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.

HOW CAN I MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN MY COMMUNITY?

Mental illness affects everyone. People who experience a mental illness may face challenges in their communities. Capable workers may not find good employment. Housing may come with restrictions or may be limited by inadequate income. Many challenges around living with a mental illness have to do with unfair attitudes and discrimination. You can make a difference by advocating for people who experience mental illnesses. Let leaders and policy-makers know that your community includes everyone, and support organizations that work to give everyone a voice.
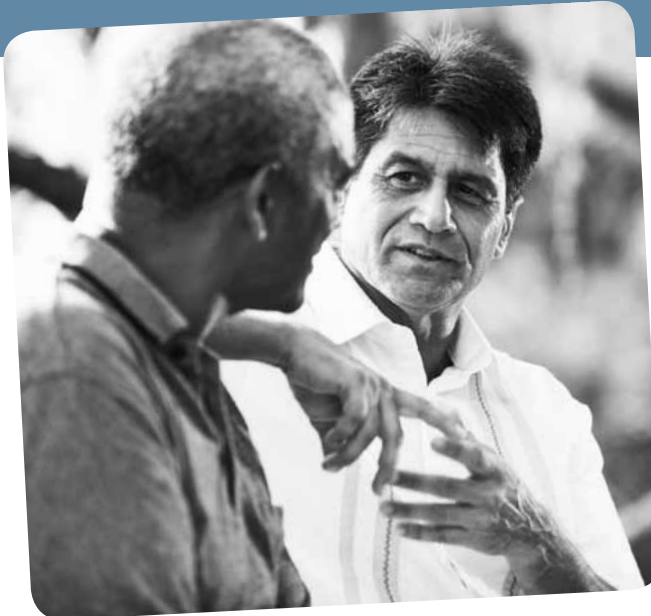
DO YOU NEED MORE HELP?

Contact a community organization like the Canadian Mental Health Association to learn more about support and resources in your area.

Founded in 1918, The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is a national charity that helps maintain and improve mental health for all Canadians. As the nation-wide leader and champion for mental health, CMHA helps people access the community resources they need to build resilience and support recovery from mental illness.

Visit the CMHA website at www.cmha.ca today.

Canadian Mental Health Association
Mental health for all

MENTAL ILLNESSES

Canadian Mental Health Association
Mental health for all

www.cmha.ca

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.

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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.

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.

A note on suicide

Suicide, when someone ends their life on purpose, is not a mental illness in itself. Not all people who die by suicide experience a mental illness. However, suicide may be linked to many different mental illnesses. It's important to take any talk or thoughts of suicide seriously and seek help.