiative to increase access to affordable therapy and counselling services across Canada. Therapists listed on the database offer:
- **LOW-COST RATES:** Many listed therapists offer sessions at a low-cost rate ranging between \$50- \$65 to support those experiencing financial difficulty.
- **SLIDING SCALE FEES:** All listed therapists offer sliding scale rates for those who do not require the low-cost rate but cannot access standard therapy fees. These generally range between \$70-\$120 and varies between individual therapists.
- **STANDARD RATES:** For those who can pay standard rates, you are helping our therapists provide more options to those who otherwise would not be able to access support.

Community Supports and Services

- **Caregivers Nova Scotia | <https://caregiversns.org/>**
- Caregivers Nova Scotia provides programs, services, and strong advocacy for caregivers. With ongoing support from our funders, Board of Directors, allied organizations, volunteers, and caregivers themselves, we provide recognition and practical assistance to friends and family giving care.



- **Trans Life Line | (877) 330- 6366 | www.translifeline.org.**
- Trans Lifeline is a grassroots hotline and microgrants 501(c)(3) non-profit organization offering direct emotional and financial support to trans people in crisis – for the trans community, by the trans community.
- **Canada Suicide Prevention Service and Crisis Services Canada | 1-833-456-4566 | Text 45645 – available 24/7/365 days a year EST (standard text messaging rates apply)**
- This service is available across Canada via toll-free phone, or text in English. The toll-free phone service is also available in French. This means anyone in Canada that is thinking about, is or has been affected by suicide, can reach out across a variety of media, and feel supported 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Anyone can have suicidal thoughts for a number of reasons. CSPA offers a barrier-free, non-judgmental space with supportive and responsive responders.
- **Eating Disorders Nova Scotia | 902-229-8436 | www.eatingdisordersns.ca | info@eatingdisordersns.ca**
- Eating Disorders Nova Scotia offers support through nutrition counselling, a mentor program, peer support and friends and families peer support.
- **Eskasoni Crisis and Referral Center | 902-379-2099 | [Toll Free] 1-855-379-2099 | www.eskasonimentalhealth.org | Connect on Facebook messenger**
- 24-hr Crisis and support line available to members of Mi'kmaq communities. Provides emotional, social and educational support. Assists individuals with referrals to counselling and helps to navigate agencies and services. Services are provided in Mik'maw and English.
- **IWK Mental Health and Addictions Intake Service | 1-855-922-1122 | www.mha.nshealth.ca/en/tools**
- If you need help with a mental health and addictions concern our team is here to help. Real people Monday - Friday, 8:30 a.m to 4:30 p.m., Voicemail evenings, weekends, and holidays.

Mental Illnesses

What do you think of when you hear that someone is experiencing a mental illness? Some people feel concern, fear, or confusion. Some even avoid those who experience mental illnesses.

But mental illnesses are just like any other illness: everyone deserves care, help, and support.

What are mental illnesses?

Mental illnesses are health problems that affect the way we think about ourselves, relate to others, and interact with the world around us. They affect our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Mental illnesses can disrupt a person's life or create challenges, but with the right supports, a person can get back on a path to recovery and wellness.

It's important to understand that there are many different types of mental illness that affect people in different ways. Within each mental illness, people may have very different symptoms and challenges. However, symptoms are just one piece. Access to services, support from loved ones, and the ability to participate in communities play a big part in the way people experience mental illnesses. Culture, background, and personal beliefs also shape the way people understand mental illnesses.

Some people don't see the name of a diagnosis as an important part of their journey, while others prefer the medical terms to describe the illness. No matter how people talk about their experiences, they will likely need to use medical terms if they seek help in the health system. This is just how the system works right now—but it isn't the only way to talk about wellness.

Different mental illnesses:

Health professionals divide mental illnesses into several different groups based on signs or symptoms. Common groups of mental illnesses include:

- **Anxiety disorders**
 - Anxiety disorders are all related to anxiety. They may include excessive and uncontrollable worry, strong fears around everyday things or situations, unwanted thoughts, panic attacks, or fears around a past scary situation. Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illnesses, and they can create barriers in people's lives. Panic disorder and phobias are examples of anxiety disorders.
- **Mood disorders**
 - Mood disorders all affect a person's mood—the way they feel. This can affect every part of a person's life. When someone experiences a mood disorder, they may feel sad, hopeless, tired, or numb for long periods of time. At times, some people experience an unusually 'high' mood and feel powerful and energetic, but this can also create problems. Depression and bipolar disorder are examples of mood disorders.
- **Eating disorders**
 - Eating disorders really aren't about food. They are complicated illnesses that are often a way to cope with difficult problems or regain a sense of control. Eating disorders may include seriously restricting how much food a person eats, bingeing, or purging food. Anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa are examples of eating disorders.

