

Join the conversation

WHY IS STIGMA A PROBLEM?

- People living with mental illness often say the stigma is worse than the illness itself.
- Recently published Canadian data suggests that over a quarter of people who have been in treatment for mental illness over the past year report experiencing prejudice or discrimination.
- Stigma lowers chances of people seeking help and getting the treatment and care they need and deserve.

WHAT IS STIGMA?

1. **Self-stigma** is when you internalize social myths, stereotypes and prejudices about mental illness (i.e. “I am weak because of this illness”). Negative beliefs can hurt because they may stop someone from receiving treatment, and self-stigma also makes symptoms worse.
2. **Social/public stigma** exists at the group level when a community shuns people due to behaviours thought to be abnormal that stem from symptoms of mental illness and/or substance use concerns.
3. **Structural stigma** includes policies, laws, and practices of institutions and systems that restrict the rights of those with mental health issues. This includes discrimination by people in positions of authority such as health care providers, landlords, judges, and employers.

HOW CAN I FIGHT STIGMA?

Self-Stigma

- **Actively practice self-compassion.** Ask yourself how you would treat a friend who was in a similar position. Learn exercises and skills at www.self-compassion.org.
- **Apply Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)** to lessen self-stigmatizing thoughts. You may be eligible for free access to the evidence-based Bounce Back online CBT program via www.mindhealthbc.ca/bounceback
- **Connect to peer support** (local groups, 1-on-1 Peer Support Specialists, or online peer support) to relate to others who have and understand your mental health issues.

Social Stigma

- **Be a Stigmabuster!** Dispute stigmatizing comments when you hear them. Complain to TV networks, film studios, newspapers, and magazines if they show stigmatizing portrayals in mass media.
- **Language matters.** People are not their illnesses; refer to them as people first. Avoid stigmatizing phrases like “nuts” or “psycho,” and don’t use psychiatric diagnoses inappropriately or as hurtful words.
- **Hearing from people with lived experience** of mental illness and recovery is the best way to fight social stigma. If you’re ready and safe, share your story. Face-to-face talk breaks down walls and stereotypes.

Structural Stigma

- **Write** to your local politicians and ask them to make mental health funding a priority.
- **Ask** your workplace to endorse Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (www.psychologicallysafeworkplace.ca)
- **Volunteer** for Patient Voices Network or Vancouver Coastal Health’s Community Engagement & Advisory Network, to be involved in mental health care policy in BC.
- **Join** the boards of non-profit mental health organizations to govern and guide their programs.

To learn more, read ‘Opening Minds’: www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/initiatives/11874/opening-minds

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Improved Care for Mental Health and Substance Use in Vancouver

The Access and Assessment Centre (AAC)

In 2016, Vancouver General Hospital opened its Access and Assessment Centre. It is a 24/7 service meant to serve Vancouver residents age 17 and up with mental health and/or substance use difficulties who require immediate help but not hospitalization. It will work closely with the VGH Outpatient Team, which includes the Cross Cultural Program, SAFER (Suicide Attempt Follow Up Education and Research), and Community Link Program (a program that helps persons with serious mental health issues achieve their goals in leisure, education, work and other areas). Persons who require mental health services but no emergency services will have contact with a mental health professional right away and will then receive a follow up appointment within three days.

AAC Contact Information

Hours: 7 days/week; 24 hours/day; 365 days/year

Phone: (604)875-8289

Address: 711 West 12th Ave (Entrance is in the back parking lot, through the service lane off Heather Street)

Options for when you or your loved one has an immediate mental health or substance use crisis

- 1. Phone the AAC:** It is the central access point for all mental health and substance use concerns. The AAC staff will work with you to determine the next steps. This may include visiting the AAC or having an AAC clinician visit you and/or your loved one at home.
- 2. Visit the AAC:** It is a clinic that can support non-emergency concerns related to mental health and substance use.
- 3. Go to Emergency:** It is best to go to Emergency if your loved one is experiencing acute signs of the following:
 - a. Suicidal
 - b. Self-harming behaviours
 - c. Highly intoxicated
 - d. Psychosis
 - e. Possible medical problems/complications
 - f. Violent &/or aggressive behaviour
- 4. Call 911:** The police and the health authority have many partnership programs and will work closely to get you help. For example, a constable and nurse team may visit you at home to provide an assessment and intervention.

Options for when you are concerned about your loved one's mental health and/or substance use

- 1. Contact your loved one's GP**
- 2. Phone or visit the AAC.** You will speak with staff who will listen to your concerns, gather information about your loved one, and the AAC team will follow up as needed
- 3. Phone or visit a Vancouver Mental Health Team** that offers walk-in services, for example Raven Song: 2450 Ontario St.; Telephone: (604)709-6440
- 4. Visit MindHealth BC's website** for local resources and further information about mental health: <http://mindhealthbc.ca>

