

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Six community organizations join up to create innovative collaborative supporting mental health during COVID-19**

**Toronto, July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020** – In order to better support the increasing mental health needs of Ontarians during COVID-19 and beyond, six community mental health organizations are pooling their resources to better serve their communities.

[Empowering Community Minds \(ECM\)](#) – a new community mental health partnership – brings together the Institute for Advancements in Mental Health (IAM), Community Family Services of Ontario (CFSO), Ontario Peer Development Initiative, Hope + Me – Mood Disorders Association of Ontario, Fred Victor and recently, the Ontario Brain Injury Association. ECM aims to empower and support communities impacted by mental health challenges across the province. Sparked in response to the pandemic but sustained by a shared passion for people, the collaborative aims to provide a continuum of services to improve the lives of individuals and families impacted by mental health challenges, and those who are facing new distress sparked by COVID-19.

The organizations within ECM saw COVID-19 adding new challenges to the vulnerability of already marginalized populations, who already face negative mental health impacts of social isolation, housing insecurity, digital exclusion and economic instability.

“We have seen a drastic increase in the volume and complexity of concerns our community is facing including stress within families, poverty brought about by the current social crisis, addictions, mental health challenges and more,” says Anna V. Wong, Executive Director of Community Family Services of Ontario.

Through the ECM initiative, the six member organizations are gearing to support increasing needs within the community.

“We needed to work together to amplify our community mental health response. In light of the pandemic, Empowering Community Minds (ECM) was created to pool resources across organizations and unite services to help more people,” says Mary Alberti, CEO, Institute for Advancements in Mental Health. “Through collaboration and sharing of resources, our partnership aims to fill gaps in access and services, creating healthier families and communities for all.”

The collaborative began expanding their services by offering support through online workshops in Mandarin and English for frontline workers in health, social services and mental health. Over this summer, ECM online webinars were delivered to nearly 400 people across Ontario so far, addressing key topics such as:

- Self-care and Mental Wellness for Frontline Health Care Staff
- Peer Support for People of Indigenous Heritage
- Peer Support 101 in Challenging Times
- Plan for Resilience: A Workshop for Front Line Workers
- Working with Hard to Reach Clients

ECM webinars were designed to provide skill development to build increased resilience for health care workers serving people in our communities impacted by mental health needs.



“COVID-19 has revealed new areas of need in mental health care, social services and worker self-care. By using each of our specialities to facilitate webinars on these topics, we can help close these widening gaps,” says Laura Pearson, Executive Director of the Ontario Peer Development Institute.

ECM's pooling of resources this summer to deliver support online is an example of how collaboration can lead to unique opportunities and innovative approaches to address age-old challenges. Empowering Community Minds continues to work closely together to examine and address the evolving challenges facing communities during the pandemic, and beyond.

“Harnessing the power of this collaboration will be a source of health resilience within our communities and improve outcomes,” says Ann Marie MacDonald, Executive Director of Hope + Me – Mood Disorders Association of Ontario. “Our collaborative will reflect the foundation of our shared values, our awareness of cultural contexts, and the complexity of concerns within our communities, which will lead to a new exciting pathway of care across Ontario.”

### **About the Collaborative**

Empowering Community Minds (ECM), comprised of the Institute for Advancements in Mental Health, Community Family Services of Ontario, Ontario Peer Development Initiative, Hope + Me – Mood Disorders Association of Ontario, Ontario Brain Injury Association and Fred Victor, brings together community-based organizations in Ontario to empower and support our communities. We aim to provide a continuum of services to improve the lives of individuals and families with varying mental and psychosocial abilities, within the diverse communities of GTA. Sparked by the pandemic but sustained by passion, we unite to serve our communities for their chronic and crisis needs. The collaborative works together to support mental health by offering a wider range of services to communities experiencing increased wellness challenges as a result of the pandemic.

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