

The Family Voice

What your Family Advisory Committee is doing for you **MAY - AUG 2022**
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The Family Experience during a Mental Health Crisis

A mental health crisis can look different depending on the person experiencing the crisis. They can be difficult to predict unlike other health crisis (e.g. heart attack), because the warning signs are not as visible. You may have heard that someone is in a mental health crisis when they are “at risk of harming themselves or others” but what does this experience feel like for families? We spoke to two family members who shared their experience supporting someone in crisis.

Mara’s Story

In my journey supporting a family member with a mental illness and substance use challenges, there has been no shortage of crisis experiences. From the first crisis I experienced with my family member at the onset of their illness, to subsequent calls to police, visits to

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emergency rooms, and episodes of psychosis over the years, it feels as though experiencing crisis is part and parcel to being a caregiver to a loved one who lives with these particular challenges. What has given me hope and supported my ability to cope in times of crisis, was having a support system of my own. From support with finding a community that understands my struggle, to accessing resources available to me and my loved one, having assistance in navigating the mental health system was key.

At CAMH we define “family” as any person or group of people that someone identifies as belonging to their family or significant circle of support. Our definition of family is as broad as the range of people—relatives, partners, friends, co-workers and others—who come forward in times of need.

Another important part of my support system, especially in times of crisis, is having a Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) for both myself and my loved one. A WRAP is a practical and empowering tool for mental wellness and recovery that I encourage you to read more about in the Self-Care Corner of this newsletter.

CAMH's Family Resource Centre (FRC) is a great resource for caregivers who are in need of support with any of the above topics. They offer navigational support, educational resources related to mental health and addictions, and information on community supports for you and your loved one.

— Mara Jayenthiran, sibling, CAMH-FAC member

What does a crisis feel like for a family?

"My phone rang. It was the security guard at my loved one's apartment, telling me my loved one had just rung the fire alarm, then raced outside in the snow with no coat or shoes on. I ran out, calling my husband to meet me there.

When we arrived my loved one was back in the apartment. They were psychotic and incoherent, saying there was a woman talking to them from inside their computer. We got them into the elevator, where they pushed the button for every floor, then bolted out of the door. We ran after them, and managed to get them back in the elevator. Outside, my loved one tried to get into a stranger's car. Finally we got them into our car and headed for CAMH.

But partway there, at a stop sign, a woman ran into the back of my car, and my loved one bolted again, running several blocks then across Avenue Road in the traffic. My husband ran after them and I followed in the car, again we finally caught up with them and got them back in the car.

Finally, we got to the CAMH Emergency Department where the psychiatrist assessed them then consulted with us. She admitted them and upon hearing the story said "you are really great parents", which truly made us feel validated.

Most of our experiences at CAMH have been very positive and in our first crisis, the family

consultations were amazing. The care given to us was sensitive and tender – like big arms going around our family at its worst moment.

To me, the consultation and care we received is what family engagement is really all about.

—Anonymous, Family Member at CAMH

Message from the Co-Chairs

The Family Advisory Committee is thrilled to welcome four new committee members: Shabnam Sukhdev, Susan Joyce, Miriam Wohl and Susanna Kelley! The FAC works to carry out the mission of engaging with families, patients, community members and care providers in order to improve patient care and enhance the experience of both patients and their families. We are excited to have new members who will help us continue this work, inspire us, and bring new perspectives to the FAC's goals.

Patient and family engagement is at the core of our work and is a key focus of the One CAMH strategic plan (2020-2023). Meaningful engagement cannot be achieved without the inclusion of all voices at the table. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are central to this work. When we started our FAC recruitment process, we acknowledged that voices were missing from the table and directed our efforts at filling those gaps. We reached out to specific programs and diverse groups at CAMH and in the community, as well as collaborating with the CAMH Health Equity Office on our recruitment materials.

Shabnam, a filmmaker and mother of a young adult with mental illness shared why she is excited to join the FAC: "Being part of the FAC makes me feel I'm not alone in my struggles. The FAC has opened up avenues to myriad possibilities to support our loved ones. I am inspired to share my unique perspectives on coping with familial struggles, which may resonate with others as well."

