



CMHA ALBERTA DIVISION

RURAL MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT

Over four million people live in Alberta, with 38% of those residing outside of the seven largest urban centres in the province. Alberta is home to 220,695 Indigenous people — over half of living outside of Calgary and Edmonton. With respect to mental health, the Government of Alberta's (2015) *Valuing Mental Health* report highlighted the need for attention in rural and remote areas due to the challenges — including barriers such as scarcity, cost, & effectiveness (e.g., no long-term follow up) of services. The Government of Alberta, Alberta Health Services, municipal governments and non-governmental organizations are challenged to think differently about how we each can play a role in working together to support improved mentally healthy communities.

The Canadian Mental Health Association, Alberta Division (CMHA AB) is hosting a Rural Mental Health Community Development Project. Alberta Health provided \$1.6 million dollars over three and a half years to develop an Alberta Rural Mental Health Network, and support 150 rural Alberta communities in developing community mental health roadmaps and action plans.

The Rural Mental Health project supports CMHA's vision of "mentally healthy people in a healthy society". The project aims to build the capacity of rural communities to consider their communities' wellness, mental health, and mental illness. By coming together, grassroots coalitions can support community wellbeing activities that reflect on the assets, values, and priorities of the community. A trained local Animator will facilitate these grassroots coalitions to identify broad areas of strength, concerns and opportunities, and support communities to identify and work to build local projects and capacity. Rural communities can connect with Rural Mental Health Network to share, support, and learn from one another while having access to additional resources and funding.

Understanding the Project

The design, implementation and evaluation of Rural Mental Health project is being done collaboratively with strategic partnerships, to ground approaches in rural and indigenous worldviews. Our guiding principles include being community-driven, building on existing strengths, using wholistic approaches, while considering the full lifespan of our communities. Our approach has two key elements:

❖ **Community Animators & Action Plans**

Anchoring the project is the training of local Animators and the development Action Plans, through a community engagement process. Local community Animators in participating rural and remote communities are provided training and support. Training enables Animators to convene local stakeholders, including community members and elders, agencies, educators, and community associations, to collectively scan the current mental health and addictions landscape. Together, Coalitions can set-direction, generate solutions, and implement a transformational roadmap dedicated to supporting a mentally health community. Roadmaps will include action plans that strengthen the pillars supporting a mentally healthy community. This will identify: existing services, community strengths and opportunities, promising practices, and a set of key strategic activities to consider over the next three years and beyond.

Community Animators are recruited through a local community-based organization. Connecting Animators to a local backbone organization will ensure the community continues to be engaged in



developing and growing its capacities. Animators will be connected to a Rural Mental Health Network to facilitate shared learning and experience.

❖ **Rural Mental Health Network**

A Rural Mental Health Network is connecting Animators and coalitions across Alberta. Together, communities can learn and share, while drawing on collective experience to identify existing capacity, systemic issues, and common themes in the rural mental health and community wellness landscape. Working together, communities can create new or better pathways to access existing corridors of care, facilitate shared learning, problem-solving, and emerging practice. The Network is an access point for additional training, resources, and funding. It is also a way of coordinating and creating efficient pathways to offer training, services, campaigns, and more.

For more information or to express your interest in participating, head to ruralmentalhealth.ca or Contact us at rmh@cmha.ab.ca