



**Submission from Dr. Catherine Zahn, President & CEO, CAMH
Toronto Police Services Board Virtual Town Hall
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When people with mental illness experience a crisis in the community, the outcome can be tragic. Many of these people haven't received the care and supports from our health care system that they need and deserve.

This injustice is compounded by racism, in particular, anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism.

The heartbreak here is that mental health crises can be prevented. For decades, CAMH and our mental health system partners have advocated for equitable health and social service funding for people who live with mental illness – for their care in the community and for their care in crisis.

The system of crisis response – as it exists today – does not work. But there's a rational path forward.

The CAMH guiding belief is that Mental Health is Health. That means that those with mental illness need health care – that in the same way a person with a heart attack is met with a health response, people with a mental health emergency should be met with emergency health care.

It distresses me deeply to know that, because of underfunded community mental health resources, the responsibility of supporting people in crisis has fallen on the shoulders of our police. Police are skilled and essential professionals, but they are not health care experts. The de facto expectation that they lead this work is just wrong and our starting point is not the status quo. People with mental illness need care from a health professional.

Today, I'm calling for a new direction in care for those with crisis and critical mental health care needs.

We'll start by reviewing international models that have the following characteristics:

- Individuals or their families can call for crisis support;
- The response is flexible depending on the crisis severity;
- A mental health professional and paramedic are dispatched to assist;

- The individual is supported with wrap-around services through their crisis and recovery; and
- The first responders have a clear connection to security or police service back up when needed.

This new direction will include strategic investments in community mental health and will respect the human, civil and healthcare rights of individuals who need mental health support. A strong, sustainably funded mental health system will guarantee access to care and supports for people with mental illness across the entire trajectory of their illness, including early intervention and crisis prevention.

Building on successful international models and working together – the health system, our police services, our community and the people we serve – we can reimagine a comprehensive and respectful approach to people who are worthy of better – who need and deserve care, not confrontation.