



2023 CAST REPORT

COMMUNITIES ADDRESSING SUICIDE TOGETHER

To: Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness

Submitted by:

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Canadian Mental
Health Association
Nova Scotia
Mental health for all

Association canadienne
pour la santé mentale
Nouvelle-Écosse
La santé mentale pour tous

Introduction

Our Mission: To prevent suicide in Nova Scotia, through partnership, collaboration and innovation while respecting the diversity of cultures and communities that are touched by this issue.

Suicide is an urgent public health issue in Nova Scotia.

While it is a complex issue involving biological, psychological, social, cultural, spiritual, economic factors, we know that suicide can be prevented when collective efforts are harnessed to instill hope and healing, raise awareness, and promote mental health and well-being.

The work undertaken by Canadian Mental Health Association Nova Scotia Division [CMHA NS] through the Communities Addressing Suicide Together program (CAST) is informed by the Nova Scotia Suicide Prevention and Risk Reduction Framework's strategic objectives.

It is also informed by the World Health Organization's Preventing Suicide: A Global Imperative report which reinforces the value of a public health approach to suicide prevention.

It also aligns with the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework which is designed to help partners work more effectively with provincial and territorial programs within a comprehensive mental wellness system for First Nations.

With support from the Department of Health and Wellness, our work throughout 2023 and early 2024 has focused on building hope and resilience, promoting mental health and well-being, and improving access to resources and information.

Strategic Objectives

Reduce stigma and raise public awareness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Disseminate information about suicide and its prevention.• Support research and innovation in suicide prevention to identify gaps and opportunities in research, knowledge, and translation.
Connect Nova Scotians to information and resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offer affordable, low barrier access to prevention-focused workshops, tools, and events.• Connect people, information, and resources, including tailored initiatives for different population groups.
Promote collaboration and knowledge exchange across sectors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote the use of research and evidence-based practices for suicide prevention.• Leverage partnerships with government departments and agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations, Indigenous organizations, communities, practitioners, and those with lived experience to improve coordination.

Under these objectives, the projects we focused on this year were:

- Community Conversations [Sector Specific]
- Forest of HOPE
- Indigenous Peer Support and Education
- The C.A.S.T. Resource Hub
- Youth Mental Health
- Team Up

Additional Activities

- The Holly Carr Story Trails Project/ The Portapique Community Build Up
- ASISTing in Rural Nova Scotia
- Community Suicide Awareness Days
- Hope and Healing: An Emotional and Practical Guide for Survivors of Suicide Loss

PROJECTS

Community Conversations

As community members on the Suicide Prevention and Risk Reduction [SPRR] Community Working an Advising Group and in partnership with Injury Free Nova Scotia (IFNS) and the communities across Nova Scotia which we serve, we will build upon the foundation of insight that was harvested from the 'Community Conversations' hosted by the SPRR Community Working and Advisory Group (SPRR CWAG) in January 2023.

The Community Conversations provided a space for suicide prevention/ life promotion services, resources, and hope providers to think, discuss, and explore the issue of preventing suicide and reducing risk in community.

Sector specific community conversations can allow people of similar areas or shared identities to address community suicide prevention specific to them.

The broader goal would be to create recommendations for the Framework specific to communities and to create a sustainable model and practice that would easily be replicable in future years.

In June of 2023, the Canadian Mental Health Association Nova Scotia Division, in partnership with IFNS and Roots of HOPE hosted Community Conversations at Asitu'lisk.

Representatives from all three organizations and families who lost children to suicide came together to discuss youth suicide prevention.

The group of 12 parents and community partners gathered to share, to reflect, to plan and to heal.



Findings and Recommendations

Access to Mental Health Support:

Accessing clinical support in rural communities poses significant challenges. Additional preventive supports that offer culturally relevant and holistic approaches to mental health, could mitigate crises among youth.

Additionally, there is a need to enhance support for rural hospitals, drawing lessons from institutions like the IWK, and to establish services for youth between appointments or while waiting for one.

Safe Neighborhoods and Schools:

First responders are vital in rural communities for responding to mental health crises but require improved training. Programs like Mental Health First Aid, safeTALK, and ASIST should be more accessible to various community members such as barbers, coaches, peers, and teachers.

Creating safer spaces for discussing suicide and suicide loss, along with raising awareness about suicide prevention, is crucial.

Schools must address bullying and provide mental health support rather than solely focusing on academics, fostering a more open approach to discussing suicide. Efforts are needed to support the mental health of these children and address issues like school phobia.

Family Support: Advocacy for youth mental health requires further attention and action. Exclusion of families from a youth's circle of care can lead to mental health concerns for family members supporting them, necessitating knowledge and resources to assist their youth and maintain a safe home environment.

Families require avenues to connect and support one another through peer support and network building, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and experiences.

Building Resilience and Emotional Intelligence in Youth:

There is a deficiency in mental health literacy among youth, particularly in navigating the impact of social media, gaming, and academic pressure.

Competitive environments in academia, sports, and employment can foster bullying behaviors and diminish empathy.

