



Canadian Mental
Health Association
Ottawa
Mental health for all

Association canadienne
pour la santé mentale
Ottawa
La santé mentale pour tous

Recovery College at
CMHA Ottawa:

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



“What is Recovery College?”

- Recovery College is a peer-designed and peer-facilitated mental health workshop series that equips participants with the skills we all need to thrive.
- Recovery College at CMHA Ottawa is a supplemental program available to clients of the agency: individuals in the Ottawa area experiencing severe and persistent mental illness and/or substance use disorder, many of whom are experiencing chronic homelessness or are vulnerably housed.
- Recovery College is a recovery-focused mental health program that supports students in personal growth and empowerment, finding a new sense of self, and moving beyond what has happened to them to rebuild their lives with renewed meaning and purpose.

- Recovery College is a unique learning centre where people with lived or living experience of mental health issues—also known as peers—work together on equal terms with mental health professionals and community organizations to co-produce and co-deliver courses that support well-being and recovery.
- The approach to wellness education found in Recovery College helps form connections between peers, service providers, and the community in ways that support new relationships and alliances while helping people gain knowledge, skills, and confidence.
- Growing international research demonstrates that Recovery Colleges have an effective and valuable role in students' recovery and ongoing wellness.

“What is unique about Recovery College?”

- Course development at Recovery College starts by identifying the learning needs of its students, exploring topics that are important to them. Courses are then co-created and co-produced. Co-production involves collaborative brainstorming and development sessions that include professionals, students, and community members.
- Recovery College students are adult learners who bring the wisdom of lived experience to course development, and professionals' involvement ensures that reliable, evidence-informed material is delivered.
- Each course is reviewed after its launch to receive feedback and make improvements.
- Students are involved in almost all aspects of the college, including development of evaluation tools and course facilitation. They are learners and leaders!

“What can students expect?”

Recovery College facilitators strive to offer courses on wellness that are delivered in a non-therapeutic manner. Students can expect to connect with others, increase their knowledge about topics they value, and become empowered in their recovery and wellness. Facilitators use non-clinical language as much as possible and work to make courses accessible to a variety of learning styles.

Recovery College is committed to diversity, accessibility, equity and inclusion. Unique experiences and identities are respected and valued.

“What effect does Recovery College have on its students?”

Recovery College students across the world report:

- Experiencing less stigma, more hope
- Increased confidence and self-esteem
- Better understanding of their mental health
- Increased wellness tools
- More balanced relationships with service providers and better self-advocacy skills
- Feeling valued, involved, and included in mental health services
- Better connection to themselves and others
- Feeling better prepared to move towards new activities and goals
- Less reliance on clinical services including hospital inpatient and emergency services

(Source: Perkins, Meddings, Williams and Repper, 2018)

“What do students of Recovery College at CMHA Ottawa have to say?”

“There’s a sense of community, and I always leave feeling energized and invigorated.”

“I feel valued being part of sharing knowledge, learning, and growing.”

“[I feel] emotional balance—mentally, physically and spiritually.”

“What else do I need to know about Recovery College at CMHA Ottawa?”

- Since launching in January 2021, CMHA Ottawa’s Recovery College has offered more than 50 learning opportunities to students. Topics include *Challenging Isolation and Loneliness*, *Connecting with Nature*, *Coping with Triggers*, *Developing Self-Compassion*, *Pets and People: Caring for Your Pet*, *Navigating Loss and Grief*, and a series called *Empowered In Your Home* that supports recently housed persons in gaining skills for success.

- Course streams are designed to provide learning opportunities in areas such as mental health management, personal development, gardening and connecting with nature, community connection, and home maintenance.
- Based on a semester system, Recovery College offers spring, summer, fall, and winter offerings of 12–14 courses.
- More than 165 students have registered, with more than 650 attendances so far!
- CMHA Ottawa has partnered with six community agencies, enhancing the array of course topics and improving access to expertise while building bridges and connecting students to new resources. Recent partnerships include Just Food Community Farm and the African Caribbean and Black (ACB) Wellness Resource Centre.
- With the help of generous funding, facilitators have purchased and installed video equipment that allows them to deliver courses in a hybrid format, supporting their commitment to the accessibility and availability of Recovery College courses and co-production events.
- Other funding has allowed facilitators to offer modest honorariums to peers who participate in co-productions to honour and respect the work and time they provide.

“Who can enroll in Recovery College?”

- Recovery College is available to CMHA Ottawa service users who have a case manager or other worker.
- Recovery College is available to people who receive a CMHA Ottawa rent supplement but do not currently have a worker.

“How can I support Recovery College at CMHA Ottawa?”

Recovery College at CMHA Ottawa does not receive any funding from the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. It relies entirely on grants and the generous support of charitable donations. To donate to Recovery College, visit CMHA Ottawa on CanadaHelps.org: <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/dn/4839>



“The skills and wisdom I have gained from Recovery College are immeasurable. I have overcome challenges such as loneliness and isolation, gained a better understanding of recovery, found peace with anger, established healthy boundaries, explored self-esteem, connected with myself through journaling, developed hope and optimism, and so much more. Each class I attend is like a gift, and I am so grateful for the opportunities they provide.”

—Emily, Recovery College student at CMHA Ottawa

For more information or to get involved, email recoverycollege@cmhaottawa.ca.