Mental Illnesses, continued

- **Psychotic disorders**

- Psychosis is a health problem that affects how people understand what is real and what isn't real. People may sense things that aren't real or strongly believe things that can't be real. Schizophrenia is one example of a psychotic disorder.

- **Personality disorders**

- Personality disorders are patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that may last for a long time and create challenges in a person's life. People who experience personality disorders may have difficulties developing healthy and satisfying relationships with others, managing their emotions well, avoiding harmful behaviour, and working toward important life goals. Personality disorders can affect the way people understand and view themselves and others and cope with problems. Borderline personality disorder is one example of a personality disorder.

- **Childhood disorders**

- This is a large group of mental illnesses that start to affect people when they are young, though some people are not diagnosed until they're older. One example of a disorder in this group is attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (or ADHD), which affects a person's ability to focus, complete tasks, plan or organize, sit still, or think through actions.

- **Dementia**

- 'Dementia' refers to a group of symptoms. It can be caused by a disease that mainly affects nerve cells in the brain or can be associated with many other medical conditions. Dementia impacts a person's memory, language abilities, concentration, organization skills, mood, and behaviours. Alzheimer's disease is one type of dementia.

What can I do about it?

Experiencing a mental illness can be very distressing. You may wonder if you'll feel like yourself again. You may not know what's happening to you, and you may worry about other people's reactions. It's important to know that it's not your fault and it's not a sign of weakness. It's important to seek help early. Finding help early will get you on the road to recovery faster and may even reduce the risk of problems in the future.

Treatment often includes a few different approaches—for example, counselling, medication and self-care. Support groups can connect people with shared experiences. And there are many self-help strategies to try. Some people may also find extra supports like income and housing. Each person has their own preferences and goals, and recovery plans should reflect that. Contact your local CMHA branch to find help and support in your community.

How can I help a loved one?

When someone you love experiences a mental illness, you may have conflicting feelings. You may feel worried about their future, and feel relieved that the problem has a name. You may even wonder if you've done anything to cause their illness. These feelings—and many more—are normal.

You can be an important person in your loved one's recovery. Ask what you can do to help. Emotional support is important, but don't forget about practical help with daily tasks, if needed. Remember to take care of yourself and find support, too. Contact your local CMHA branch to find resources in your community.

Community Supports and Services



- **First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Helpline | 1-855-242-3310 | Online chat: Hope for Wellness Chat**
- The Hope for Wellness Help Line was established as a specific resource for First Nations and Inuit to provide immediate, culturally competent telephone counselling, 24 hours a day, seven days a week and is available in English, French, and upon request in Cree, Ojibway, and Inuktitut. Online chat services are currently available in English and French, with expansion to Indigenous languages currently being explored as this new service launches.
- **Good 2 Talk | 1-833-292-3698 | Text: GOOD2TALKNS to 686868**
- Provides confidential support services for post-secondary students in Ontario and Nova Scotia.
- **IBPOC (Indigenous, Black & People of Color) Service Provider Database www.khyber.ca/ibpoc-mental-health-database/**
- Resource to share information and highlight IBPOC mental health workers and services local to Kijipuktuk/Halifax. This database was created to highlight a range of local services, programs and IBPOC mental health workers for IBPOC residents of Kijipuktuk/Halifax. It is updated regularly. To learn more, visit www.khyber.ca
- **Kids Help Phone | 1-800-668-6868 or Text 686868 | www.kidshelpphone.ca | Connect with Kids Help Phone on Facebook Messenger**
- Kids Help Phone is Canada's only 24/7, national support service. They offer professional counselling, information and referrals, and volunteer-led, text-based support to young people in both English and French. Their service is completely confidential – you don't even have to give them your name if you don't want to.

