Canadian Mental Health Association
Calgary
Mental health for all

Strategic Framework 2026-2029 Renewal

"Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end."

Over the past several years, CMHA Calgary has navigated a period of rapid and significant change. The combined pressures of shifting funding models, evolving community needs, and disruptions across the nonprofit sector have required our organization to adapt quickly while remaining steadfast in our mission to promote community mental health care and support unique recovery journeys for our diverse stakeholders.

This period has tested our resilience and strengthened our commitment. We have weathered uncertainty, embraced innovation, and responded to emerging realities—ranging from the mental health impacts of the pandemic, to a growing need for culturally responsive services for newcomers and Indigenous peoples, to the rise in complex housing and mental health challenges.

The next chapter in CMHA Calgary's story is about Renewal. Renewal is more than a return to stability—it is a deliberate choice to refresh our vision, rebuild our foundations, and reignite our capacity for impact.

- Reinforcing our core – Strengthening our organizational sustainability, governance, and workforce so that we are equipped to deliver high-quality, evidence-informed services well into the future.
- Reconnecting with our community – Deepening partnerships and co-designing solutions with those who experience mental health challenges, ensuring our services reflect the voices and realities of the people we serve.
- Reimagining service delivery – Adapting our programs to meet emerging needs, using innovation and integrated approaches to address the whole person in the context of their community.
- Reinvesting in our people – Supporting and developing our staff and volunteers, recognizing that their passion and expertise are the foundation of our success.

In a time when the mental health and nonprofit landscapes are evolving faster than ever, Renewal gives us the clarity, confidence, and creativity to chart our course. It is about honouring what we have built, learning from our recent challenges, and boldly stepping into the future with renewed energy and purpose.

Through Renewal, CMHA Calgary will emerge stronger, more connected, and better prepared to meet the complex and changing needs of our community—today and in the years ahead.



Finding Our North Star

"A thriving Calgary & Area community where mental wellness is everyone's foundation."

Our North Star is the clear, guiding principle or visionary goal that aligns and drives the entire organization. It represents the core value our organization delivers to its stakeholders and serves as the key metric or concept that teams can focus on to drive growth and success.

A thriving community is one where all individuals feel mentally well, socially connected, and empowered to contribute. Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Calgary plays a vital role in creating a thriving community by addressing the foundational need for mental wellness. Here's how:

- Improves Individual Wellbeing
  - By offering peer support, preventive education and skill building, personal empowerment and recovery services, connection to resources, housing and basic needs, and innovative responses to emerging challenges, individuals and families receive the care they need to protect and enhance their mental health.
  - This leads to greater resilience, stability, and quality of life, allowing people to contribute meaningfully to their families, workplaces, and communities.

- Reduces Social and Economic Strain
  - Effective community mental health care prevents homelessness, hospitalizations, unemployment, and interactions with the child welfare and justice systems.
  - It lowers the burden on emergency services, shelters, and health care systems—saving public resources and improving health outcomes.

- Builds Social Connection and Inclusion
  - Programs that foster peer support, community integration, and stigma reduction help people feel connected and valued.
  - When people feel included, they are more likely to participate in community life, build confidence to pursue careers, volunteer, or have the capacity to support others—creating a ripple effect of care and connection.

- Supports Youth, Families, and Workplaces
  - Early intervention for youth, parenting supports, and mental health education in schools help build stronger future generations.
  - Services that support workplace mental health contribute to productivity and employee retention, strengthening the local economy.

- Drives Systemic Change and Advocacy
  - CMHA-C advocates for responsive social policy, access to care, and meaningful investments in mental health infrastructure.

VALUES DRIVEN

Hope Belonging
Kindness Connection
Resilience

Our strategy is grounded in our collectively defined values. These are not only values we hold, but the experience we strive to create in every relationship, service, and initiative.

