

WINNIPEG REGIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITY MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION

The WRHA Mental Health Promotion program was formed in 2003 and has grown in both size and scope over the last decade. Mental Health Promotion (MHP) is an integral program stream of both the Regional Mental Health Program and the Population and Public Health Program. MHP works collaboratively at the regional, provincial and national level to promote the mental health of the population to enhance factors that protect mental well-being, and reduce risk factors and conditions that negatively impact mental health.



“MENTAL HEALTH IS THE CAPACITY OF EACH AND ALL OF US TO FEEL, THINK AND ACT IN WAYS THAT ENHANCE OUR ABILITY TO ENJOY LIFE AND DEAL WITH THE CHALLENGES WE FACE. IT IS A POSITIVE SENSE OF EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING THAT RESPECTS THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE, EQUITY, SOCIAL JUSTICE, INTERCONNECTIONS AND PERSONAL DIGNITY”
(Public Health Agency of Canada)



The WRHA Mental Health Promotion team leads and supports a range of activities including resource and program development, training and education, community development, social marketing and public awareness, as well as advancing innovation, research and evaluation.



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Mental health is the foundation for well-being and effective functioning for every individual and community. The aim of mental health promotion is to enhance the mental health and well-being of the population across the lifespan. Mental health promotion includes actions that promote mental well-being, prevent mental health problems or illnesses, and improve quality of life and support recovery for people living with mental illness.

Mental health promotion in the population focuses on enhancements at the individual level and also recognizes the role of social, structural and environmental conditions that impact well-being such as housing, living conditions, education, work, safety and other health determinants. There is a complex interplay of risk and protective factors that impact our mental health and well-being. It is our goal to make these issues a priority and to strive for positive change at every level.

Economic analyses have shown that we can no longer afford to ignore the growing burden of mental illness and mental health problems in society. As well, we now have solid evidence that demonstrates the value of mental health promotion interventions in protecting and preserving the health of the population.

Enhancing the mental health and well-being of the population requires a shift in thinking and resources. The MHP program places an emphasis on developing partnerships with other WRHA programs and community agencies to embed mental health promotion across the lifespan within multiple settings.



MAKING AN IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING ACROSS THE LIFESPAN



MATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH – RESILIENT FAMILIES

Parental well-being and particularly, maternal mental health is critical to family well-being and is associated with childhood and family outcomes. One in eight women experience postpartum depression after giving birth and others experience anxiety or other distressing mental health concerns during pregnancy and throughout the first postpartum year.

WRHA MHP has taken a lead role in promoting maternal mental well-being with the development of key resources including a Postpartum Depression Awareness brochure, a Perinatal Mental Health Quick Reference for Health Care Providers and a comprehensive Perinatal Mental Health Toolkit to guide Public Health Nursing practice in working with families during the perinatal period.

WRHA MHP coordinates and delivers professional development sessions on maternal mental health with WRHA public health and hospital staff, primary care, as well as to community partners including child and family services, and women's health organizations. For regional resources on perinatal mental health contact: mentalhealthpromotion@wrha.mb.ca

THE EARLY YEARS – A SOLID START

The early years of life are foundational in the social emotional development of young children. Decades of research evidence demonstrates that a child's lifelong mental health is shaped by early experiences of caregiving, education, social interactions and environment. Investments made in the first several years of life, such as through positive parenting and early learning have significant impacts for children throughout their lifetime. WRHA MHP engages with parents and caregivers, family and early learning environments and agencies to advance an early start to promoting the mental health of young children.

One example of an early years initiative is the Public Health Agency of Canada funded project **Handle with Care** which promotes the mental health of young children from birth to six years by engaging their parents in a series of interactive activities and focused discussions centered on four building block topics: trust and attachment, enhancing self-esteem, expressing emotions and relationships with others. The sessions are led by trained facilitators. WRHA MHP is one of four sites in Canada to develop and deliver the program. Early evaluation outcomes from Handle with Care demonstrate that parents and caregivers benefit from an increased sense of parenting competence, improved mental well-being and enhanced attention to self-care.

