



ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH IN THE COMMUNITY AND QUALITY JOBS FOR EDMONTONIANS

Briefing Paper

Greater Edmonton Alliance
<https://www.greateredmontonalliance.org/>

Overview

The Greater Edmonton Alliance (GEA) is a coalition of non-profit, non-partisan, multi-issue organizations that unite a diverse group of faith, community and labour organizations. GEA members are unifying for a common purpose; to improve Edmonton for all. Our extensive memberships are focused on taking collective action for social change.

After embarking on a lengthy listening tour, two pressing issues impacting Edmonton were identified as shared interests and values among our diverse members: addressing mental health and providing quality jobs. Once identifying our issues, GEA organized a campaign for a call to action.

On December 4th, GEA hosted approximately 100 delegates from the various member institutions. Collectively, our members asked the City of Edmonton to take meaningful action on addressing mental health and providing quality jobs.

The following briefing paper provides a synopsis of the detailed commitments presented to the City of Edmonton Council members. We will provide concise information regarding each commitment and the rationale for each.

Abstract

After identifying the issues impacting Edmonton, GEA members formed an Action Team. The Action team developed strategies focused on advancing improvements. Recognizing the substantial influence of the City of Edmonton on these issues, the Action Team proposed four clear-cut initiatives that, if adopted, would definitively advance improvements. The following initiatives were presented:

Addressing Mental Health

1. The City of Edmonton adopts the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (CAN/CSA-Z1003-13/BNQ 9700-803/2013: PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH AND SAFETY IN THE WORKPLACE).
2. The City of Edmonton establishes a fund that will subsidize mental health first aid training and provide financial support to community-based organizations conducting education, outreach and peer-to-peer support initiatives designed to reduce stigmas and reach people with mental illness concerns both in their workplace and in their community.

Providing Quality Jobs

3. The City of Edmonton adopts community benefits policies related to infrastructure projects.
4. The City of Edmonton adopts a social procurement policy based on the lessons of the current pilot project.

The rest of this briefing paper is dedicated to providing concise rationale for the above proposals.

Proposal #1:

The City of Edmonton adopts the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (CAN/CSA-Z1003-13/BNQ 9700-803/2013: PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH AND SAFETY IN THE WORKPLACE).

What is the problem?

According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada, “more than seven and a half million people in Canada will likely face one of the common mental illnesses [in 2017] – that is more than the population of our 13 capital cities combined. The economy pays an associated price tag of more than \$50 billion per year” (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2017, Foreword).

“Since two-thirds of adults in Canada are at work 60 per cent of their waking hours, the Standard can help create safe workplaces where mental health concerns are given the attention they deserve” (MHCC, 2017, p. 8). Self-evidently, taking meaningful action in the workplace can significantly improve the psychological health and safety for many Canadians.

What is “The Standard”?

The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (the Standard) is “a global first, this game-changing set of guidelines, tools and resources is redefining what it means to be a responsible employer” (MHCC, 2018, p.1).

The standard is a voluntary set of guidelines not an imposed regulation. The document outlines “a systematic approach to develop and sustain a psychologically healthy and safe workplace. It focuses on mental illness prevention and mental health promotion. The Standard is intended for everyone, whether or not they live with a mental illness” (MHCC, n.d., p. 1).

Why implement the Standard?

Most employers would like to protect the psychological health of their employees. Implementing the Standard is the best way to achieve this. Simply stated, this is the right thing to do.

There are many other benefits to organizations from implementing the standard. Evidence suggests the standard helps mitigate liability and reduce costs associated. An organization can customize actions to suit their specific needs. These actions range from implementing policies and procedures, providing employee assistance programs tailored to mental health, enhancing mental health knowledge, building resilience, supporting stay-at-work, to training managers about mental health (MHCC, 2017, 13-14).

What does the Standard do?

Adoption of the Standard involves the creation and application of a Psychological Health and Safety Management System (PHSMS) incorporating five key integrated elements: Commitment, Leadership and Participation; Planning; Implementation; Evaluation and Corrective Action; and Management Review (MHCC, 2017, p. 8).

The Standard provides a comprehensive framework to help organizations of all types guide their current and future efforts in a way that provide the best return on investment (MHCC, 2020b, National Standard, How does the standard work).

Proposal #2:

The City of Edmonton establishes a fund that will subsidize mental health first aid training and provide financial support to community-based organizations conducting education, outreach and peer-to-peer support initiatives designed to reduce stigmas and reach people with mental illness concerns.

What is the problem?