Guiding Principles

Our mission & work will be guided by a commitment to:

Centering an approach that acknowledges strength in every person

Fostering Collaboration & Community Integration

Advancing Equity & Inclusion

Supporting Empowerment through Learning

Modelling Flexibility & Adaptability

CMHA CALGARY - SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

Supporting Lives, Building Skills, Empowerment to Thrive

At CMHA Calgary, we believe that mental health and well-being are nurtured through a continuum of care. Our Live, Learn, Thrive model illustrates the interconnected journey from meeting essential needs to building knowledge and skills, and ultimately empowering individuals to flourish. Each stream, Live, Learn and Thrive represents a vital part of this progression, offering a holistic framework that supports people where they are and helps them move toward where they want to be.

Thrive (Recovery & Well-being)

Therapeutic services and opportunities for personal growth



- Counselling & therapy
- Recovery-focused programs
- Life skills coaching
- Social engagement & inclusion programs

Learn (Skill-building & Community)

Education, prevention and peer support to empower community members

- Community mental health education
- Child & youth services
- Peer support programs
- Recovery College workshops



Live (Foundation)

Meeting basic needs to create stability



- Housing support & advocacy
- Food security programs
- Income & benefits navigation
- Emergency support services

Mental Health in Calgary – Environmental Scan (August 2025)

A concise overview of our current context to inform strategy, funding pursuit, and partner alignment. The environmental scan will be updated annually to reflect a nuanced and evolving landscape in which we operate and serve.

Current State & Context

Population & Demand

- Calgary is among Canada's fastest-growing cities (strong newcomer and non-permanent resident inflow), intensifying demand for housing, primary care, and community mental health supports.
- Affordability stress (housing/food/transport) is a major risk multiplier for anxiety, depression, and substance-related harms.

System & Governance Shifts

- Alberta established Recovery Alberta to deliver provincially funded mental health, addiction, and correctional health services (transitioned from AHS). New interfaces with Acute Care Alberta, Primary Care Alberta, Assisted Living Alberta, consolidating Primary Care Networks (PCNs), and associated Ministry departments and benefits programs are taking shape.
- The City of Calgary Mental Health & Addiction Strategy continues to orient activity under three lenses: Being Well, Getting Help, Staying Safe, with emphasis on crisis response, navigation, and community pilots.

Service Utilization & Need Signals

- 50% of Calgarians report needing mental health support in the last year; ~1/3 rate their mental health as fair/poor; ~1/3 are unsure where to go; <1/2 are satisfied with services.
- Distress Centre Calgary reports sustained high volumes across crisis line, 211, and text/chat; notable numbers of diversions away from CPS/911 into community response.
- Child and youth mental health services face long waits (18–24 months reported by primary care clinics), with steady referral growth.
- Homelessness counts increased in absolute numbers alongside population growth and visible evidence of rough sleeping/encampments city-wide.
- Opioid toxicity remains a critical burden; late-2024 data suggested improvement vs. 2023, but need remains high.

Implications

- Navigation, brief intervention capacity, and crisis alternatives to acute care/CPS remain top priorities.
- Housing and mental health service integration are central to responsive care
- Culturally safe care for youth, Indigenous populations, and newcomers is essential.
- Partnership discipline (shared protocols, data standards, warm transfers) is increasingly determinative of outcomes under the Recovery Alberta strategic vision.

Calgary Mental Health Dashboard (Key Indicators)

Sources: City of Calgary (Calgary.ca) monitoring, Distress Centre Calgary Crisis Line annual reporting, provincial/federal dashboards.

Population & Experience

- Calgary population: ~1.49M (Apr 2024); rapid growth year over year.
- Self-reported need (past 12 months): ~70% felt they needed MH support.
- Self-rated fair/poor mental health: ~33% of residents.
- Wayfinding gap: ~32% unsure where to go for help.
- Service satisfaction: ~49% satisfied (noted room for improvement).

Access, Crisis & Navigation

- Crisis line contacts (Distress Centre, 2024): ~50.6k.
- 211 navigation contacts (2024): 59k+.
- Diversions from CPS/911 to community crisis line (2024): ~8.5k.
- Total contacts across programs (2024): ~165k.
- Repeat ED visits for MH/SU: Elevated; use as a system stress indicator and target for diversion.