Community Supports and Services

- **Lifeline Canada App | Available for free download on Google Play or Apple Store**
- The LifeLine App is the national free Suicide Prevention and Awareness App that offers access and guidance to support for those suffering in crisis and those who have suffered the devastating loss of a loved one from suicide. The LifeLine App also provides awareness education and prevention strategies to guide people in crisis all across the Globe.
- **Mental Health and Addictions Tools | www.nshealth.ca**
- A comprehensive resource list of free online resources available through NSHA and other community partners.
- **National Eating Disorder Information Centre (NEDIC) | 1-866-633-4220 | 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Mon.-Thurs., 11 a.m. – 5 p.m. Fri. EST Instant chat available at nedic.ca | nedic@uhn.ca**
- NEDIC provides information, resources, referrals and support to Canadians affected by eating disorders through their toll-free helpline and instant chat. Outreach and education programming focuses on the awareness and prevention of eating disorders and is available online across Canada and in-person in the Greater Toronto Area. NEDIC has a non-dieting, client-centered, feminist philosophy. They promote healthy lifestyles, including appropriate, enjoyable exercise and eating. NEDIC recognizes that the determinants of health are varied, and that weight is not an effective gauge of health, so do not endorse dieting or diet centers.

National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation Residential School Survivor Support Line | 1-866-414-8111

If you are a Residential School Survivor and need emotional support, a national crisis line is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Emotional, cultural and professional support services are also available to Survivors and their families through the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program. Services can be accessed on an individual, family or group basis.

In recognition of intergenerational impacts of Residential School, family is defined as: "A spouse or partner those raised by, or in, the household of a former Indian Residential School student or any relation who has experienced effects of intergenerational trauma associated with a family members time at an Indian Residential School.

Indigenous Services Canada verifies eligibility of persons requesting Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program services with Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, which holds data on former students who attended those Indian Residential Schools that are part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement.

Community Supports and Services

- **Nova Scotia Mental Health and Addictions Crisis Line | 1-888-429-8167 available 24/7**
- The Provincial Mental Health and Addictions Crisis Line provides crisis intervention for children, youth and adults experiencing a mental health crisis or mental distress. The service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to support callers who present with suicidal thoughts, self-harming thoughts or behaviors, overwhelming anxiety, difficulty coping with distress, psychotic or distorted thinking, depression, substance use difficulties, or any other self-identified mental health concerns. Crisis is self-defined by the individual calling for support. The crisis line also supports families, friends, community agencies and others to manage mental health crisis through education, outreach and consultation.
- **Pride Health | www.nshealth.ca/content/pridehealth | 902-487-0470 | Email: prideHealth@nshealth.ca**
- Pride Health works to improve access to health services in Nova Scotia which are safe, coordinated, comprehensive, and culturally appropriate for people who are two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual (members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community). Offers health resources, navigation and referrals for addictions, mental health and other health services.
- **Red Cross Friendly Calls | 1-833-729-0144 Mon. – Fri. 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. AST to register | www.redcross.ca [Not A Crisis Line]**
- Red Cross friendly calls are available to anyone who is feeling isolated or lonely due to COVID-19. To receive friendly calls Red Cross asks that people register. Red Cross staff and volunteers can often accommodate calls in English and French, as well as languages other than English and French but unfortunately cannot guarantee this. If desired, Red Cross can also provide contacts for other support services in your community.
- **Post-Partum Support International Helpline | Call or text 1-800-944-4773 #1 in Spanish and #2 in English | www.postpartum.net [Not A Crisis Line]**
- The PSI Help Line is a toll-free telephone number anyone can call to get basic information, support, and resources. It is based in the USA but helpline and support groups are available to Canadians. Messages are returned everyday of the week. You can leave confidential messages anytime and a HelpLine volunteer will get back to you as soon as possible. If you are unavailable when they call you can setup an alternate time. The volunteer will give you information, encouragement, and names of resources near you. PSI also hosts weekly chats with experts, online postpartum peer support groups, and online meetings on various topics. Specific groups include support for adoptive parents, queer parents, groups for dads, support groups for pregnancy loss and more.

Mental health is not only the avoidance of serious mental illness.

Your mental health is affected by numerous factors in your daily life, including the stress of balancing work with your health and relationships. In this section, you will find resources to help you stay mentally fit and healthy.