WRHA MHP is a partner along with the University of Manitoba and Healthy Child Manitoba in a mental health promotion initiative funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada called **Towards Flourishing**. This initiative promotes the mental well-being of parents and their young children by adding a mental health promotion strategy to Manitoba's Families First Program. Towards Flourishing also aims to strengthen the public health workforce capacity to address mental health promotion and support collaboration between mental health and public health systems. As a result of the Towards Flourishing initiative, over 1000 families in Manitoba have received information and guidance on how to support their own and their families' positive mental health. The final evaluation will have national implications for public health and mental health policy and programs. To learn more about Towards Flourishing visit: <http://www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/towardsflourishing/>

CHILDREN, YOUTH AND SCHOOLS – WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH TO POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

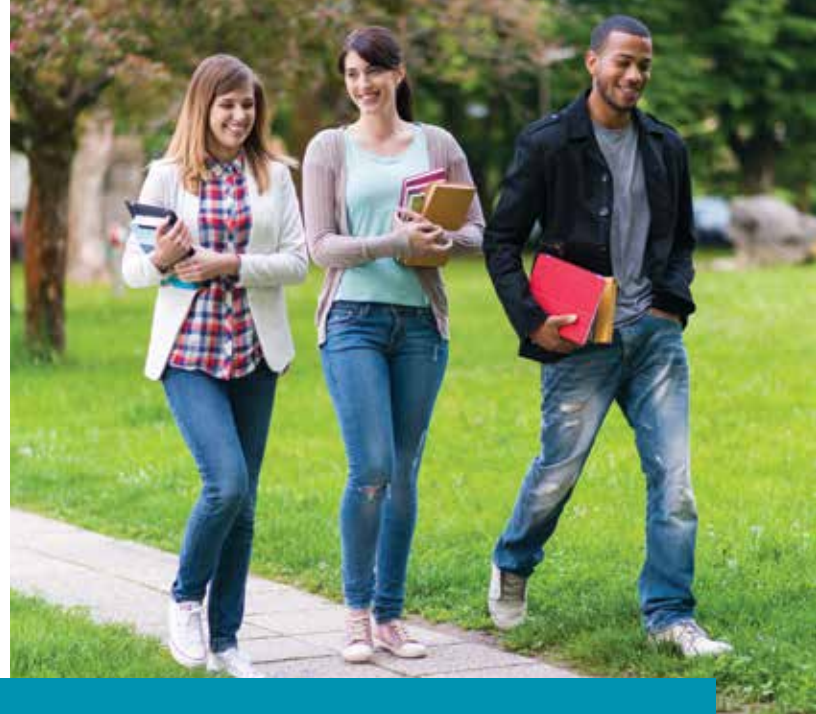
School age children and adolescents grow and change rapidly. It is vitally important that children and adolescents have the necessary skills, support and environment to help them thrive every day. There are many evidence-based mental health promotion and illness prevention strategies that can optimize the well-being of school-aged children and youth.

The WRHA Mental Health Promotion team has adopted a “whole school approach for positive mental health.” This evidence-based approach includes components designed to:

- teach self-awareness, coping skills, social skills and problem-solving skills
- increase resilience and create flourishing school environments
- increase awareness of mental health issues among students
- encourage students to recognize mental health problems in themselves and their friends
- facilitate processes for appropriate help-seeking for students and their peers

On a provincial level, the WRHA Mental Health Promotion team has worked closely with the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) to develop provincial policy on mental health. This framework document can be found at the following link: http://www.mass.mb.ca/documents/mental_health_framework.pdf

The WRHA MHP team provides project support and capacity building to several school divisions to provide assistance in advancing a comprehensive mental health strategy, building on existing approaches to enhance policy, education/curriculum, school climate and culture, community partnerships, mental health literacy and professional development opportunities.



YOUNG ADULTHOOD AND POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION – A STRONG FUTURE

Post-secondary institutions are a key setting for mental health promotion. The transition from adolescence to adulthood involves major changes in responsibilities and relationships. Students may experience a range of stressors including academic demands, relationship issues, financial strain, isolation, relocation, cultural challenges, loss, trauma, and for some, the early onset of mental illness. Colleges and universities are recognizing that they play an important role in creating environments that support student mental health and well-being. There is a need for a comprehensive, proactive plan that encompasses promotion, prevention, early identification and intervention of mental illness.

An integral part of the strategy is to enhance wellness, resilience and recovery. The specific strategy is reflective of the uniqueness of each post-secondary institution, its culture, and the assessed needs of the campus community.

The following website is one example of how a post-secondary institution can engage students in mental well-being. Red River College Mind it! <http://blogs.rrc.ca/mindit/>



The WRHA Mental Health Promotion team collaborates with post-secondary institutions to assist and support the development of **College-Wide Mental Health Strategies**. The aim is to cultivate an environment of support that promotes a sense of well-being, belonging, connectedness, and positive mental health for all students, faculty and staff.

THRIVING ADULTS

Adulthood is a busy time of focus on employment and career goals, relationships and possibly raising a family which can at times be very demanding. Adults can experience a variety of stressors that can negatively affect their mental health. Chronic stress in particular is a risk factor for poor mental health.

Workplaces are a key setting for promoting mental health. The MHP team is a leader in researching, exploring and piloting a range of workplace wellness initiatives that impact on both individual and organizational levels. WRHA MHP strives to support psychological safety in the workplace and other mental health promoting workplace approaches.