Catherine E. Gallagher and Margo C. Watt (2019) explained in the Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science that “knowledge and correct identification of mental health problems” are barriers to treatment (p. 177). Many Canadians “know that stigma and discrimination towards mental disorders exist, and they exhibit some reluctance about disclosing mental health problems especially in the workplace, for fear of stigma and discrimination” (Bourget and Chenier, 2007, p. 5). By initiating conversations one-on-one and then in peer situations, stigmas can be broken.

What is Mental Health First Aid?

The Mental Health Commission of Canada defines Mental Health First Aid as “the help provided to a person developing a mental health problem, experiencing a mental health crisis, or a worsening of their mental health” (MHCC, 2020a, Mental Health First Aid).

What does Mental Health First Aid training accomplish?

MHFA is an international program active in over 20 countries. Evidence suggests the course offers significant positive impacts for participants and those they know, namely:

- Increase their knowledge of signs, symptoms and risk factors of mental health problems
- Decrease the social distance between themselves and someone with a mental health problem
- Increase their confidence to help someone experiencing a mental health crisis
- Can identify professional and self-help resources for individuals with a mental health problem
- Show increased mental wellness themselves

Why subsidize Mental Health First Aid Training?

A joint analysis by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine determined that every \$1 investment in prevention and early intervention for mental illness and addiction programs yields \$2 to \$10 in savings in health costs, criminal and juvenile justice costs and low productivity (Steinberg Institute, 2017, The Potential).

How would the fund help increase the number of people with Mental Health First Aid?

When established, a dedicated fund would be accessed by community groups interested in increasing mental health awareness, understanding and support within their organizations. Through a program supported by the Greater Edmonton Alliance, each grant to a community organization would provide the resourcing for that organization to establish a group of members willing to canvas their full membership—reaching those not commonly reached by conventional means. Those expressing interest would be connected to peers and provided additional information on mental health challenges individual to their membership. From there, champions would be sponsored to complete Mental Health First Aid. For accountability purposes, tracking and reporting would detail impacts of increased mental health knowledge in the community.

Proposal #3:

The City of Edmonton adopts community benefits policies related to infrastructure projects.

What is the problem?

Infrastructure projects are long-term and generally very large investments in the community. Traditionally, when deliberating the needed outcomes from an infrastructure project municipalities consider financial and environmental costs, meeting the requirements of families, businesses and communities, and future growth considerations among many other considerations. Often, however, community building considerations such as expanding employment and skills training or building a local supply chain are overlooked particularly in reference to the future growth plan.

Economist Armine Yalnizyan (2017) reported “Canadian governments are committed to spending at least half a trillion dollars on public spending over the next decade, to repair and expand public infrastructure” (p. 4). Without community building considerations, a massive opportunity to maximize the benefits of these public infrastructure investments will be lost.

What are Community Benefits Policies?

Generally speaking, community benefits policies can be categorized into three types (Yalnizyan, 2017, p. 5)

- Jobs and/or training opportunities, including apprenticeships, for members of traditionally disadvantaged communities, for whom the experience can facilitate gaining and maintaining employment.
- Purchase of goods and services from local businesses or social enterprises to maximize the economic, social or environmental impact of public procurement.
- Supplementary benefits which are identified as priorities by the community to improve public space (e.g. request to develop a park on unused land, or reduce pollution). This can both build and improve the functionality of community assets, in response to or leveraged from the impact of an infrastructure project taking place.

GEA recommends, at a minimum, the following specifics in any Community Benefits Agreement

1. To pay the prevailing wage for each craft employed on a job;
2. To Utilize appropriately mentored apprentices to do 15% or more of the work on the job;
3. To make contributions to employee pension plans or other retirement savings programs; and
4. To target hiring from traditionally disadvantaged communities

What do Community Benefits Agreements accomplish?

There are three returns on investment for community benefits agreements: to help communities and their people thrive while reducing emissions, pollution, congestion, and noise; improve economic outcomes and boost the local economy through more training, jobs and vending opportunities particularly from the most marginalized groups within the community; and to build social capital through deliberate and coordinated community response, building skills, creating new networks between neighbourhoods, businesses, civil social agencies, and governments (Yalnizyan, 2017, p. 3).

Proposal #4:

The City of Edmonton adopts a social procurement policy based on the lessons of the current pilot project.

Update

The Social Procurement Policy was approved by City Council in December at the executive committee. The Greater Edmonton Alliance commends City Council for taking this bold action in improving their policies for the people of Edmonton.

Next Steps

During the Implementation process, GEA continues to advocate for the robust principles of a social procurement policy. Our members remain interested in ensuring strong policies that improve the effectiveness of the implementation of the policy.

References

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Additional Resources

To download the National Standard of Canada: Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace - visit <https://www.csagroup.org/article/canca-s-z1003-13-bnq-9700-803-2013-r2018/>