



Canadian Mental
Health Association
Lambton Kent
Mental health for all



News Release

Community Allies Create New Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team

CMHA and partners launch innovative new program: MHEART

SARNIA – August 9, 2019 – Today, during an event hosted by Minister Christine Elliott, Minister Sylvia Jones and Associate Minister Michael Tibollo, the Canadian Mental Health Association Lambton Kent (CMHA LK), Ontario Provincial Police (OPP), Sarnia Police Services (SPS) and Bluewater Health (BWH) announced the introduction of a new service that is launching in Sarnia/Lambton. MHEART (Mental Health Engagement and Response Team) aims to improve the experience of those who have mental health and addiction needs and come into contact with police services.

Mobile crisis rapid response teams are made up of mental health workers who work with police to engage individuals in crisis, de-escalate the situation, and connect people with needed services. They are a proven model provincially and nationally and MHEART Sarnia Lambton is following in the footsteps of other successful models within our region (Chatham-Kent and Windsor-Essex). Mental health nurses from CMHA will work with police, the individual, and the hospital.

The new MHEART service will work in conjunction with the Province of Ontario's "Improving Police-Hospital Transition" framework which was also announced today. The new protocol will improve the transition process between police and hospital staff to help patients in crisis access timely care.

"Mental health impacts our friends, colleagues, neighbours, and family members," said **Alan Stevenson** CEO of CMHA. "It is a community issue and as partners, we have already established the criteria set out in the framework document released today, including leadership endorsement, training, and protocols. MHEART will be in a position to ensure the initial contact is positive and the individual's transition to the right care is seamless."

"The creation of the Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team is a demonstration of how well we can serve our communities when we work together," said Inspector **Chris Avery**, Detachment Commander, Lambton County OPP. "The impact that interacting with police can have on an individual in crisis can be significant, and we are confident that our partnership with MHEART will ensure we are providing the highest level of service at the right time, by the right team."

"Our local MHEART response team in Sarnia will respond to community incidents that require this specific type of intervention. To improve the team's discretion and engagement with the community,

the team will travel in an unmarked police vehicle and our officers will be in plain clothes,” explains Inspector **Jeff Hodgson**, who heads this initiative within SPS.

The ideal outcome of the MHEART contact is to provide ongoing support and treatment in the community. If an individual requires a hospital visit, the Emergency Department and the Department of Psychiatry at BWH are committed to facilitating a more accessible and seamless experience once they arrive at the hospital. Bluewater Health’s Chief of Psychiatry, **Dr. Emmanuel Anyaegbuna** comments, “Having the MHEART in the community will help alert the psychiatrist if or when our patients are not doing well. As such we’ll be better able to help them in the Emergency Department and, if necessary, will improve our ability to formulate a care plan sooner and avoid delays. This will improve how we are able to assist those who come into our care via police interaction.”

The three-way partnership was born after months of collaboration, listening to community and provincial funding support. The partnership organizations are committed to improving the way those with mental health and addictions needs experience police, mental health and hospital services.

“We recognize that a collaborative approach to community safety and wellbeing works, and our local mental health partnership with CMHA and BWH in Sarnia is a perfect example of the approach we need for the citizens of Sarnia,” said Sarnia Police Service Chief **Norm Hansen**.

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**Photo cutline: Left to right: Inspector Chris Avery – OPP Lambton County Detachment Commander, Constable Tim VanCowenberg – Sarnia Police Services, Dr. Emmanuel Anyaegbuna – BWH Medical Director and Chief of Psychiatry (Mental Health and Addiction Services), Alan Stevenson – CMHA Chief Executive Officer, Bob Bailey – MPP, Sarnia-Lambton and Chief Norm Hansen, Sarnia Police Services.

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