

Government of Alberta Social Policy Framework Public Consultation

Focus Group Summary Notes: Canadian Mental Health Association

Facilitated by the Edmonton Social Planning Council

With support from the United Way of Alberta Capital Region, the City of Edmonton, and FCSS

August 31st, 2012

VISION

Question 1: What words would you include in your vision for social policy?

Probe Questions:

- a) What do the words in the proposed vision mean to you?

Responses:

What words would you include in your vision of social policy?

- Respect for everyone.
- Equal access to programs and services.
- No stigma attached to a diagnosis.
- Participation by all Albertans in building our community.

What do the words in the proposed vision mean to you?

- I disagree with some of the vision statement.
 - All Albertans? I work at Bissell Centre. I've been there for a year and a half. Not all Albertans are included. Sounds great, but not true. "We" don't necessarily have a choice when it comes to changes in the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA). People are marginalized all the time. Whether it's homelessness, addictions, and mental health. There are so many people who fall through the cracks.
 - It's difficult to take someone from the inner city with mental health issues and line them up with adequate support.
 - It doesn't work. I came from a smaller town, and to get help with mental issues – difficult to find help.
 - First struck me as utopian, nice ideal. But what happens now, does it reflect what I go through? No. Not all Albertans can participate due to their economic situation. It's a nice goal, but it's just not working.
 - To be able to engage in economic and social life, it's not there. I'm left out because all I have is CMHA, my family (who are not always there for me), and my psychiatrist. With CMHA [programs] closing, I lose my support worker. This vision does not apply to me.
 - I only think that some Albertans get the opportunity. Both mental health and addicts, once you're labeled, the stigma gets attached, which is a hard fought battle to try to overcome.
 - CMHA are the stepping-stone back to the community. But once programs are taken away you feel like it is like having the rug being pulled underneath you. Government has not been able to explain why CMHA's program closures are happening. The politicians' responses have been patronizing.

- The words themselves are meant to show inclusiveness in a broad spectrum. For me, it's somewhat arrogant. Finest place to live? Compared to where? I can't compare this to anywhere else. Raising a family might not be possible for someone who is dealing with mental health.
- It's good language. It can be a good vision, nice words, but it's just not there. It's not our reality.
- I can't see all Albertans having opportunities, especially if they're burdened.
- Does government believe that people with mental illnesses should be treated so they can be truly engaged in society? Do they want us to full citizens?
- The strength of a society is judged on how well it treats its most vulnerable citizens. How well does the government of Alberta live up to this statement?

OUTCOMES

Question 2: What results are needed in order to achieve your vision for Alberta's social policy?

Probe Questions:

- a) Where are positive social outcomes for Albertans already being achieved?
- b) Where could significant improvements be made?

For Alberta to become the best place to live, work and raise a family, what would it look like?

- Everyone who need mental health support would get it. "There are too few psychiatrists trying to serve many patients. I only get 5 minutes a week with mine to provide an update while others have better access."
- There needs to be more support. "I was able to turn to CMHA, and they found me a psychologist (which I have to pay out of pocket for), but I am an exception to the rule because I can afford it."
- There would be enough transitional housing for those who are coming out of treatment. These are not simple issues, anyone with mental illness have complicated lives and require proper ongoing interventions. It's frustrating to have mental illness and helping people with mental illness. Addiction support, detox treatment, and a place to go and live are all important.
- There would be fewer cutbacks to CMHA programs recognizing that these programs are very effective at helping people deal with their mental health issues while also integrating individuals back into society.
- There would be more compassion for individuals dealing with mental health issues. Give an opportunity to help those who can fall along the wayside. Give some hope and opportunity to succeed.
- Decisions regarding program changes and cut-backs would be shared and discussed with those who are involved in them instead of after the fact when the decisions have already been made.

- Programs would be client centered based on the individuals specific needs; no cookie cutter approach.
- Vulnerable Albertans would be treated as a whole person, not piecemeal. An individual might suffer a host of issues, but they are interrelated, and shouldn't be treated as segments.
- Programs would be affordable, not cost prohibitive.
- Governments would exercise greater accountability all of the time. Keeping politicians accountable during elections is not enough. There needs to be a mechanism for keeping governments accountable *in-between* elections.

MOVING FORWARD: STRATEGIES

Question 3: What actions could help achieve the desired outcomes for Albertans?

Probe Questions:

- a) What is being done well already? What makes these actions successful?

What is currently working?

- The increase to AISH has been extremely helpful as I also work. The increase has meant that I can live a better life.
- Having organizations such as CMHA have been extremely effective.

What could be improved?

- Expand the Peer Support programs and provide some funding to the participants who are offering the peer support.
- More structured day programs as these provide opportunities for individuals to get out, integrate and connect with others.
- Teach more practical skills within the programs (life skills)
- Increased funding for more Coordinators and Independent Living Skill workers.
- Some of the rules behind AISH are barriers to people moving ahead. Prescription coverage for new effective drugs is not covered under AISH so therefore I have to pay out of pocket. "I can't afford these drugs."

FACILITATOR'S FEEDBACK

If you wish, please provide your personal feedback on facilitating this conversation or advice you may have to the project team regarding the discussion resources or process.

- Our team rephrased some of the questions to facilitate a more meaningful discussion around the needs of the population we engaged with. The questions we used were as follows:

What do the words in the vision mean to you?

For Alberta to become the best place to live, work and raise a family ...

What would it look like?

Why is that important to you?

What has to happen in order to achieve what you describe?

What's currently working and what could be improved?