Equipping youth with coping strategies for stress and anxiety, along with fostering healthy boundaries, is essential.

Peers can play a pivotal role in suicide prevention and intervention but require education and support to do so effectively.

Responsible Media: Media coverage of suicide often focuses on rising death rates and may inadvertently exploit parents' experiences, necessitating training for parents on engaging with media while advocating for more support.

Social media, while a potential source of education, lacks adequate content monitoring and can be harmful or triggering.

Forest of Hope

In October 2023, the Canadian Mental Health Association Nova Scotia Division was a key partner in bringing Canada's second Forest of Hope to Nova Scotia.

We also used this opportunity to reconvene and gather with the parents who attended the Community Conversations in June.

Forest of Hope is a long-term program by the Canadian Association of Suicide Prevention [CASP] and their partners to help raise awareness about suicide prevention and promote healing while contributing to a healthy and sustainable forest.

A tree planting event was held at Mi'kmawey School/Allan Lafford High School Area in Potlotek, Nova Scotia to mark the first phase of the Forest of Hope in Nova Scotia.

During this event, CMHA NS Division co-hosted the Circle of Hope with Roots of Hope and Injury Free Nova Scotia.

While this event was established for the community of Potlotek, it was a great opportunity to continue the rich and important dialogue at the Community Conversation held in June.

Circle of Hope provided a safe space for the community to commemorate those lost to suicide, share experiences, and feel acceptance.

Those who attended were encouraged to bring photos or other pieces to help share the unique qualities and contributions of the individuals lost.



Media Coverage

[Forest of Hope planned for Potlotek First Nation | Global News Atlantic](#)

[Forest of Hope: planting seeds of hope in Potlotek | CBC](#)

[Forest of Hope set for Saturday | Saltwire](#)

[Planting hope: Potlotek forest and trails dedicated to suicide prevention | Saltwire](#)

Indigenous Peer Support and Education

Through the CAST program, CMHA NS Division collaborated with We'koqma'q Mental Health and Addiction Services to facilitate a peer support group.

The group focused on a variety of themes each session, including anxiety, stress management, depression, and self-care. The group attracted 4-6 people per session and was held in-person in We'koqma'q First Nation once a month.

Over the coming year, we will continue to work with We'koqma'q Mental Health and Addiction Services to ensure the sessions are community-led and held more frequently.

The program has been highly successful for a small number of community members as, but they are always happy to have support from the community.

The group continues to grow with each session as more people come to discover peer support groups.

We have been told they leave each session feeling like they are not alone and because of this, they continue to refer more people to the group.

We will continue to expand on this work with Indigenous communities to fill gaps in culturally relevant in-person programs.

C.A.S.T. Resource Hub

The Canadian Mental Health Association Nova Scotia Division's Communities Addressing Suicide Together [C.A.S.T.] Hub is an online resource for Nova Scotians who would like to initiate suicide prevention activities in their community.

This includes relevant information such as research, guides, workshops, and tool-kits to support Nova Scotians in building Suicide-Safer Communities.

The C.A.S.T. Hub is updated quarterly and can be found at www.novascotia.cmha.ca.

C.A.S.T. Hub Metrics	
12,000	Impressions
864	Unique Visitors
1,416	Page Views

We will continue enhance our C.A.S.T. HUB through the continued revision of tools, resources, supportive links, and links to on-line training to support the goal of suicide safer communities in Nova Scotia.

We will also update the site to include opportunities for feedback.

**** Impressions** refer to the number of times content is displayed to a user on a website or mobile app. This metric measures the potential reach of an ad, as each impression represents an opportunity for a user to view the site. **Unique Visitors** reveals the size of the website's audience based on the number of people who visit your website. **Page Views** refers to the number of times a specific page on your website is loaded or reloaded in a browser.**

Team Up



Team Up is a suicide prevention program designed to support athletes in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League (QMJHL) and the Maritime Hockey League (MJHL) with potential to expand the program to university varsity teams.

The program includes facilitating a suicide prevention workshop for the players, having a CMHA Mental Health Coach to connect team members to community resources, establish an internal Mental Health Champion for the team (parent, staff, etc.), and host an Awareness Game to promote mental health and reduce stigma.

In 2023, CMHA NS Division staff delivered suicide prevention workshops to 109 players and staff across the Maritime Hockey League (MJHL). The teams we trained include: the Amherst Ramblers, the Pictou County Weeks Crushers, the Truro Bearcats, the Valley Wildcats, and the Yarmouth Mariners.

The Halifax Mooseheads and the Cape Breton Eagles hosted awareness games in support of CMHA NS in February 2024



Additional Projects

The Holly Carr Story Trails Project/Portapique Buildup



In the Spring of 2024, Nova Scotia artist and author Holly Carr and the Canadian Mental Health Association Nova Scotia Division will launch the Story Trails Project.

The Project, which is a collaboration between Carr, CMHA NS Division, CMHA Colchester East-Hants and the Portapique Community Build Up, was created in late 2020 to foster hope, resilience, and connection in the community of Portapique in the wake of tragedy.

