

Ontario Mental Health and Addictions Alliance

Election Kit

- Introduction.....1**
- Meet your local candidates.....3**
- Contact your local media.....5**
- Attend an all-candidates meeting.....6**
- Engage others.....8**
- Appendix.....10**

Introduction

The Ontario Mental Health and Addictions Alliance is a coalition of 9 organizations from across the province and across the continuum of care whose goal is to ensure that mental health and addictions are a provincial government priority:

- Addictions and Mental Health Ontario (AMHO)
- Canadian Mental Health Association – Ontario (CMHA Ontario)
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)
- Children’s Mental Health Ontario (CMHO)
- Mood Disorders Association of Ontario (MDAO)
- Ontario Association of Patient Councils (OAPC)
- Ontario Hospital Association (OHA)
- Ontario Peer Development Initiative (OPDI)
- Schizophrenia Society of Ontario (SSO)

The purpose of the Ontario Mental Health and Addiction Alliance’s **Vote4MHA** campaign is to ensure that mental health and addiction challenges are a priority on the election agenda. Mental health and addiction issues affect 1 in 5 people directly in any given year and most individuals can relate to experiencing the effects of mental health and addictions indirectly through a relationship with a friend, family member or co-worker. Regardless, there have been ill efforts to prioritize mental health and addictions by politicians and government. This election, we are asking you to help us change that.

This election kit provides helpful information on simple ways that you can take action in your riding and in your community. Party leaders and local candidates need to hear loud and clear that voters are concerned about this issue, and that they will heavily weigh party platforms when they vote.

There are many concerns with the current mental health and addictions system. People wait too long for services, and in some communities, the help needed is not even available. While everyone’s journey is unique, there are many common barriers which many of individuals face in accessing the necessary services and supports.

The Alliance has identified three priority areas for action at the provincial level, which will enhance the mental health and addictions system and the health outcomes of Ontarians:

- Make a full range of mental health and addictions services and supports accessible to every person in Ontario, when and where needed.
- Ensure that people with mental health and/or addictions issues have access to safe and affordable housing with supports as needed.
- Engage stakeholders in meaningful collaboration to provide guidance on the implementation of Ontario’s mental health and addiction initiatives.

Within your community and based on your experience, there may be other specific changes that you want to advocate for. In this election kit, we have provided you with information on ways to effectively convey these key messages to the candidates and to other influencers such as the media.

We hope you find the contents of this election kit useful. If you have any questions, please visit our website (<http://www.vote4mha.ca>) or contact us at info@vote4mha.ca.

#1: Meet Your Local Candidates

The provincial election will be held on Thursday June 12, 2014. It is important to go out and meet your candidates, get to know their positions, and educate them about the need to address mental health and addiction challenges in Ontario.

The Ontario Mental Health and Addiction Alliance encourages everyone who wants to put this issue on the election agenda to meet with your local candidates. The broader the group the greater the impact, so try to include individuals directly affected by mental illness and addiction as well as organizations such as mental health and/or addictions agencies, housing providers and community health centres.

Why meet with your candidates?

- Mental health and addictions affect so many people. Meeting with a candidate face to face is an opportunity to hear more about their background.
- A face-to-face meeting gives you a chance to learn more about what your local candidates know about mental health and addictions, and provides an opportunity for you to educate them about what is needed.
- Meeting with candidates is an opportunity to get into more detail about local issues and to reinforce the key messages being delivered to the party leaders:
 - Make a full range of mental health and addictions services and supports accessible to every person in Ontario, when and where needed.
 - Ensure that people with mental health and/or addictions issues have access to safe and affordable housing with supports as needed.
 - Engage stakeholders in meaningful collaboration to provide guidance on the implementation of Ontario's mental health and addiction initiatives.

Meeting with candidates – step by step

Scheduling the meeting:

- Find out who your local candidates are. This information can be found at the Elections Ontario website (www.elections.on.ca) or by visiting the individual party websites.
- Send your request for a meeting in writing, stating who you are and why you are requesting the meeting.
- Confirm how long the meeting will be, and plan an agenda for this amount of time.
- Call the day before to confirm the meeting.