Health communication and social marketing strategies aim to reach the public with valuable messages on how to care for and protect mental well-being. Positive messaging has the potential to address stigma, promote help-seeking behaviour and build more supportive communities.

Mentally healthy...every day is a WRHA MHP public awareness pamphlet that describes what it means to be mentally healthy, what the benefits are and what can be done to be mentally healthy every day. People can make significant improvements to their mental health and well-being with a few simple changes in their day. <http://www.wrha.mb.ca/prog/mentalhealth/files/MentallyHealthyEverydaybrochure.pdf>

Enjoy Life More is a mental health promotion awareness campaign that highlights a variety of simple, everyday strategies individuals can do to get the most out of life every day. A variety of materials are available to order through an order form at: <http://www.wrha.mb.ca/prog/mentalhealth/files/EnjoyLifeMoreMaterialsOrderForm.pdf>

MHP features a regular column called **Balance in WAVE** – Winnipeg's health and wellness magazine. Articles have been published on a variety of mental health topics including resilience, happiness, workplace stress, relationships and spirituality. Back issues are available online at <http://www.wrha.mb.ca/wave/2014/07/index.php>

Mental health and physical health are inextricably linked. For example, we know that poor mental health is associated with increased physical disease while emotional wellness is linked to better physical health outcomes. Primary care providers are ideally suited to promote mental health and introducing mental illness prevention strategies to their patients since the majority of adults go to their primary care provider for concerns regarding their mental health. WRHA MHP program is collaborating with WRHA Primary Care to develop and integrate mental health promotion and prevention opportunities into Primary Care practice as they develop Primary Care Networks across the region.

The WRHA MHP team delivers and sponsors other organizations to offer **ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Teaching)**, **SafeTalk** and **Mental Health First Aid**. These educational programs contribute to enhanced mental illness literacy, promote early identification of individuals who may be struggling, reduce stigma associated with mental illness and help-seeking and also promote recovery.



HEALTHY AGING

Healthy aging means living a life that is fulfilling and meaningful while embracing changes as one grows older. With the population aging in Canada and individuals 55 and older being the fastest growing age group, it is important to address the specific needs of the older adult.

Major life changes for older adults can include children moving out, retirement, losses, caregiver stress, financial worries and sometimes physical or mental health challenges. The WRHA MHP team develops resources on mental health and well-being and healthy aging. For example, the **Thrive over 55** tip sheet highlights five steps to living life to the full as we age. For a copy of the resource go to:

<http://www.wrha.mb.ca/prog/mentalhealth/MentalHealthPromotion.php>

SUICIDE PREVENTION

Suicide and associated risk factors are complex and influenced by multiple and interacting dynamics. Suicide and suicide related behaviors can occur across the lifespan so special attention is required when developing targeted approaches to reach the most vulnerable groups. The WRHA has implemented a regional suicide prevention strategy that includes a range of services and interventions including mental health and crisis service enhancements for adults as well as supporting more upstream approaches to strengthen protective factors and reduce risk factors.

Partnerships are key in building community capacity to address suicide and foster the development of supportive communities for those who may be vulnerable and struggling to enhance resilience. The MHP team established the Winnipeg Suicide Prevention Network in 2004 which continues to thrive with broad community participation.

Youth engagement and peer leadership is a priority of the mental health promotion team. **Sources of Strength Inc.** is recognized as a best practice model in youth suicide prevention and can be described as a comprehensive wellness program that uses peer leaders to change norms around codes of silence and help-seeking. The WRHA MHP team is supporting the implementation of the program in partnership with several Winnipeg school divisions and youth serving organizations.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH PURPOSE

WRHA MHP leads and initiates partnerships with a variety of community agencies to build capacity to support positive mental health. Building capacity means that as a small team we work with other organizations in combined action to build a stronger effort to accomplish mental health promotion goals.

Working in collaboration we establish a vision, develop leadership, and generate resources, and support into existing system structures such as within school divisions, public health programs or community agencies. We provide consultation to the region on mental health promotion striving to respond to the needs of the community. Our work focuses on evidence-informed strategies that build awareness, assess needs, provide education and training, and develop resources, planning, policy development, research and evaluation.



MOVING FORWARD

The WRHA Team is encouraged by the increased focus on population mental health across the country and is excited about future opportunities. The program will continue to seek strategic partnerships to strengthen our collaborative efforts in building a community that values and promotes mental health and well-being.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION AND PREVENTION

Visit the <http://www.wrha.mb.ca/prog/mentalhealth/MentalHealthPromotion.php>

For more information on **WRHA Mental Health Promotion** please contact:
mentalhealthpromotion@wrha.mb.ca

