



## How is 211 different from 811 and 911?

**211** – Information referral service for non-emergency human services – including more than 4,000 community, social and government services

**811** – Health link Health advice 24/7

**911** – Emergency number for medical, fire and police assistance

## What is Mental Health?

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/about-mental-health.html>

Mental health is the state of your psychological and emotional well-being. It is a necessary resource for living a healthy life and a main factor in overall health. It does not mean the same thing as mental illness. However, poor mental health can lead to mental and physical illness.

Good mental health allows you to feel, think and act in ways that help you enjoy life and cope with its challenges. This can be positively or negatively influenced by:

- life experiences, such as:
  - family situation
  - the death of a loved one
  - financial and employment status
- relationships with others, such as your:
  - friends
  - family members
  - co-workers
  - schoolmates
  - work or school environment
- physical health, such as problems caused by:
  - long-term illness
  - problematic substance use
  - the type of community you live in
- is it a supportive and trusting community or one where everyone keeps to themselves?



### **How can you take care of your mental health?**

Take care of your mental health in the same way you would take care of your physical health. It takes practise, patience and support.

You can maintain or improve your mental health by following the advice below.

- Know and accept that life can be challenging.

- Know and accept your strengths and weaknesses.
- Set realistic goals for yourself.
- Accept yourself and others. This is the basis of self-esteem.
- Learn to recognize and understand that you and others have both positive and negative feelings.
- Create a sense of meaning in your life by learning and trying new activities, like starting a hobby.
- Create healthy, trusting relationships with people who accept and support you.

Building a supportive community is an important way to improve mental health. Making meaningful connections with your family, friends, peers, colleagues and other members of your community can help you feel:

- like you belong
- safe and secure
- free to express your thoughts and feelings on issues that are important to you

You can help create a healthy and safe environment where you live, learn, work and play by:

- knowing and accepting that everyone has difficulties in their lives
- taking part in local events and getting to know your neighbours
- finding ways to get involved and giving back to your community
  - supporting and including people of different ages and backgrounds in your community

### **How does being mentally healthy benefit you?**

Being mentally healthy can:

- increase coping skills
- how we handle difficult experiences and stresses
- improve self-esteem
- feeling confident in your worth and abilities
- improve resiliency
- your ability to successfully move on after a negative event and regain control of your life

Increasing coping skills, self-esteem and resiliency encourages people to:

- create healthy relationships
- positively interact with their community
- talk openly about their mental health, including their needs and wants

Feeling confident and competent in these areas can improve emotional strength. In turn, this can help improve and maintain your level of mental health.



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## Mental Warm Fuzzies to Love Yourself

February is a special month where we can choose to love ourselves, others and our community. Together we can develop community mental health roadmaps and action plans to raise support for individuals and unique populations that make up each small community



throughout Alberta. Our actions can all contribute to becoming a part of the positive ripple within The Canadian Mental Health Association's vision of "Mentally Healthy People in a Healthy Society".

Within Alberta we are blessed to have an amazing program called, Rural Mental Health Project. This program is a network of Community Animators like myself that work collaboratively, coming together to support community wellness and wellbeing activities.

Our network of 150 Rural Alberta Communities all share, support, learn, lift, and strengthen each other by improving quality and implementation of our unique toolboxes. Collaboratively we strive for new mental wellness pivots contributing towards a positive transitional ripple of change. Community Animators in partnership with established community organisations ensure engagement in developing community mental health reflections that match the individual population needs within the community wellness landscape.

We all know people who have fallen through the cracks and swirled the drain of depression without the true support they needed. Today in February let's implement uplifting methods of self love. Far too often we place our own needs on the back burner, later reflecting on the value lost and true cost of putting yourself last. Hindsight is 20/20, so let's take action now to step away from all those stress filled days and put yourself first for a change. No matter if you feel busy in society's rat race, weighed down with responsibilities from the many hats you wear, (Spouse, Parent, Son, Daughter, Brother, Sister, Caregiver) or the roller-coaster ride of your health journey, today you can change focus and make yourself a priority. Managing your own self-care and anxiety during our pandemic experiences and as restrictions begin to loosen is extremely important for maintaining personal wellness and good mental health.