In advance of the meeting:

- Research the candidate. Find out about their background, and look for experience or connection with our sector.
- Think about what your “key messages” are – these are the points that you want to make sure to get across. Write them down and bring them with you to the meeting so you can be reminded to repeat them often. For example:
 - Mental health and addictions must be a priority for the next government
 - People in this community care about mental health and addictions, and we will consider it when we vote
 - All Ontarians must have access to key mental health and addictions services
 - Children and youth in this community wait far too long to access services
 - Access to safe and affordable housing is key to recovery, and it reduces pressure on hospitals
- Gather information on local data and statistics, particularly information that demonstrates there are challenges for people accessing services in your community.
- Develop a few “asks” – these are things that the local candidate could have as campaign commitments related to mental health and addictions. For ideas you can use documentation developed by the Alliance, available at <http://www.vote4mha.ca>. Some suggestions include:
 - Make a commitment to increasing the number of supportive housing spaces in your community
 - Make a commitment to increasing funding for mental health and addiction services in your community
 - Make a commitment to getting to know local service providers; and in doing so, understand the successes, gaps and opportunities within your local riding

At the meeting:

- Arrive on time.
- Focus on discussion, not debate. Present your issues in a clear way, referring back to your key messages as much as possible.
- Be sure to discuss how mental health issues directly affect you, your friends and your family. Personal stories have an impact.
- Engage in active listening to determine the candidate’s views, beliefs, and values.
- Present your asks – tell the candidate what you think they should commit to in this election campaign, and how this would help address mental health and addictions in your community.
- Offer your assistance – ask “What can we do to help you to advance mental health and addictions issues and work towards these changes?”
- Leave enough time for discussion and questions.

What to leave behind:

- Prepare a package that includes Alliance documents (available at www.vote4mha.ca), information on local issues, and your contact information.

After the meeting:

- Send a letter to the candidate, thanking them for meeting with you. (We have provided a sample thank you letter in the appendix at the end of this document.) Offer your expertise or assistance on these issues in the future.

#2: Contact Your Local Media

Media can be an important tool when trying to raise an issue at election time. The information below will help you to bring the issue of mental health and addictions to your local media in an effective manner. We have outlined three simple things you can do to raise the profile of mental health and addictions as an election issue through your local media:

Write a letter to the editor

A letter to the editor can be an effective way for individuals and/or organizations to deliver important information to the public. The “letters” section in newspapers provides a forum for public comment or debate. You can use a letter to the editor to:

1. **Correct or clarify information or perceptions:** If there is an article that you think carried the wrong message about mental health and addictions, or had incorrect information, write a letter to the editor. Share your expertise on this topic and talk about how important it is that the next government make mental health and addictions a priority.
2. **Introduce or reinforce a message:** If there is an article in your local newspaper that somehow relates back to mental health and/or addiction, you can respond to that article and either introduce or reinforce the message about the need for investments in mental health and addiction services. Use a newspaper article – whether positive or negative – as an opportunity to raise your issues.
3. **Express an opinion or point of view:** You can also write a letter to the editor even if your topic has not been covered lately in the news. In your letter, state that access to mental health and addictions in your community is a real problem, and that the community needs to come together to raise this issue with local candidates at the upcoming provincial election.

Contact a local journalist

Journalists from local newspapers, radio, and television stations are interested in hearing from local residents like you about the issues that matter. Here are some tips for contacting local media outlets:

1. Gather a list of media outlets that cover events and activities in your community. Try to find specific contact information for journalists that would be interested in a story related to mental

health/addictions and the election.

2. Before contacting media outlets, take some time to think about what you want to ask the reporter to do. Do you want them to cover an event you are organizing? Do you want the journalist to write about your efforts to focus local attention on mental health and addictions? Journalists get a lot of emails and calls, and may not have a lot of time to chat. The more organized and focused you are, the more likely they will listen to what you have to say and decide to cover your story.
3. Remember that when you are talking to journalists **anything** you say could appear in print, on the radio or on TV. Before doing an interview with a reporter, always take time to write down two or three points you want to make – and stick to those points! There is no such thing as “off the record.”
4. Speak from personal experience whenever possible. The mental health and addictions system can be a very complex issue for journalists to cover and for their readers and viewers to understand. Help them by offering insight based on your personal experience.

Put out a press release

A press release is an announcement to the media about a newsworthy issue. It is a fairly short document that states the key issues and provides quotes that a journalist can use when writing his or her own story. We have provided a sample press release for you in the appendix at the end of this document. We encourage you to replace the quotes and text with words that are specific to your own community.