Community Supports and Services

- **SOAR [Survivors of Abuse Recovering] | 902-679-7337 | [Toll free] 1-877-679-SOAR (7627) | www.survivorsofabuserrecovering.ca**
- A community-based peer support service for adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse in West Hants, Kings & Annapolis Counties (Nova Scotia, Canada). They offer peer counselling, support groups and community awareness training.
- **Thoughtful Changes | 902-932-7122 | www.thoughtfulchanges.org**
- A non-profit group of counselors dedicated to providing affordable care to Nova Scotians. Intake appointments are \$50, ongoing services are provided on a sliding scale from \$50-\$80/session. They also offer a pay-it-forward program where people who can afford to pay higher than the regular fee can contribute to reducing costs for people who struggle to pay the \$50 minimum.

Our mental health is an ever changing aspect of ourselves.

Positive mental health is described as:

- emotional and psychological wellness
- positive self-concept, self-acceptance
- satisfying interpersonal relationships
- satisfaction in living
- feeling in control, taking personal responsibility for your actions
- and feelings
- ability to handle daily activities

By being self-aware we can take positive steps towards mental health when the balance is disrupted.

Here are some simple ways to work toward regaining a balance.

- get adequate sleep
- eat a balanced diet
- get regular exercise
- practice relaxation techniques
- make time for pleasurable activities, hobbies, and work
- prioritize tasks, delegate
- don't take on too much
- develop supportive relationships
- don't be overly critical of yourself
- focus on your strengths and abilities

Community Supports and Services



- **Togetherall | www.togetherall.com/en-us**
- Togetherall is a safe and anonymous online community where people can share what's troubling them. The service is free to all youth and young adults aged 16 – 29 in Nova Scotia and allows people to get support, take control and feel better- all in a way that is most comfortable to the individual. Peer support is moderated by trained counselors. To access Togetherall, simply go to the homepage, click on Register, and register under the “your area” button. All postal codes in Nova Scotia are registered to have access to this resource.
- **Unison Benevolent Fund | 1-855-986-4766 | www.cimpleo.com/projects/unison/**
- The Unison Benevolent Fund offers a toll-free number to connect Canadian music professionals with resources and support for personal and practical issues. This service is free, anonymous, confidential and available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Before you make the call, please register with Unison on their website. Service is available in English and French.
- **Wellness Together Canada | www.wellnesstogether.ca/en-CA | Phone: 1-866-585-0445 | 1-888-668-6810 (Youth) | Text: WELLNESS to 741741 (Adults) or 686868 (Youth) | Frontline Workers text: FRONTLINE to 74174**
- Wellness Together Canada was created in response to an unprecedented rise in mental health and substance use concerns due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with funding from the Government of Canada. Services include: online community of support and coaching, one-to-one counselling, self-guided courses and apps and more.
- **Strongest Families Institute | 1-866-470-7111 | Provincial Intake Line: 1-855-922-1122 | www.strongestfamilies.com**
- Programs include learning anxiety coping skills or behavior management tools and weekly telephone coaching sessions. Referrals required via family doctor or provincial intake line.

Medications for Mental Illness

The decision to use medication—or any other treatment—is an ongoing conversation between you and your doctor. Since you are the most important part of your treatment plan, your choices and your questions are an important part of that discussion. When you have accurate information about medication and you can see how it might apply to your situation, you can make decisions that will give you the best chance of feeling better.

Medications are one tool

Most people in recovery from a mental illness use more than one tool in their recovery. Medications can be one of those tools. Research shows that medications for mental illnesses may help many people feel better, but that doesn't mean every medication will work, or work the same way, on every person.

Other tools may include talk therapies like psychotherapy or counselling, supports at school or at work, treatments in hospital, support groups, or skills you can practice on your own. The tools available to you will depend on your diagnosis, your own situation, the resources in your area, and your own values. For some people, medications will be an important part of their long-term treatment plan. For other people, medications might help them feel well enough to start using other tools. Still other people may try other approaches before they consider medication.

Medications can help people manage many symptoms, but they can't fix all problems. For example, they won't remove an outside source of stress that contributes to your problems. What medications can do is help you manage symptoms affecting thoughts, feelings, and physical symptoms so you are better able to benefit from other kinds of support.

