

### **What is Mental Health?**

Mental health is just like physical health and varies just as much from individual to individual based on genetics, past traumatic injuries, and the time and tools they employ to sustain or improve their health. And, as with physical health, poor mental health over time or a serious traumatic injury or experience can result in the development of a chronic mental illness.

### **Is Having a Mental Health Issue the Same as Being Mentally Ill?**

No. Just as people can be in poor physical health without having a diagnosable illness or disease, so too can people be in poor mental health without having a diagnosable mental health illness. What is important to remember, however, is that remaining in a state of poor health will drastically increase the likelihood of major illness or disease, making timely intervention a priority. It is important that some individuals with mental illnesses require lifelong supports. These supports should be tailored to their needs and guided by experts.

### **Why Is Timely Intervention So Important?**

Timely care for physical or mental health can stop further deterioration from happening and make it much easier and quicker for people to recover. Just as ignoring infection or cardiovascular risks can lead to lengthy hospital stays, emergency care, and death, so too can ignoring mental health issues lead to hospitalization, emergency care, and death. Often, we also see additional effects in the public, as those with major mental health issues are also far more likely to end up homeless, suffer from addiction, and end up in police custody.

From a resource perspective, it is far, far less expensive to intervene in mental health crises early and effectively than it is to deal with the increased load on social services, healthcare, policing, and corrections. Best estimates place the return on investment for primary health care at \$9 in savings on emergency care for every \$1 spent in primary care.

### **Why Are Mental Health Issues Important to SUMA?**

Municipalities are on the front-lines of governance, as the order of government closest and more accessible to the people. When mental health issues are inadequately addressed provincially, urban municipalities and their residents are the first to feel the effects. Police and fire fighters are often called upon to ensure tent encampments are safe and to respond to a general increase in crime that tends to accompany rises in homelessness and

addiction. Municipalities also find themselves in the position of having to fund shelters and even housing, despite lacking either the jurisdiction or the fiscal capacity to do so.

### **What Does SUMA Want?**

SUMA wants what we all want: healthy citizens and healthy and safe communities. We want people to have access to services in a preventive manner, avoiding high-cost crises and lifelong impacts - allowing them to fully contribute to society.

We look to the provincial government show leadership in addressing the ongoing mental health crisis, while developing public policy that is evidence-based and effective. We believe that the solution needs to include:

#### Access to preventative and acute services

- Expansion of PACT (Police and Crisis Teams) is imperative. These teams offer mental health assessment, support, and / or consultation in crisis situations from SHA and local police. They can arrange urgent psychiatry assessments and referrals as needed.
- Increase in funding for preventative, low barrier mental health services are required. These services must be long term and holistic.
- CBOs provide crucial supports for individuals in crisis as well as significant preventative support. CBOs must receive multiyear, predictable, and sustainable funding.

#### Strong social supports

- The Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability (SAID) program is a needs-based income assistance program that gives Saskatchewan citizens with significant and enduring disabilities (including disability related to mental illness) access to long-term income support. SAID rates fall short and recipients are left unable to meet even the most basic needs.
  - Increase to SAID rates to provide people with disabilities dignity and ability to meet necessities of life is required.
  - Improves access to a skilled case workers are important to ensure recipients have their ongoing needs met
  - Reinstate direct payment for rent and utilities, unless otherwise explicitly requested is required immediately.



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and northern municipalities are  
urban hubs bringing people together.

# Policy in Brief

Mental Health

## Housing

- People with mental health issues are more susceptible to homelessness – 30-50% of those experiencing homelessness have mental illness.
  - More complex supportive housing units are required, offering complete wrap around services provided by highly skilled clinicians and case workers.