Not only will our new members enhance our team, they will provide perspectives gained from a variety of different life and professional experiences. Although we have made progress in including more diverse voices on the FAC the work is not done. The FAC is commitment to

continuing its recruitment efforts and developing a committee that is reflective of the population CAMH serves.

—Susan Conway, mother, CAMH FAC co-chair & Ashley Bowe, sibling, CAMH FAC co-chair



Top Row: John Im, Mara Jayenthiran, Mary Beth Odell, Miriam Wohl, & Nicole Waldron
Middle Row: Pauline Lefebvre-Hinton, Vivien Cappe, Susan Joyce, Shabnam Sukhdev, & Susanna Kelley
Bottom Row: Susan Conway, Thanisa Sundaralingam, Miriam McCann, & Ashley Bowe

Ask the Expert: Navigating a Mental Health Crisis



If you believe your family member is in crisis, what are five things you should know as a caregiver?

When supporting a loved one through a mental health crisis it's helpful to be **present, calm and non-judgemental**. During a crisis each person may require different types of support. Ask your family member how you can help and **provide a listening ear**. You may **offer practical support** (such as going to appointments or help with childcare) or support them by **encouraging self-care** and engaging in enjoyable activities until they can see a mental health professional. Overall, the best way to prevent and respond to a mental health crisis

is **by preparing ahead**. Ask your family member about warning signs,

FAC VISION

Family will be integral members of the recovery process and will be embraced by and actively engaged at all levels of the organization.

FAC MISSION

The Family Advisory Committee (FAC) is a partnership between CAMH staff and family members affected by a family member's mental illness and/or addiction. The CAMH FAC will engage with families, patients, community members and care providers to improve client care and enhance the experience of both patients and their families at CAMH.

FAC GOALS (2020-2023)



Build our Capacity as Advisors



Improve Information Sharing with families at CAMH



Partner with our allies in patient and family engagement



Collaborate to increase in-person and virtual supports for families



Partner with CAMH to bring the family voice to opportunities that impact the organization

Interested in becoming a CAMH Family Advisor? Email family.engagement@camh.ca to learn more.

coping strategies and what others can do to help. By planning ahead, families can discuss their mental health openly and build trust with one another. This can help families respond effectively during a crisis.

What should caregivers avoid during a family member's mental health crisis?

When a family member is going through a mental health crisis we may feel a need to protect them from the stress this may cause. Sometimes in order to help, family members may feel inclined to share their own experience or what has helped them in the past. Even though giving advice or problem solving can be helpful in some situations, it can be incredibly invalidating in others. As carers, it's important to avoid making assumptions or moving too quickly to problem solving. Instead, listen without judgement, validate their experience and be present when our loved one asks for help.

What are some tips on how to talk to someone who you think is having suicidal thoughts?

If you are noticing warning signs that a family member is thinking about suicide it's important to have an open and clear conversation about suicide. Some warning signs you may notice are:

- being unable to do daily tasks
- withdrawing from friends and family
- making suicidal statements

Bringing up the issue of suicidal ideation may be an opportunity for your family member to discuss their thoughts and feelings to feel better understood.

During this conversation it's important to remain calm and non-judgemental.

You may begin with asking about general questions that address the feelings about life and move on to more specific questions about suicidal ideation, such as:

"Do you have any thoughts of ending your life?"

If suicidal ideation is mentioned you may ask questions to determine the nature of these thoughts:

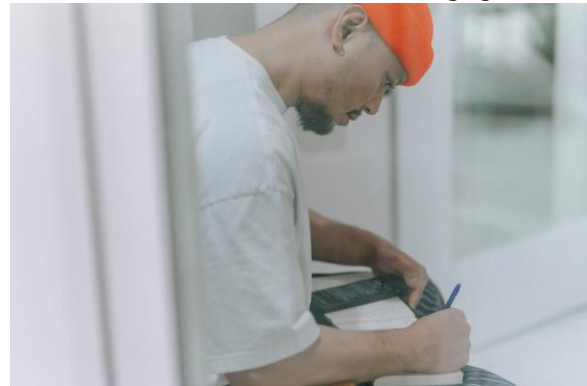
"Tell me what you have thought about. Do you have a plan?"

