



# PROJECT CONNECTION

## DISTRIBUTING SMARTPHONES TO CLIENTS IN SUPPORT OF HEALTH EQUITY AND ACCESSING VIRTUAL CARE

### THE CHALLENGE

COVID-19 led to a significant reduction of in-person group and individual service provision both by the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), Ottawa Branch and other community health care providers. While intensive case management and outreach services have returned to in-person, CMHA Ottawa is strongly encouraging its clients to connect with their workers through videoconferencing to mitigate the risk of transmission of COVID-19, and to support safer meeting practices, particularly through the winter months when meeting outside is more difficult. Access to virtual services is a significant challenge for many individuals due to barriers that include poverty, homelessness and internet costs.

### THE SOLUTION: PROJECT CONNECTION

- CMHA Ottawa is providing smartphones to clients to support digital equity in health care. Smartphones are provided with data plans to allow for similar intensive case management, outreach and group service experiences.
- As of February 2021, CMHA Ottawa has provided approximately 250 smartphones to clients who do not otherwise have access to a smartphone or the internet.
- With their phones, each client receives a two-page handout introducing them to their phone, as well as recovery-focused suggestions for how to use them.
- The agency developed a committee focused on the fair and equitable distribution of phones. It is composed of members of the peer engagement advisory committee (PEAC, made up of former and current clients of CMHA Ottawa), peer support staff, front-line staff, management and directors. PEAC members and the peer support staff have led the development of the processes for distributing phones.
- CMHA Ottawa also created the Tech Buddies program: Tech Buddies are staff who are confident in their knowledge of technology and are paired with frontline staff whose clients have received a smartphone. The Tech Buddy helps to ensure the phone is a useful tool for virtual care by loading virtual care/ videoconferencing and recovery-focused apps and ensuring the client has a working email address.
- As of December 2020, CMHA Ottawa is seeking funding for peer tech support to help support clients with use of the phones and any technological issues that arise.
- The smartphones have helped many clients through isolation as a result of COVID-19. Clients have re-established lost connections with friends and family, maintained their physical health concerns with regular medical check-ins, and downloaded apps targeted at health and wellness. These phones are also a source of information and entertainment.



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### WHO IS THIS PROGRAM FOR?

- CMHA Ottawa clients who do not have access to a smartphone or the internet
- Persons who experience poverty or low income and are unable to afford a smartphone and data plan
- Persons who are interested in engaging in virtual care with CMHA Ottawa
- Persons whose personal safety would benefit from having access to a phone, including women who experience intimate partner violence, people who are homeless, etc.

### CONTACT US

For more information about **CMHA OTTAWA**, please contact:

**613-737-7791**  
[general@cmhaottawa.ca](mailto:general@cmhaottawa.ca)  
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### HOURS OF OPERATION

Monday to Friday: 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
Summer hours (Monday to Friday): 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.  
(June 1 to Sept. 1)