Vulnerabilities & Determinants

- Homelessness (Oct 2024 PIT): ~3,121 people; ~74% sheltered; >25% rough sleeping.
- Substance-related harms (2024 trend): Lower monthly opioid toxicity deaths vs. 2023 but still high; vigilance required.
- Influx of complex needs refugees and evacuees: strain on housing resources, primary care, public education, settlement services (federal reductions to numerous funding streams simultaneously).
- Affordability crisis: food, housing, and finances rank as the top three community navigation requests.
- Primary care access continues to be limited: more frequent decompensation of health conditions resulting in pressures on acute care and higher acuity presentation once care is accessed.

System Structure

- Recovery Alberta: Operational since Sept 2024; standardization and integration agenda underway (virtual tools, youth integration, justice interfaces).

Priority Focus (2026–2029)

1)Access & navigation; 2) Crisis alternatives; 3) Housing + MH integration; 4) Substance-use continuum; 5) Culturally safe youth & newcomer care; 6) Partnership & data readiness

What This Means For CMHA Calgary

Prioritize Strategic Goals and Demonstrate Impact

1. Shrink the “time-to-help” gap. Make it simple and fast for Calgarians to get the right-sized help the first time.
2. Build strong early intervention alternatives to acute care/police. Ensure 24/7 community options that connect, validate, assess, and provide a warm-handoff to appropriate care and level of intervention.
3. Integrate housing and mental health supports. Improve diversity of housing access, enhance timely and coordinated intake models, promote tenancy stability and wellness for people at risk or experiencing homelessness.
4. Advance youth and newcomer access & cultural safety. Close language, culture, and developmental fit gaps.
5. Strengthen substance-use health across the continuum. Prevention → harm reduction → treatment → recovery, with seamless transitions and close adherence to respecting theory of change evidence.
6. Operate as a partnership “backbone” in the Recovery Alberta era. Clear protocols, data standards, and shared outcomes with RA, Ministries and sector partners.

Core Services Framework 3 year trajectory

- One-Front-Door Navigation: Collaborate with Recovery Alberta, system and sector partners; triage to CMHA brief interventions, groups, peer support, and partner services.
- Housing + Health Bundles: Pair tenancy support with MH/SU care; priority lanes from hospitals/shelters/encampments; shared metrics with RA.
- Child and Youth Prevention Initiatives: School referral lanes; family care and education; virtual options.
- Newcomer Access & Cultural Safety: Language services, cultural brokers, and newcomer-serving partnerships; staff training and co-designed materials.
- Complementary Care: Peer services and supports as an integrated component of community mental health care to alleviate singular reliance on clinical paths.
- Partnership/Data Infrastructure: Standard referral forms, e-consult channels with referral sources, shared care plans, and KPI dashboards; align with Recovery Alberta standards.









Strategic Pillars

Organizational Sustainability

Ensure a stable & reilient foundation to support long-term impact.

Sector & Community Leadership

Position CMHA Calgary as a leader in shaping community mental health care policy & practice, public dialogue, & community solutions

Innovation & Learning

Strengthen our capacity to work across sectors & systems to improve outcomes for people & communities

Integrated Service Delivery

Advance bold, upstream solutions to address the root cause of mental health challenges. Embrace curiosity, creativity, & continuos improvement to stay responsiove & effective.

Year 1 - 3 Priorities

- Diversify & stabilize funding through philanthropic partnerships, social enterprise & multi-year grants.
- Strengthen internal systems to support scalability & quality.
- Improve workforce wellness, engagement & retention through trauma-informed leadership, meaningful staff recognition & ongoing professional development.
- Embed environmental & social sustainability practices across operations.

- Design & pilot innovative community mental health care programs informed by evidence, need & impact.
- Amplify lived experience voices to influence policy, practice & public understanding.
- Strengthen advocacy efforts to address system gaps & social determinants of mental health (e.g., housing, income security, equity).

- Expand formal partnerships with Indigenous organizations, settlement services, housing providers & health systems.
- Advance seamless service navigation through co-locations, shared intake systems & care coordination.
- Strengthen culturally safe, equity-oriented approaches that centre the needs of diverse populations.
- Support collective impact initiatives to address youth, family & newcomer mental health.