If a family member is experiencing psychosis you may ask specifically about the voices:

"Do the voices ever tell you to harm yourself? Is it difficult to ignore them?"

Families can establish a level of risk based on this conversation, the person's history and current presentation and seek help as needed.

—Pelin Gulver, CAMH Social Worker,
Bridging Services



Self-Care Corner: Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP)

Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) is a recovery and crisis prevention plan that people with mental health challenges create for themselves. A personal WRAP is individualized, and with it you can:

- Discover simple, safe, and effective tools to create and maintain wellness;
- Develop a daily plan to stay on track with your life and wellness goals;
- Identify what throws you off track and develop a plan to keep moving forward; and
- Gain support and stay in control even in a crisis

WRAP is a tool for people to learn how to take charge of their health and wellness, and ways to cope with their illness on a daily basis. It can also include a crisis plan to help guide others on how best to make decisions for and to take care of them in times of crisis. WRAP is also a

practical and helpful tool for caregivers supporting a loved one with mental illness.

As caregivers, we want what's best for our loved ones and sometimes that means we ignore our own needs. Having a WRAP can also help caregivers by providing a framework to ensure that, if you're going to keep helping, you're taking care of yourself so you can keep showing up for your loved one. It can help you identify when you're putting your wellness in danger, and remind you to do what you need to do to stay well.

If you are sharing caregiving responsibilities with other people, you may find a Family WRAP a good option. Family WRAP helps each member contribute to plans that the family will use to improve day-to-day interactions, meet daily challenges, and promote mutual cooperation.

Having a WRAP for both myself and my loved one has been a powerful, practical and empowering tool in my journey as a caregiver. For more information and to develop a WRAP of your own, visit:

<https://www.wellnessrecoveryactionplan.com/>

— Mara Jayenthiran, sibling, CAMH-FAC member

Starting your day with gratitude

Before you roll out of bed take time to think about what you want your day to look like. Take a moment to stretch and give yourself a hug.

Take an extra minute in the shower. Let the warm water soothe your muscles and think about something you are grateful for.

Play music as you get ready for the day. Music can bring a sense of peace and fun!

Make time for nourishment. Sip a cup of warm tea and have something to eat, even if it's something light.

Starting your day with one or more of these actions can help to put you in a positive mindset!

—Vivien Cappe, mother, CAMH-FAC member



Spotlight Program: Toronto Community Crisis Support Services (CCSS)

The City of Toronto is recognizing that non-police community safety responses are needed, and that police are not mental health workers. While police are necessary for crime response, a mental health crisis is not a crime. On February 2, 2022, Toronto City Council unanimously voted to confirm the launch of Toronto's four Community Crisis Support Service (CCSS) pilots and to begin developing a plan for the expansion of these pilots to cover the entire city. This vote signifies a historic milestone in the push to take policing out of mental health care in Toronto.

The four pilots - launching in two phases in spring 2022 - will be geographically-based, operating in areas of Toronto where apprehensions under the *Mental Health Act* and 911 calls for people in crisis are the highest. The service delivery partners include organizations that are Indigenous, Black, and 2SLGBTQ+ led and organizations guided by the voices of people with lived experiences. Accessible through a call-triaging process with 911 and 211, the pilots will:

- Feature mobile multidisciplinary teams of trained crisis support specialists (e.g.

- community health nurses, crisis counsellors, harm reduction workers, peer workers)
- Operate 24/7
- Provide case management support including follow up support, primary health care, referrals, holistic support, trauma counselling, housing support and other individualized supports

[Learn more](#) about the CCSS pilot, or view the full CCSS [launch report](#).

— Mara Jayenthiran, sibling, CAMH-FAC member



Reach out Response Network (RORN) is a Toronto non-profit organization that has worked with the community towards the creation of civilian-led mobile crisis response teams in Toronto. The Toronto [city council vote to approve](#) the crisis response pilots was a collective victory for the community!

RORN is made up of community stakeholders advocating for changes to mental health crisis services. They conduct town halls, seek community feedback, and lead research on international and local crisis models. [Learn more](#) about what RORN is currently working on.

