

## Shutting Down Wellness Together Canada Bad Mental Health & Substance Use Health Policy says CAMIMH

**OTTAWA, February 22, 2024** — On February 8, 2024 the federal government announced it would stop funding and close the *Wellness Together Canada* (WTC) portal on April 3, 2024. WTC was originally created by the government in response to the COVID-19 health crisis. This decision puts an end to a low barrier, universal point of access to mental health and substance use health services.

The Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH) urges the federal government and its provincial and territorial counterparts to act immediately to find a way to continue funding *Wellness Together Canada*. Mental health and substance use health is *health* and all people in Canada have a right to universal care.

The federal government stated that the emergency phase of the health crisis is over and that the mental health of Canadians has improved since the lows during the pandemic, however, the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on mental health and substance use health continue,” says Ellen Cohen, CAMIMH co-Chair. “Statistics Canada data shows that while moderate to severe symptoms of mental disorders have recovered from mid-pandemic lows, they persist at higher levels than prior to the pandemic.”

The federal government says it has engaged with the provinces and territories to ensure a transition of services. “But workforce limitations mean not all provinces and territories have the capacity to create a regional version of the services offered on this central portal, which has access to a Canada-wide workforce,” counters Cohen. “This national universal service, has supported millions of people, filled gaps and reduced burden on the mental health system. The service was gaining momentum with 4.2 million people having used the portal—thousands a day. Patients were referred to the portal by mental health professionals, family doctors, community services and more recently, the new 988 suicide crisis helpline.”

Just last month, CAMIMH released the results of its second annual mental health and substance use health report card ([www.CAMIMH.ca](http://www.CAMIMH.ca)). Once again, Canadians gave their provinces a failing grade when asked how well they thought the mental health and substance use health needs of people in their province were being met. The closure of *Wellness Together Canada* and these results demonstrate the federal government is out of touch with the mental health and substance use health realities of Canadians. Eliminating an effective, low barrier support such as *Wellness Together Canada* is a step backwards.

Health Canada states that they continue to work alongside provinces and territories to make mental health and substance use health care a full and equal part of Canada’s health care system. However, CAMIMH is not aware of such collaboration taking place, particularly in absence of a Canada Mental Health Transfer. “The closure of *Wellness Together Canada* is another example of the federal government failing to invest in mental health and substance use health care, which has been chronically underfunded and is, more than ever, in dire need of resources,” says Florence Budden, CAMIMH Co-Chair.

### CAMIMH MEMBERS

- Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists
- Canadian Association of Social Workers
- Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention
- Canadian Consortium for Early Intervention in Psychosis
- Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association
- Canadian Federation of Mental Health Nurses
- Canadian Medical Association
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Canadian Perinatal Mental Health Collaborative
- Canadian Psychiatric Association
- Canadian Psychological Association
- Community Addictions Peer Support Association
- Medical Psychotherapy Association of Canada
- National Initiative for Eating Disorders
- National Network for Mental Health
- Schizophrenia Society of Canada
- Psychosocial Rehabilitation Canada
- The College of Family Physicians Canada

Canada's universal health care system, unlike in many other G7 countries, does not include mental health and substance use health. By ending funding to *Wellness Together Canada*, we are concerned that this government is reducing its funding commitment to support mental health and substance use health care.

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**About CAMIMH**

Established in 1998, the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH) is a member-driven alliance of 18 national mental health organizations comprised of healthcare providers and organizations representing persons with lived and living experience, their families and caregivers. CAMIMH's mandate is to ensure that mental health and substance use health is placed on the national agenda so that the people of Canada receive timely and appropriate access to care and support. For more information on our work, please visit our website at [www.CAMIMH.ca](http://www.CAMIMH.ca).

**MEDIA CONTACT:**

Barb Barrette, The Impact Group

343.998.8906

[barbara@impactcanada.com](mailto:barbara@impactcanada.com)