- Co-design & pilot preventative & early intervention programs in schools, communities & workplaces.
- Expand continuum of community housing models as a core mental health intervention.
- Promote equity through anti-racism, decolonization & inclusion practices at all levels.
- Develop policy practice innovations & propose evidence-informed solutions for government & sector partners.







Strategic Risk Overview

As CMHA Calgary moves forward with its Strategic Plan, it is important to acknowledge key risks that may affect the organization's ability to achieve its goals. Proactive risk awareness ensures that we remain agile, resilient, and accountable in a rapidly changing environment.

1. Financial Sustainability
   - Risk: Constrained financial position, a volatile funding landscape, reliance on short-term project grants, and rising costs of service delivery could compromise long-term sustainability.
   - Response: Continue to curb expenses and diversify revenue streams (multiple government sources, philanthropy, corporate, fee-for-service), strengthen donor relations, and build both capital and operating reserves.

2. Workforce Capacity and Wellbeing
   - Risk: Increasing demand for services paired with workforce shortages in the nonprofit and health sectors may result in staff burnout, recruitment challenges, and turnover.
   - Response: Invest in employee wellbeing, competitive compensation, leadership development, and succession planning.

3. Service Demand vs. Capacity
   - Risk: Calgary's growing and increasingly complex mental health needs (youth, seniors, housing instability, addictions) may outpace organizational capacity.
   - Response: Strengthen partnerships, prioritize high-impact programming, and leverage peer support and community-based models to extend reach.

4. Reputation and Public Trust
   - Risk: As a leader in mental health advocacy and service delivery, reputational risks (e.g., service gaps, client dissatisfaction, public misperceptions, data breaches) could undermine credibility.
   - Response: Enhance communication strategies, ensure transparency, and invest in quality assurance and client feedback systems.

Strategic Risk Overview Continued...

5. Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)
   - Risk: Failure to reflect and respond to the diverse needs of Calgary's population (Indigenous communities, newcomers, LGBTQ2S+, rural residents) could reduce relevance and accessibility.
   - Response: Commit to EDI audit, enhancement of inclusivity policy, diversity as an asset in staff recruitment, culturally appropriate programming, and meaningful community engagement.

6. Technology and Data Security
   - Risk: Increased reliance on digital platforms, virtual service delivery, AI, and client data management creates cybersecurity and privacy risks.
   - Response: Invest in continuous system improvement, staff training, and robust IT policies and advocate for resourcing from key funders to support integration of AI.

7. Policy and System Shifts
   - Risk: Provincial and federal policy changes, shifts in health system reform, and economic pressures in Alberta may disrupt funding models or create service delivery gaps.
   - Response: Maintain strong government relations, engage in advocacy, and remain adaptive in program design.

8. External Shocks
   - Risk: Unexpected events (pandemics, economic downturns, climate-related emergencies) could significantly increase demand and reduce resources.
   - Response: Build crisis response capacity, cross-train staff, and develop contingency planning.









Stepping Forward with Renewal

CMHA Calgary's Strategic Plan 2026–2029: Renewal is both a roadmap and a commitment. It reflects the lessons we have learned during a period of rapid change, the strengths we have drawn upon to remain resilient, and the vision we hold for a stronger, more connected community.

Renewal is not simply about returning to stability—it is about refreshing our purpose, rebuilding our foundations, and reigniting our capacity for impact. By focusing on organizational sustainability, sector leadership, integrated service delivery, and innovation and learning, we will be positioned to meet the growing and evolving mental health needs of our city.

Our North Star— "a thriving Calgary and Area community where mental wellness is everyone's foundation"—keeps us aligned and inspired. It reminds us that the work ahead is not only about programs or services, but about transforming lives, strengthening communities, and driving systemic change.
To realize this vision, we will need the continued trust and partnership of our staff, volunteers, donors, funders, sector allies, and, most importantly, the people we serve. Together, we will ensure that CMHA Calgary continues to be a leader in community mental health care: a trusted partner, a courageous innovator, and a place of hope, belonging, and resilience.

As we step into this next chapter, we do so with clarity, confidence, and determination. Renewal is our promise—to ourselves, to our partners, and to our community—that the best is yet to come.