RORN Contact Information:
hello@reachouttoronto.ca

WHERE ARE YOUR FAC MEMBERS?

Internal CAMH Committees, Working Groups, and Projects:

- Digital Health Steering Committee
- BrainHealth Databank
- Complex Care and Recovery (CCR) Quality Council
- Acute Care Quality Council
- Child, Youth, and Emerging Adult Program (CYEAP) Quality Council
- Clinical Quality Committee of the Board (CQC)
- Constituency Council
- Horizontal Violence, Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression Working Group
- Hope by CAMH App
- Family Engagement in the Emergency Department
- Family-Facing Frequently Asked Questions for camh.ca

Sub-Committees of the FAC:

- Café Connection
- Social Media and Communications
- The Family Voice

External Committees:

- The Ontario Family Caregivers' Advisory Network (OFCAN)





The Family Resource Centre Highlights: Crisis Supports

GERSTEIN CRISIS CENTRE

The Gerstein Crisis Centre is a free, confidential, and 24/7 community-based crisis service for adults 16+ in the City of Toronto. They offer a telephone crisis line, mobile crisis team, community-based crisis beds, short term follow-up support, and referrals to health and social services. The Gerstein Centre also offers Wellness Recovery Action Planning (WRAP) groups, and the Finding Recovery through Exercise Skills and Hope (FRESH) project.

Crisis Line: (416) 929-5200

Website: <https://gersteincentre.org/>

Mailing List: <https://gersteincentre.org/stay-connected/>

DISTRESS CENTRES OF GREATER TORONTO

The Distress Centres of Greater Toronto provides 24/7 support to individuals in the community who are at risk and their most vulnerable. Their crisis and emotional distress services are available by hotline and text. They also offer programs including Suicide Loss Survivor Support Program, Tele-check Seniors Program, Touching Base Program and a 4-week Grief Skills Group. For a full list of their programs, click [here](#).

Crisis Line: (416) 408-4357 or text 45645 **ACCESS CAMH** provides centralized information, intake and scheduling for most CAMH services. Access CAMH Family Line is **416**

535-8501, press 2, listen to the choices to the end, and you'll be connected.

For community resources on a wide range of topics, see: www.camh.ca/en/health-info/guides-and-publications/community-resource-sheets

RECONNECT FAME FAMILY & CAREGIVER SUPPORT SERVICES offers families ongoing monthly support groups and one-on-one support across the GTA. The groups are drop-in format and are facilitated by family support worker. FAMEkids and FAMEyouth programming available.

416 248-2050

www.reconnect.on.ca/

FAMILY OUTREACH AND RESPONSE PROGRAM, CMHA offers educational information, programs, support services and referrals for friends and family of people recovering from serious mental illness.6 toronto.cmha.ca/programsservices/family-support

THE ONTARIO CAREGIVER

ORGANIZATION is an independent non-profit dedicated to caregivers. **1 833 416-2273** for 24/7 helpline

Online chat 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Mon. to Fri. www.ontariocaregiver.ca

Family Resource e-Bulletin

Want to receive new issues of *The Family Voice* and more family-focused resources to your inbox? Subscribe to the Family Resource e-Bulletin [here](#) or email family.engagement@camh.ca

Family Matters: we want to hear from you!

Family members — including relatives, partners, friends and co-workers — play an essential role in supporting the care and recovery of people living with mental illness and/or addiction.

Do you have an experience or story to share?

Do you have feedback about your experience at CAMH?

Your voice matters and we want to hear from you!

How to share feedback with CAMH's Family Advisory Committee (FAC):

- Phone: 416 535-8501 ext. 33202
- Email: family.engagement@camh.ca
- In person when COVID-19 restrictions lift: Family Resource Centre, now in the RBC Patient and Family Learning Space, McCain Complex Care and Recovery building. Hours will be 9:00 a.m. to 4:45 p.m., Monday to Friday.

Would you like to receive new issues of *The Family Voice Newsletter* to your email inbox? Scan the QR Code below using your smart phone camera or click the [link](#) to subscribe to the Family Resource e-Bulletin.



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