

New three-digit suicide prevention hotline coming to Canada

Written By ALYSSA PARKHILL

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

Local MP Kyle Seeback joined in the fight to allow easier access to suicide prevention programs for Canadians who are struggling with their mental health.

The Dufferin-Caledon MP announced at the beginning of this month, his support and advocacy to delegate 9-8-8 as Canada's official National Suicide Prevention Hotline.

Seeback offered his support, along with Cariboo-Prince George MP Todd Doherty, who is the Special Advisor to the Leader of the Opposition on Mental Health and Wellness.

Doherty brought forward a motion this past Friday to the House of Commons to enforce the three-digit number as the official suicide hotline for Canadians.

Now, more than ever, the mental health of Canadians is being tested. Increased isolation and heightened anxiety have led to higher rates of alcohol and substance abuse. Reports [state] domestic violence have gone up and we are seeing elevated levels of suicidal ideation and crises. First Nations communities across Canada continue to battle a growing suicide crisis, said MP Doherty in a statement.

The current number for operated by Crisis Services Canada, includes a 10-digit number of (833) 456-4566. A little hard to remember.

MP Seeback said he was thrilled by the unanimous passing of the bill brought forward by fellow Conservative MP, as he understands the struggle people go through on a daily basis.

I myself have had serious bouts with depression over the years. I thought this was something to definitely try to get behind, he explained. I've been very fortunate in my life. I've had good friends, family and the ability to speak to people when I needed to.

In the difficult times of living in a global pandemic, the need for easily accessible resources for mental health are vital.

Cold weather, uncertainty, eroded social networks and restrictions on holiday gatherings are hitting at a time when people are already anxious, hopeless and fearful that things are going to get worse, says Margaret Eaton, CMHA's National CEO, in a recent statement. I am afraid that many people are in such despair that they can't see past it.

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, 10 per cent of Canadians have experienced thoughts and/or feelings of suicide, an increase from the six per cent the past spring. The numbers are higher for specific groups of population, including 28 per cent for members of the LGBTQ+ community, 27 per cent of individuals who have existing mental health issues, 24 per cent of those with a disability and 20 per cent are those in the Indigenous community.

21 per cent are within the ages of 21 to 34, and 19 per cent 18 to 24.

17 per cent of Canadians have increased the amount of substances they take in order to cope with these issues.

I was absolutely thrilled when the motion passed on Friday unanimously. We'd been pushing the government to go forward with it, said Seeback.

Members of the public expressed their support through petitions and online advocacy to help support the motion.

The implementation of the 9-8-8 National Suicide Hotline is said to be soon discussed with the Minister of Health in order to direct appropriate timing for the number.

?I think having a national hotline like this will save lives,? said Seeback.