#3: Attend an All-Candidates Meeting

All-candidates meetings and debates are events where political candidates come together to discuss election issues before a public audience. These meetings offer the local candidates and parties the opportunity to reinforce key messages and share positions on different issues. As a voter or member of an organization concerned about mental health and addictions, an all-candidates meeting offers an opportunity to ask questions to your local candidates, and have them make a public commitment to your issues.

How to find your local events

You can try finding information about local all-candidates events through:

- Local candidate headquarters or offices
- Your MPP’s constituency office
- Political party websites or riding association offices
- Local media
- Some community organizations

Asking your candidates a question

While all-candidates meetings or debates typically have set questions, there is often an opportunity for members of the public to ask their own questions as well. Here are some ideas for questions to ask at your local all-candidates meeting or debate about both provincial and local mental health and addictions issues.

Provincial questions

The Alliance has developed three priorities that they would like each political party to address:

1. Make a full range of mental health and addictions services and supports accessible to every person in Ontario, when and where needed.
2. Ensure that people with mental health and/or addictions issues have access to safe and affordable housing, with supports as needed.
3. Engage stakeholders in meaningful collaboration to provide guidance on the implementation of Ontario's mental health and addiction initiatives.

Some examples of questions you can ask that relate to these three provincial priorities include:

- “The Ontario Mental Health and Addictions Alliance is asking Ontario’s next government to do three things: *[state the three priorities]*. Will you commit today to moving these recommendations forward both at the party level and in this community, and if so, what specifically will you do?”
- “Mental health and addictions touch almost every person in this province. Will you commit today to being a champion for mental health and addictions within your party, and if so, what will you do to help ensure that this area is a priority?”
- “There are currently huge disparities in access to mental health and addiction services across the province. In this community, people simply cannot get the services or supports they need, when they need it. *[State a fact about your community]*. What will you do to ensure that a full range of mental health and addictions services and supports is available to all members of this community?”

Framing a local question:

As an organization or a community member, you may have concerns or suggestions about what needs to be done to address mental health and addictions in your local area. When posing a question at an all-candidates meeting on local issues, we offer the following suggestions:

Be specific. A broad question such as “will you support mental health and addictions in this riding” invites a vague or high-level answer. Try to narrow down your question so that the candidate is forced to give you a more specific answer. For example: “Housing is critical to recovery. What would you do to address the need for more supportive housing in this community to help people with mental illness and/or addictions stay out of hospital and live in the community?”

Provide context. Your local candidates may not be fully aware of the issues impacting people with mental illness or addiction in your riding. Before posing your questions, provide one or two sentences that explain the situation, so that the candidates understand the problem that they have to address. For example: “Access to services and supports for people with mental health and addiction challenges varies considerably across Ontario. In this community, for example, a young person with a mental illness can wait over six months just for an assessment.”

State the facts. Facts and figures are a powerful way of demonstrating the severity of a problem. It’s one thing to say that something is an issue, but it’s another to show the evidence. If you have a specific concern in your area, try to find some facts that will back it up. ConnexOntario has an e-services site for organizations which provides data on local wait times and availability of services – go to www.connexontario.ca for more information. More general facts on mental illness and addiction can be found by entering “mental health facts Ontario” or “addiction facts Ontario” into your internet search engine. (Ensure that the facts you are using come from a credible source.) For example: “The average wait time for early psychosis intervention in *[your region]* is *[x number]* days. That is simply too long to get the help you are looking for.”

Share your experience with us

Contact us at info@vote4mha.ca and let us know what your local candidates committed to and what your experience was like.

#4: Engage Others

One of the most significant things you can do to help put mental health and addictions on the election agenda is organize your community around this issue. The more people you can rally around this movement, and the more diverse your group, the greater your chances of getting the attention of your local candidates and party leaders.

Here are some simple things you can do to get the word out about this campaign in your community and across your networks:

E-mail

The quickest and easiest way to spread the word about this campaign to your networks is by e-mail. This option allows you to send information in a personalized manner to anyone who you think would be interested in helping make mental health and addictions an election issue. You can include your friends, family members, and even co-workers.

Personalized message about the Vote4MHA campaign: Send out a mass e-mail letting people know that there is a movement to make mental health and addictions a priority for the next government. Ask people to visit the www.vote4mha.ca website to learn more about this campaign, or send them information about our key messages.