A unique intersection between art, nature and mental wellness, the Holly Carr Story Trails Project involves attaching laminated pages from Carr's book, "The Comfort Tree" to wooden stakes and installing them around the Portapique Community Centre to create an interactive experience that generates safe discussion around the topics of fear, anxiety, and hope.

The book, written especially for this project, delivers a timely and vital message, a beautiful reminder to readers of all ages that even in times of darkness, there is light and hope.

Media Coverage

[The path of hope and resilience](#) | Nova Scotia Journal of Sustainable Community Development

CASP (Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention) Conference

The Canadian Mental Health Association Nova Scotia Division partnered with the Canadian Association of Suicide Prevention [CASP] as they brought their 33rd Annual National Suicide Prevention Conference to Halifax in May 2023.

The conference highlighted the most current knowledge and practices in the broad field of suicide and its prevention, and attracted hundreds of researchers, front-line clinicians, people with lived experience, and sector professionals, from across Canada and the United States.

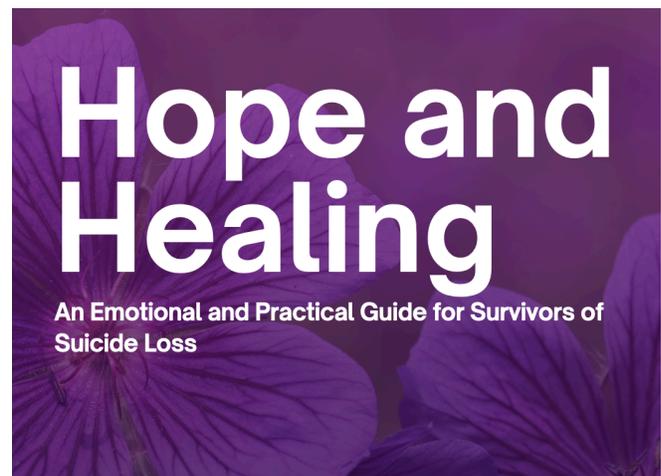


Hope and Healing: An Emotional and Practical Guide for Survivors of Suicide Loss

Losing someone to suicide is a unique loss and can lead to several conflicting feelings and many unanswered questions.

There is no one way to feel or grieve a death by suicide – we all react and grieve differently.

It is important to remember that you are not alone – that suicide impacts more people than we often know about.



International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day is an annual event in which survivors of suicide loss come together to find connection, understanding, and hope through their shared experiences.

In 2023, CMHA NS Division marked this important day by releasing an updated version of Hope and Healing: An Emotional and Practical Guide for Survivors of Suicide Loss, a project previously undertaken by CMHA NS that had become out of date.

We updated this resource and, with support, intend to update a list of resources specific to this guide in the future.

ASISTing Rural Nova Scotia

Over the past few years, and with the support of the C.A.S.T. funding, CMHA NS Division has been building capacity to support our communities through the delivery of Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training [ASIST] and SafeTALK training.

In the coming year, the C.A.S.T. Coordinator will be trained in T4T for ASIST and facilitate ASIST in the future with a focus on rural Nova Scotia.

Mental health support has been limited in rural communities due to lack of transportation and lack of medical professionals in the community.

By providing ASIST in communities, it allows the community to increase mental health support in rural communities.

The goal is to create a model and practice that we could learn from support similar at-risk Indigenous communities.

One-hundred and thirty-one individuals received subsidized ASIST training funded through a grant from the Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia and 150 individuals took part in private ASIST training sessions.

World Suicide Prevention Day

On September 6, 2023, the Canadian Mental Health Association Nova Scotia Division hosted our third annual event in recognition of World Suicide Prevention Day. After reviewing feedback from our previous years, we opted to offer a free Community Suicide Awareness workshop.

This workshop was held via Zoom and addressed common myths around suicide as well as risk factors and tools for how to support someone experiencing suicidal thoughts. One hundred and two Nova Scotians registered for this workshop with 46 attending.

World Suicide Prevention Day is held annually on September 10. Each year for the past three years, CMHA NS Division has hosted a virtual event on this day. Approximately 30 - 50 individuals attend this event each year.

“Thank you so much for putting on this workshop. I am grateful you offered this. The information was so helpful and will help me better support and understand my daughter.”

Attendee, Community Suicide Awareness workshop

Financials

Account Number	Account Name	Expense
5410	Wages & salaries	80,651
5420	EI Expense	1,101
5430	CPP Expense	1,207
5464	Honorariums	150
5465	Contract personnel	563
5470	Employee Benefits - Group Ins	517
5505	Admin Costs	12,000
5642	Computer & licenses	538
5650	Communications/Marketing	1,241
5700	Office Supplies	46
5720	Materials	635
5725	Meetings and Conferences	2,322
5760	Rent, equipment lease & storage	1,783
5767	Staff Training	559
5780	Telephone	376
5784	Travel	8,690
5787	Training Kits	345
		<hr/>
		112,722

Thank you for your
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