You are an active participant in your care

When you receive treatment for any health concern, you need to make choices that fit your needs and your values.

Your doctor, pharmacist, and other health care providers can guide you through different options and help you understand the risks and benefits, but in most cases, the final decision is up to you. You are also the person who will be following your treatment plan, so whatever your doctor prescribes must be something that you are willing and able to try. Many people have a harder time sticking with treatments like medications when they are concerned about possible side effects, financial costs, loved ones' reactions, or challenges taking medications as prescribed.

It's also hard to follow a treatment plan if it doesn't match your goals. In these situations, some people may decide it's not for them and stop treatment without looking for a new option, which means they aren't getting the help they need. It's best to be upfront about challenges so you and your doctor can look for solutions. You can make the most of treatment decisions by being an active partner in your care. A big part of being an active partner is communication. You communicate your needs and concerns to your doctor, and you use your doctor's knowledge and guidance to help you make decisions. If you don't have a good relationship with your doctor, it can be hard to get the support you need to follow a treatment plan. You have the right to find a new doctor or get a second opinion.

Medications for Mental Illness, continued

Starting your medication

If you've decided to try a medication, it's important to take the medication correctly. If you're starting a new medication, the pharmacist will give you information to take home. This information isn't always easy to understand, so be sure to ask questions if anything is unclear. Once you start your medication, it's helpful to monitor your progress and any side effects so you can track how well it's working for you. You can keep a journal or try an app to help you keep track. Share your notes with your doctor regularly.

Common concerns about medications

Many people have concerns about medications, especially when it comes to medications for mental illnesses. **"Medications will change who I am."** When medications work like they're supposed to, they can help you feel and think like you—the way you feel and think when you're well. Most common medications like antidepressants and antipsychotics are thought to have an effect on messenger chemicals in the brain (and throughout the nervous system) called neurotransmitters.

The medications make neurotransmitters that are already in your body more available or more effective. **"I tried a medication before and it didn't work."** There are many different kinds of medications, and they each work in slightly different ways. Many people who choose to use medication find that they have to try a few different options in order to find the medication that works best for them. It can be frustrating, especially when you just want to feel better, but it's difficult for doctors to predict how a medication might affect you without giving it a try. **"I should be able to deal with this on my own."** When someone has a physical health problem, they typically seek help from a doctor or other health professional. Mental illnesses are no different.

Medications are simply one tool that you might use as you take care of your health. **"I'll have to take medications for the rest of my life."** In some cases—and with the support of your doctor—you might be able to stop using medication after you've been well for a period of time. In other cases, you might continue to take medications even when you feel well to prevent symptoms from coming back. In any situation, it's important to talk to your doctor so you understand what to expect in treatment and recovery. **"Medications are addictive."** Most medications for mental illnesses are not addictive or habit-forming, including antidepressants, antipsychotics, mood stabilizers, anticonvulsants, and stimulants. Even though they are not addictive, you should never suddenly stop taking a medication without talking to your doctor.

One group of anti-anxiety medications, benzodiazepines, can cause dependence if they aren't used properly. While there are risks to these medications, they may also be helpful. If you're considering benzodiazepines, talk to your doctor to learn how you can get the most benefits while reducing some of the risks.

Finding a Family Doctor

If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health challenge, it is important to seek help early.

It is a good idea to see a doctor to assess your overall health and to rule out any underlying physical illness.



Be very specific and thorough about what you have been experiencing in order for the doctor to provide the best possible course of treatment.

If you do not have a family doctor, nurse practitioner or other primary health care service, you call 811 or visit needafamilypractice.nshealth.ca

Your doctor may prescribe treatment or you may be referred to a psychiatrist or a general practitioner who has specialized training in psychiatry, or other mental health professional.

Other professionals who may be part of your treatment team include: psychiatric nurses, social workers, community mental health workers, occupational therapists or psychologists.

Psychotherapy

Many people find that the simple act of talking with family and friends can help them see a new perspective, solve a problem, or simply feel supported. Sometimes talking with a friend isn't enough, and you need more specialized help and support. Psychotherapy is another type of conversation that can help you feel better.

What is Psychotherapy?