As a Health care provider myself, I often experienced heightened emotions, psychological pressure, helplessness, loneliness, stress, physical and mental fatigue, overwhelm, burnout and more all which didn't help my own disabilities, challenges or medical conditions. Hindsight and self-reflection helped me to see clearly how different stressors were affecting me. I became more aware of how my mind, body and behaviours were fluctuating. Please allow my unfortunate clarity of mental health weaknesses and the importance of boundary values which often came down to lack of self-care. We are all caregivers today as wives, mothers, daughters and community volunteers, please see the truth in your reflection and choose self-care starting today. Make attainable positive pivots your new priority.

Here are a few of the mental health warm fuzzy action steps I assisted myself with, choose one to start as you implement a new positive in your journey.

- **Slow Down:** Make yourself a priority! Give yourself proper rest, nutrition, exercise and quiet times of peace to rest. Create moments of relaxation every day.
- **Practice Gratitude:** Take time to embrace the blessings of each new day.
- **Social Interactions:** Are so extremely valuable to our brain and mental health improvements. Reach out to seek connection and support from true friends. Value time spent with loved ones.
- **Choose Positive Pivots:** Trade in old habits for a positive improvement option, consider the pandemic as an opportunity to re-discover who you are and what values you truly value. Let go of what you can't change.
- **Choose Hope:** Choose to reset in a new direction for a better life starting today. One attainable step at a time.
- **Embrace Nature:** I have always enjoyed being outside embracing the powers of vitamin "N" for Nature, it was always my strongest uplifting reset tool. Nature provides emotional release benefits from flooding endorphins and neurotransmitters with feel good chemistry. Spending just 20 mins a day in nature significantly improves stress levels.
- **Pick One Thing:** A small attainable step to move you forwards towards your goals.
- **Listen to Music:** Use the amazing power of music to lift your mood, whether you are alone or with friends.



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- **Surround Yourself with Joy:** Embrace warm fuzzy messages everywhere you look, movies, great books, your grandkids laughter, church, amazing friendships and associations like ours here at VAD.
- **Mind-Body Connection:** Remember the mind and body are interconnected. A healthy body is an amazing support system for our busy minds. I love the way Dr. Daniel Amen puts it in his quote from his book *Feel Better Fast and Make it Last*, “When I am tempted by French fries, sugary treats or soda, I will resist and say to myself, I only love foods that love me back”. Embrace nutrition with brain and mental health benefits. Begin to learn the power of your grocery cart and the Food-Mood connection. Our food choices may help create the right chemistry in our bodies for internal healing.
- **Drink your Water:** Increasing water intake has been shown to increase blood flow and oxygen throughout the brain, decreasing headaches, reduces stress effects, while supporting the flow of nutrients throughout the whole body. Drinking more water helped me to improve my concentration and cognition, balance my mood and emotions and aid my sleeping memory. Grab a glass and give it a try this month.

February being the month of love, especially self love, is a great time to enjoy the uplifting powers of good quality chocolate. Turns out that Chocolate in its natural form isn't bad for you. In fact there are many health benefits, for instance, chocolate has been shown to increase blood flow to the brain, contains properties to support positive moods, lifting the ability to think clearly and aid the cardiovascular system. Dark chocolate is always a better choice for you as it contains:

- Vitamins B1, B2, B3, B6, E, K,
- A variety of antioxidants
- Rich in essential minerals, Magnesium, Iron, Zinc, Potassium, Phosphorus

Treat yourself this Valentine's Day and lift your mood and the mood of the ones you love.

