

## It's Never Too Late to Seek Support!

Happy New Year's to you all! We hope 2021 brings hope and prosperity around the globe.

Although many of us get excited about the holidays and the joy they give us, holidays also exacerbate the emotional pain of those experiencing homelessness, loneliness and social isolation. Furthermore, COVID-19 related protocols reluctantly became the highest priority in the healthcare sector this year, thus delaying diagnosis and treatment for other health conditions. This resulted in much worse health outcomes for Canadians. Unfortunately, individuals with mental illness and addiction disorders have always resided in this overlooked category, mainly due to the stigma associated with these disorders. Given the societal and cultural stigmas associated with being diagnosed with mental illness and addiction, these individuals have borne great internal struggles in their challenge to admit to having mental health and addiction issues. I recall some of my clients confiding to me they would rather go to jail for life than admit to having mental illness. The sad reality is that they were not alone with this perception.

Although some headway has been made to de-stigmatize mental illness and addiction disorders from a global perspective, many individuals who experience mental illness and addiction often express that they feel being judged, mistreated and blamed for causing their own illness. This blameful attitude has forced them to disguise their problems out of shame. They become disconnected from society or turn to maladaptive behaviors such as substance use to cope. It is acceptable for our society to empathize with individuals diagnosed with *chronic medical conditions*, as it simultaneously hesitates empathizing with individuals diagnosed with mental illness and addiction. It is this societal and cultural discomfort that fuels the existence of stigma.

The question is what can we (as nurses, mothers, fathers, sister, brothers, partners, extended family members, neighbors, etc.) do to support ourselves and those around us who may be experiencing mental illness and addiction issues without stigmatizing them?

Now more than ever, we need to be vigilant of mental illness and addiction signs and symptoms in our ourselves, colleagues, family members and neighbors. Many individuals and families have been feeling a great distress as a result of COVID-19 restrictions and losses. This puts so many of us in a very vulnerable state of mind, at increased risk for domestic abuse, and/or substance misuse. Given our current pandemic status, many community healthcare services have been moved to virtual care which is working for some. However, many citizens do not have access to social media and virtual mental health and addiction services in a timely manner. This leaves many feeling stranded therefore even simple, kind gestures towards them would go long way.

In reference to my last MHNIG Newsletter entry, I believe self-reflection and increased awareness is the key to stigma reduction. Self-reflection helps us critically evaluate our own values, belief system, actions, and behaviors that might promote or reduce stigmatizing practices. It is through this self-reflection that we may be able to determine when our belief system and practices require modifications. Only then, would we be able to appreciate and acknowledge the struggles and barriers

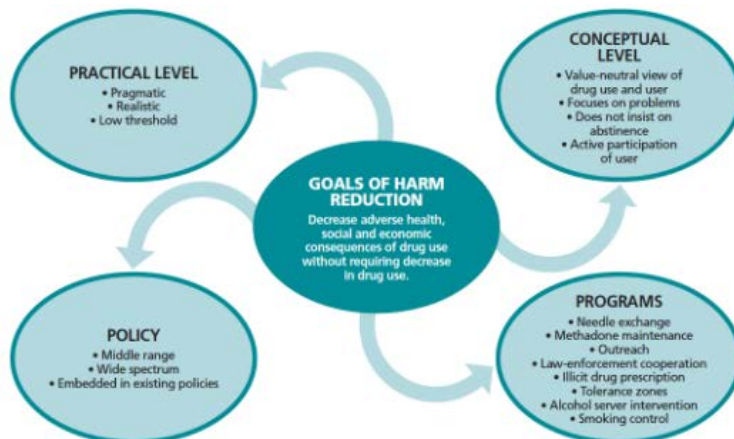
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associated with having mental illness and addiction. Only then, would we be able to empathize and assist those individuals experiencing mental illness and addiction. I agree that sometimes it's challenging to support people that aren't ready to take the necessary steps toward positive change. However, it is also essential to acknowledge that those living with the mental illness and addiction are the drivers of their change. It is okay to let them know that you are there for them whenever they are ready to take those next steps because *it is never too late to seek support*.

## Stages of Change



I admit that I used to have difficulty settling for harm reduction strategies, but through self-reflection I came to appreciate the harm reduction approach conducive to clients entering the system at any stage of change. Regrets and relapse are part of the change process, but it shouldn't be an obstacle to being able to try again. Remember to always carry a Naloxone Kit as you never know when you might save someone's life.



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(RNOA, 2015)

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### Helpful Resources:

- [✚ https://www.catie.ca/en/prevention/substance-use](https://www.catie.ca/en/prevention/substance-use)
- [✚ https://www.ontario.ca/page/where-get-free-naloxone-kit](https://www.ontario.ca/page/where-get-free-naloxone-kit)
- [✚ https://www.metaphi.ca/patient-resources.html](https://www.metaphi.ca/patient-resources.html)
- [✚ https://www.metaphi.ca/raam-clinics/](https://www.metaphi.ca/raam-clinics/)
- [✚ Provider Resources: https://www.metaphi.ca/pocket-cards.html](https://www.metaphi.ca/pocket-cards.html)
- [✚ https://www.metaphi.ca/point-of-care-tools.html](https://www.metaphi.ca/point-of-care-tools.html)
- [✚ https://rnao.ca/bpg/guidelines/engaging-clients-who-use-substances](https://rnao.ca/bpg/guidelines/engaging-clients-who-use-substances)
- [✚ https://www.camh.ca/en/suicide-prevention/resources](https://www.camh.ca/en/suicide-prevention/resources)
- [✚ https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-health-101](https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-health-101)
- [✚ https://cmha.ca/](https://cmha.ca/)
- [✚ https://ontario.abiliticbt.com/explore/allCategories](https://ontario.abiliticbt.com/explore/allCategories)

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