

United Way announces strategic investments in mental health supports

United Way of Peel Region recently announced an investment of more than \$1.3 million supporting critical mental health services to meet the growing need in Caledon, Brampton and Mississauga.

Mental illness is the second leading cause of disability and premature death among Canadians, according to United Way. One in five will experience diagnosable mental health problems or illnesses in their lifetime, and 70 per cent of them will occur during childhood or adolescence.

In Peel, this figure represents more than 250,000 people. Stigma and lack of awareness of mental health supports are key challenges facing Peel's population. There is a six-month waitlist for mental health supports, 12 per cent of Peel students surveyed had seriously considered suicide and six per cent had tried it at least once in the past 12 months.

Police units are responding to an increasing number of mental health calls, representing a 96 per cent increase since 2009.

"We see the impact of mental health and addictions in our hospital emergency departments, our work places and our schools," observed United Way of Peel Region President and CEO Shelley White. "We need to significantly increase access to community based mental health services in Brampton, Caledon and Mississauga to meet the needs of our growing, diverse communities." "Police are called upon to assist individuals suffering from mental illness at an alarming rate that seems to increase yearly," commented Peel Regional Police Chief Jennifer Evans. "It puts officers and citizens at risk due to the limited amount of mental health resources available in the community."

"As our community continues to grow, so does the need for quality mental health and addictions services," said Dr. David Kocerginski, chief of psychiatry at William Osler Health System. "Each year, we see and treat more than 85,000 people through our inpatient and outpatient mental health and addictions services, and care for over 7,500 patients with mental health issues in Osler Emergency Departments. With the support of partners like the United Way, we can continue to offer even greater access to the mental health and addictions care that our community needs, closer to home."

United Way is focused on poverty reduction. Collectively, they work to reduce poverty, prevent poverty and support people living in crisis right now. Through research and best practice, they know that mental health and addictions play a critical role in feeding into the cycle of poverty.

Across the region, there is significant need for increased supports, education, outreach and advocacy. The \$1.3 million announced recently will go to drive education, awareness, counseling, family supports and outreach strategies.

One of the best opportunities to break the cycle of poverty is to prevent and address mental health issues before it is too late.