Psychotherapy* is a treatment with a professional using psychological methods. It involves collaboration and conversation between a professional like a psychologist, psychiatrist, or counsellor and you, the patient or client. Using effective strategies supported by research, you work together to address problems or concerns that impact your well-being. The goal is to help you feel well and give you the skills to manage current and future problems in a healthy and helpful way.

Psychotherapy is a common treatment for many mental illnesses. It may also be very helpful for people who want to better manage aspects of their lives like stress, relationship problems, anger, or physical health concerns. Psychotherapy may take place on its own or alongside other treatments, such as medication.

Psychotherapy, continued

Common Psychotherapies

There are many, many different psychotherapies for mental illnesses and mental health problems. Here are common therapies that research shows to be effective.



Cognitive-behavioural therapy or CBT:

Teaches you how to change thoughts and behaviours in order to change feelings and other areas of well-being. It's a common treatment for depression and anxiety disorders, and has been adapted for some eating disorders, trauma, and other mental health and substance use concerns.

Dialectical behaviour therapy or DBT: A variation of CBT that also helps people find balance between acceptance and change, manage strong emotions in healthy ways, tolerate distress, and build relationships. DBT is often a treatment of choice for borderline personality disorder, and it may help people who experience self-harm and other mental health concerns.

Acceptance and commitment therapy or ACT: Similar to CBT, but it focuses on accepting difficult experiences rather than changing thoughts or behaviours to avoid difficult feelings. ACT may help people recognize situations, thoughts, or behaviours that cause problems. It may be helpful for depression, anxiety disorders, and may be a promising approach for schizophrenia.

Mindfulness-based interventions: Therapeutic approaches that use mindfulness techniques. Mindfulness is found in psychotherapies like CBT, DBT, and ACT, or it may be practiced alongside other psychotherapies.

Interpersonal therapy or IPT: Focuses on building relationships, communication skills, and resolving conflict. IPT is commonly used for depression and may be most helpful for concerns related to loss, grief, difficulties in relationships, or life transitions.

Which psychotherapy is right for me?

There are some specific factors that may influence your choice, such as the diagnosis, the concerns you'd like to address, or your understanding of the problem. Your doctor or other care providers can help you evaluate your options. Many psychotherapies can be done one-on-one or in a group.

Psychotherapy, continued

Which professional is right for me?

In any psychotherapy approach, your relationship with the professional is an important part of your treatment. It's best to carefully consider relationships when you choose a professional. Psychotherapy can take a lot of work. You may talk about things that make you feel uncomfortable or vulnerable. When you feel safe and supported, you're in a better position to tackle the tougher parts of psychotherapy. Many professionals offer a session to meet them before you decide on a treatment. If this is available, take advantage of this time so you can see if you're a good fit.

Questions to ask the professional:

- What is your training, areas of expertise, and experience? Are you licensed or certified to provide psychotherapy?
- What kind of psychotherapy do you use? What does the evidence say about this treatment for people with my diagnosis or concerns?
- What can I expect from treatment? What will the sessions look like and how long can I expect to see you?
- Are there any risks of this treatment approach?
- Is there a cost?
- Are there other ways to talk, such as videoconference, email, or phone?

Questions to ask yourself:

- Do I feel comfortable sharing my experiences honestly with this professional?
- Do I feel like this professional understands where I'm coming from and what I'm looking for?
- Do I feel like I will be listened to without judgment?
- Do I understand what's expected of me? Are these expectations realistic for me at this time?
- If you feel like you and your professional are not a good fit, it's best to be upfront and tell them. They know it isn't personal—the therapeutic relationship is just as important to them.

How can I access psychotherapy?

Psychotherapy professionals can be found in public health systems (funded by government), workplace programs (services and benefits provided by your employer) and direct private practices (where individuals pay fees for services not covered by private insurance).

If you do not have insurance coverage and cannot afford psychotherapy, some professionals offer lower fees for people with lower incomes. The Affordable Therapy Network and Thoughtful Changes (listed in this guide) offer rates based on a sliding scale.

Fast Facts about Mental Health and Mental Illness

Mental health and mental illness: what's the difference?

Mental health and mental illness are often used interchangeably, but they are not the same thing. “Mental health” is a concept similar to “physical health”: it refers to a state of well-being. Mental health includes our emotions, feelings of connection to others, our thoughts and feelings, and being able to manage life’s highs and lows.