Social media

The Vote4MHA campaign includes a social media component. You may have Facebook friends and Twitter followers that you didn't even know were affected by mental health or addictions. Here are some simple things you can do:

Facebook: Share information about the Vote4MHA campaign through your status. Tell your Facebook friends that mental health and addiction needs to be a priority for the next government, and that each party must take a stance on how they will address this issue. Ask people to visit www.vote4mha.ca to learn more and help make mental health and addictions an election issue.

Twitter: Tell your twitter followers that mental health and addiction needs to be a priority for the next government. Use the hashtags **#vote4mha**, **#voteON** and **#ONpoli** to get others involved in the conversation about putting mental health and addictions on the election agenda. Ask people to visit www.vote4mha.ca to learn more and help make mental health and addictions an election issue.

Do this regularly to keep the momentum going!

Appendix

Sample press release

For Immediate Release

[DATE]

Make Mental Health and Addictions a Key Election issue, Say Local Leaders

People in [NAME OF YOUR COMMUNITY] are not getting timely care for their mental health and addiction challenges, says a local coalition of mental health and addiction organizations. Candidates seeking to represent [NAME OF RIDING] at Queen’s Park should know that improving mental health and addiction care is important to the people of [NAME OF YOUR COMMUNITY].

“All candidates should understand that people with mental health and addiction issues deserve the same level of care as those with physical illnesses,” said [NAME, TITLE, ORGANIZATION]. “Yet the waiting times for essential mental health and addiction services in [NAME OF YOUR COMMUNITY] are unacceptably long.

In [NAME OF YOUR COMMUNITY], [INSERT STATISTICS ABOUT WAIT TIMES OR AVAILABILITY OF SERVICES HERE].

“[INSERT A QUOTE FROM SOMEONE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE HERE],” said [NAME].

Local mental health and addiction organizations have come together in support of a provincial alliance determined to make mental health and addictions a key election issue. The Ontario Mental Health and Addictions Alliance recommends three ways the next government can demonstrate a commitment to mental health and addiction for all Ontarians:

- Make a full range of mental health and addictions services and supports accessible to every person in Ontario, when and where needed.
- Ensure that people with mental health and/or addictions issues have access to safe and affordable housing with supports as needed.
- Engage stakeholders in meaningful collaboration to provide guidance on the implementation of Ontario’s mental health and addiction initiatives.

More than 2.5 million Ontarians live with a mental illness and/or addiction. Millions more – family members, friends and co-workers – are also affected.

“In [NAME OF YOUR COMMUNITY] and across Ontario, access to services and supports is inadequate,” said [NAME, TITLE, ORGANIZATION]. “This election campaign, let’s commit ourselves to improving services, and improving lives.”

The Alliance is encouraging voters to visit their website, www.vote4mha.ca, to write a letter to party leaders and candidates and to learn about more ways that [NAME OF YOUR COMMUNITY] residents can ensure that the next government makes mental health and addictions a priority.

For more information please contact:

[INSERT YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION HERE]

Sample thank you letter for candidates / MPPs

Your logo

[Date]

[MPP/Candidate name]

[Mailing Address]

Dear [MPP/Candidate name] for [name of riding],

Thank you for your time and interest in the mental health and addictions issues facing Ontario. I hope that we can continue our discussions in the future.

Ontario must prioritize mental health and addictions. As you know, all Ontarians are impacted directly or indirectly mental health and addictions. In addition, the economic costs measure \$39 billion in Ontario alone, while social costs are immeasurable.

Specifically, I am concerned that:

- Access to mental health and addiction services varies significantly across Ontario.
- The wait to access supportive housing for individuals with mental health and addiction issues is far too long.
- Co-ordination and leadership across the different ministries and sectors involved with mental health and addictions are lacking.

Despite these challenges, a government that is committed to change can make a difference. My organization supports the Ontario Mental Health and Addictions Alliance in urging Ontario's parties to develop a plan of action that will:

1. Make a full range of mental health and addictions services and supports accessible to every person in Ontario, when and where needed.
2. Ensure that people with mental health and/or addictions issues have access to safe and affordable housing with supports as needed.
3. Engage stakeholders in meaningful collaboration to provide guidance on the implementation of Ontario's mental health and addiction initiatives.

Your help promoting these priorities, supporting them on the campaign trail and in the legislature, and sharing them with your colleagues is much appreciated.

I sincerely appreciate your time and I look forward to providing you with any support and assistance that I can. If you have any other questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. My phone number is [your telephone number] and my email is [your email address].

Again, thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

[Your name]