



Mental Health & Government Advocacy

The mental health of the population affects everyone's quality of life. The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) advocates for all municipal, provincial and federal governments—not just health—to play a role in mental health. This means acknowledging the need for cross-ministry and community investments to promote mental health and supporting programs, like Family and Community Support Services (FCSS), that provide critical local programs across Alberta. It is imperative that all orders of government work together to address mental health needs in the community. Often, unmet service needs that are officially the jurisdiction of one order of government create problems for another. In the case of municipalities, this can be seen through phenomena such as the addictions crisis, homelessness and social service needs that municipalities are forced to respond to when proper funding and programming from other orders of government is not in place.

In Alberta, six per cent of the provincial health budget is spent on mental health and addictions.¹ Based on a health-equity spending approach, the Government of Alberta and municipal government bodies throughout the province should be spending 12 per cent of the total health budget on mental health and addictions.² All levels of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) federation advocate for more funding towards treatment of mental illness and resources for mental health.

This chronic underfunding of health care is creating an environment which fosters a two-tier system of mental health care. In Alberta, we must promote open access to all; investment is needed to guard our public system. CMHA continues to advocate for the province to adopt a health-equity, or health-parity, lens. A health-equity approach would place mental health on the same standing of importance as physical health. For more information on health-equity in Canada, read *Mental Health in the Balance: Ending the Health Care Disparity in Canada*,³ by the National office of the Canadian Mental Health Association.

If you wish to do more to help, please use the resources within this tool kit and contact your local Mayor, Councillor, Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) and/or Member of Parliament (MP).

¹ Government of Alberta (2015). *Valuing mental health: The mental health review*. Retrieved from <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/valuing-mental-health-report-alberta-mental-health-review-committee-2015>.

² Institute of Health Economics (2008). *How much should we spend on mental health*. Retrieved from <https://www.ihe.ca/publications/how-much-should-we-spend-on-mental-health->

³ Canadian Mental Health Association (2018). *Mental health in the balance: Ending the health care disparity in Canada*. Retrieved from <https://cmha.ca/ending-health-care-disparity-canada>