The presence or absence of a mental illness is not a predictor of mental health; someone without a mental illness could have poor mental health, just as a person with a mental illness could have excellent mental health.

Problematic substance use is sometimes linked to poor mental health or mental illness; it can be a coping strategy for untreated trauma, pain, challenging thoughts or emotions, or other health symptoms.

Who is affected?

- Everyone has mental health and will experience challenges regarding their mental well-being, but not everyone will experience a mental illness.
- Mental illness indirectly affects all Canadians at some time either through their own experience, or that of a family member, friend or colleague.
- In any given year, 1 in 5 people in Canada will personally experience a mental health problem or illness.
- By age 40, about 50% of the population will have or have had a mental illness.
- Mental illness affects people of all ages, education, income levels, and cultures; however, systemic inequalities such as racism, poverty, homelessness, discrimination, colonial and gender-based violence, among others, can worsen mental health and symptoms of mental illness, especially if mental health supports are difficult to access.
- Major depression affects approximately 5.4% of the Canadian population, and anxiety disorders affect 4.6% of the population.
- About 1% of Canadians will experience bipolar disorder (formerly called “manic depression”), and another 1% will experience schizophrenia.
- Eating disorders affect approximately 1 million Canadians – between 0.3-1% of the population. They impact women at a rate ten times that of men, and have the highest rate of mortality of any mental illness.
- Substance use disorders affect approximately 6% of Canadians.
- In Canada, suicide disproportionately impacts Indigenous peoples; the rate of suicide among First Nations is three times higher than among non-Indigenous Canadians, and nine times higher among Inuit.
- The mortality rate due to suicide among men is three times the rate among women, but girls and young women are three times more likely than men to harm themselves and be hospitalized from self-harm.

Myths About Mental Illness

Mental illnesses affect everyone in some way. We all likely know someone who has experienced a mental illness at some point. Yet there are still many hurtful attitudes around mental illnesses that fuel stigma and discrimination and make it harder to reach out for help. It's time to look at the facts.

Ten Common Myths

Here are ten common myths about mental illnesses.

Myth #1: Mental illnesses aren't real illnesses.

Fact: The words we use to describe mental illnesses have changed greatly over time. What hasn't changed is the fact that mental illnesses are not the regular ups and downs of life. Mental illnesses create distress, don't go away on their own, and are real health problems with effective treatments. When someone breaks their arm, we wouldn't expect them to just "get over it." Nor would we blame them if they needed a cast, sling, or other help in their daily life while they recovered.

Myth #2: Mental illnesses will never affect me.

Fact: All of us will be affected by mental illnesses. Researchers estimate that as many as one in five Canadians will experience a mental health problem or illness in any given year. You may not experience a mental illness yourself, but it's very likely that a family member, friend, or co-worker will experience challenges.

Myth #3: Mental illnesses are just an excuse for poor behaviour.

Fact: It's true that some people who experience mental illnesses may act in ways that are unexpected or seem strange to others. We need to remember that the illness, not the person, is behind these behaviours. No one chooses to experience a mental illness. People who experience a change in their behaviour due to a mental illness may feel extremely embarrassed or ashamed around others. It's also true that people with a history of a mental illness are like anyone else: they may make poor choices or do something unexpected for reasons unrelated to symptoms of their illness.

Myth #4: Bad parenting causes mental illnesses.

Fact: No one factor can cause mental illnesses. Mental illnesses are complicated conditions that arise from a combination of genetics, biology, environment, and life experiences. Family members and loved ones do have a big role in support and recovery.

Myth #5: People with mental illnesses are violent and dangerous.

Fact: Some people try to predict violence so they know what to avoid. However, the causes of violence are complicated. Researchers agree that mental illnesses are not a good predictor of violence. In fact, if we look at mental illnesses on their own, people who experience a mental illness are no more violent than people without a mental illness. Excluding people from communities is linked to violence. And people with mental illnesses are often among those who are excluded. It's also important to note that people who experience mental illnesses are much more likely to be victims of violence than to be violent.

Myths About Mental Illness, continued

Myth #6: People don't recover from mental illnesses.