This month I would love to pass on some great options and tools for you to place in your mental health toolbox as well as provide a link for you to tap into the benefits of the Rural Mental Health Project in your town. Take on the challenge to reach out and meet your communities Rural Mental Health Project Community Animators and join in the positive transition of your community. Let's all work towards the vision of “Mentally Healthy People in a Healthy Society”. Join the movement of positive



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change today. Here is a link to our provincial map to locate your Community Animators map: <https://ruralmentalhealth.ca/>

Some great options for you to check out new resources for you and your family:

- <https://ruralmentalhealth.ca/>
- <https://info.mindbeacon.com/recovery>
- Alberta Health Services - <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/amh/page16759.aspx>
- 211 - <https://ab.211.ca/>

Have a great month and choose a new pivot for yourself starting today. In Great Health, *Your Voice of Albertans with Disabilities* President,  
**Katrina Breau**

## Rural Mental Health Project

<https://ruralmentalhealth.ca/>



Over four million people live in Alberta, with 38% of those residing outside of the seven largest urban centres in the province (Edmonton, Calgary, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge,

and Red Deer). Over half of the Indigenous peoples (220,695 people) in Alberta live outside of Calgary and Edmonton. The Government of Alberta's Valuing Mental Health report (2015, p.15) highlighted the need for specialized attention to mental health in rural and remote areas due to barriers such as scarcity of resources, cost of services and effectiveness (e.g., no long-term follow up) of services.

All Albertans have mental health, and we all struggle with our mental health at times; this necessitates thoughtful, community-based approaches to identify community priorities, strengths, and opportunities on a local level. Promoting mentally healthy communities is a complex problem. Solutions to complex problems need to align with the types of issues, which requires appropriate framing, principles, and approach. Responses to complex problems also need to be emergent and adaptable, re-



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sponding to the situation based on what we learn and by having more people and perspectives involved. There is no single solution or silver bullet that will address the complexity of mental health in rural communities across Alberta. Although mental health services are important and necessary, we need to explore other ways of creating community-wide support. For example, it is unlikely that there will ever be enough resources or experts to have a psychologist for every Albertan. We also know that visiting a psychologist is not always the appropriate solution for every challenge we face throughout our lives.

The complexity of nurturing mentally healthy communities requires us to think broadly about mental health and focus on the areas that we live, work, play and pray. This includes access to treatment services but also goes further. There are multiple “upstream” factors that influence and impact community wellbeing. For example, history, access to resources, social cohesion and economic position of the community are all factors which can deeply impact a community’s wellbeing and capacity to promote mental health, and thus impact the wellbeing of community members.

The Rural Mental Health Project (RMHP) + Network (RMHN) focuses on building the capacity of rural communities through education, promotion, and prevention activities related to mental health, mental disorders, addiction, and community mental wellness. Consistent with CMHA’s history, this type of grassroots work supports communities in identifying priorities and working to build local projects and capacity.

No single person, organization, or community can build better mental health for all within communities and across systems alone; therefore, meaningful processes that include diverse perspectives and partners is essential for healthier systems and people. A broader understanding of mental health, mental illness, and community wellness is necessary to create the conditions that generate wellbeing and system innovation, which includes and goes beyond improvements to treatment services.

There is a long-standing history of experts parachuting into rural communities that are directive, without listening to or respecting local knowledge, strengths, and priorities. For meaningful change to exist, context matters—the community must be the owners and directors of local priorities and actions.

Better mental health happens through a combination of formal and informal approaches, where medical and community pathways are contributors. Mental health is not state that it is achieved indefinitely, it evolves and



changes within people and communities overtime; therefore, we aim for through progress, not perfection.

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### **Expression of Interest**

The Rural Mental Health project aims to support rural communities wanting to take actions that support a mentally healthy community, which will look different depending on the realities and passions of each community. We are offering free training and funding to a local community member (Animator), who is interested in catalyzing that conversation in the community. The Animator, community members, and other stakeholders are all welcomed to the Rural Mental Health Network that is a hub to work collectively, learn from others, and gain/share access to resources, funding, and more. Taking part in the Rural Mental Health Project gives access to funding, free training, connections with other stakeholders and rural communities working to support rural mental health, and much more. If you are interested in getting involved in the project training please complete the form online to inform us of your preferences. Once we receive the form, you will be contacted with next steps. <https://ruralmentalhealth.ca/connect/get-involved/>

## **Family Day VAD office Closed**

Please note that the VAD is closed Monday, February 21, 2022 for Family Day. We will open again on Tuesday, with regular hours.



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