Fact: People can and do recover from mental illnesses. Today, there are many different kinds of treatments, services, and supports that can help. No one should expect to feel unwell forever. The fact is, people who experience mental illnesses can and do lead productive, engaged lives. They work, volunteer, or contribute their unique skills and abilities to their communities. Even when people experience mental illnesses that last for a long time, they can learn how to manage their symptoms so they can get back to their goals. If someone continues to experience many challenges, it may be a sign that different approaches or supports are needed.

Myth #7: People who experience mental illnesses are weak and can't handle stress.

Fact: Stress impacts well-being, but this is true for everyone. People who experience mental illnesses may actually be better at managing stress than people who haven't experienced mental illnesses. Many people who experience mental illnesses learn skills like stress management and problem-solving so they can take care of stress before it affects their well-being. Taking care of yourself and asking for help when you need it are signs of strength, not weakness.

Myth #8: People who experience mental illnesses can't work.

Fact: Whether you realize it or not, workplaces are filled with people who have experienced mental illnesses. Mental illnesses don't mean that someone is no longer capable of working. Some people benefit from changes at work to support their goals, but many people work with few supports from their employer. Most people who experience serious mental illnesses want to work but face systemic barriers to finding and keeping meaningful employment.

Myth #9: Kids can't have a mental illness like depression. Those are adult problems

Fact: Even children can experience mental illnesses. In fact, many mental illnesses first appear when a person is young. Mental illnesses may look different in children than in adults, but they are a real concern. Mental illnesses can impact the way young people learn and build skills, which can lead to challenges in the future. Unfortunately, many children don't receive the help they need.

Myth #10: Everyone gets depressed as they grow older. It's just part of the aging process.

Fact: Depression is never an inevitable part of aging. Older adults may have a greater risk of depression because they experience so many changes in roles and social networks. If an older adult experiences depression, they need the same support as anyone else.

These myths—and many more—exclude people with mental illnesses from our communities and create barriers to well-being. If we want to reduce the impact of mental illnesses on our communities, we need to learn the facts and start with our own assumptions and behaviours.

CMHA NS Programs

Project H.O.P.E [Housing Outreach and Peer Empowerment]



** Project H.O.P.E is not an emergency service and does not provide housing units. **

- Housing is a basic human right, need and a requirement for good mental and physical health. Project H.O.P.E works with Nova Scotians who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to locate and secure safe, sustainable, affordable housing. Project H.O.P.E serves people living in Kings, Annapolis and Digby Counties with Housing Support and Trustee Services. We also serve Truro and area with Trustee Services. Self and/or agency referrals are welcome! To learn more about Project H.O.P.E. **To learn more about Project H.O.P.E., visit www.novascotia.cmha.ca/nova-scotia-supports-services/project-hope/**

At-Work | Au Travail



- Mental illness doesn't need to be an obstacle to employment. This program is available to anyone in need of work with mental health or addictions issue living in Nova Scotia (no diagnosis required). CMHA's At-Work team provides support services to people living with mental illness that are unemployed or under-employed, by supporting them to obtain and maintain meaningful employment. The At Work Program is a federally-funded, national program delivered in 12 communities across Canada. **Connect with Tracy Hiltz, At-Work Team Lead, to learn more: Email: tracy.hiltz@novascotia.cmha.ca | 1.877.466.6606, ext. 302 | Cell: 782.232.2697**

THRIVE Learning Center for Mental Wellness and Well-being



- THRIVE is an innovative, safe, and welcoming learning space that provides free courses designed to support mental health, boost resilience and promote connection. THRIVE courses are developed by subject experts and mental health professionals, working together with people who have their own experience in personal recovery. Courses range from Setting Boundaries to Movement for Mental Health. Everyone is welcome to attend. No previous experience is required and with a variety of courses to choose from, there is one for everyone. *(Courses are updated quarterly.)* **To find out which courses are currently being offered, visit www.novascotia.cmha.ca/thrive-learning-center-for-mental-wellness-and-well-being/**

Peer Support

- CMHA NS offers a variety of peer support groups that are safe, non-judgemental spaces for Nova Scotians to share, learn and connect with others. These groups are:
 - Held in a safe and respectful space
 - Confidential
 - Non-clinical
 - Free
 - Open to everyone

Visit www.novascotia.cmha.ca/programs-trainings-support-groups/ to find out which peer support groups are currently being offered.



**Canadian Mental
Health Association**
Nova Scotia
Mental health for all

CONNECT WITH US!

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