



Research
Centre



CAARE
for Mental
Health Group

Mobilizing Experts-by-Experience for Positive Change: Canadian Aging Action, Research & Education (CAARE) for Mental Health Group

To support the evolving mental health and social care needs of the growing aging population, initiatives that aim to catalyze positive change require active leadership and inclusion of those that are most affected. The **Canadian Aging Action, Research, and Education (CAARE) for Mental Health Group** is comprised of 20+ Canadian experts-by-lived-experience who are committed to mobilizing knowledge and influencing positive change for aging and mental health support, care, and treatment in Canada.

“The CAARE Group is important because aging and mental health are topics relevant to all Canadians—meaning collective leadership among a group of experts-by-experience with diverse expertise, skills and perspectives is required to make aging-focused mental health support, care and treatment a priority research, practice and policy topic in Canada.”



- Dr. Paul Holyoke, VP Research & Innovation, SE Health

Project Overview

Mental health is our “*positive sense of well-being or the capacity to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face*”.¹ Aging-related changes like declining health, retirement or experiencing the loss of friends/ family can affect overall mental health and well-being. However, there are major gaps in our knowledge regarding the interaction between mental health and aging. Stemming from our project identifying priority research questions on aging and mental health according to experts-by-experience (i.e., older adults, caregivers, and health/ social care providers living in Canada),² the **Canadian Aging Action, Research, and Education (CAARE) for Mental Health Group** was formalized in 2021 and comprised of members from the original project’s steering group and interested members of the public.

As a part of our research portfolio investigating Aging in Society and our commitment to authentic engagement, the CAARE Group integrates evidence with the expertise, experience, and values of our members to champion impactful and equitable change in prioritized topic areas.

Who are we?

The CAARE Group comprises a group of over twenty experts-by-experience from across Canada. Our members include older adults, family/ friend caregivers of older adults, health and social care providers who work with older adults, and members of organizations who focus on mental health. We recognize the importance of authentic partnerships and aim to challenge the traditional definitions of ‘experts,’ which otherwise tends to exclude people with lived experience in mental health research. We strive to be inclusive, equitable, and non-hierarchical, with a diverse representation of the many perspectives of aging Canadians.

What are our goals?

The overarching goal of the CAARE Group is to promote awareness of and action on the top 10 unanswered questions on aging and mental health *as well as* the answered questions that came out of the original project.² Specifically, we are working to:

1. **Build and sustain authentic partnerships** between researchers, health and social care providers, older

adults, family/ friend caregivers, funders and policymakers interested in working together to advance aging and mental health care, support, and treatment in Canada;

2. **Support the co-design and completion of research and action-oriented projects** on the top 10 unanswered and answered questions identified by older adults, family/ friend caregivers, and health and social care providers.
3. **Advocate and/or apply for funding** to support the priorities and activities of the group.

What have we done?

We were supported by a Canadian Institutes of Health Research – Institute of Aging (CIHR-IA) Voluntary Sector Knowledge Mobilization Support Grant between 2022-2023 to: formalize the group (e.g., establish a group name, logo, member honoraria); recruit additional members; and begin preliminary knowledge mobilization activities (e.g., [developing an informational video about the group](#)³).

In 2023-2024 we expanded the group's membership to 21 individuals living across 5 provinces and 1 territory; supported a pan-Canadian project advancing two priority research questions; and secured funding from SE Health for the CAARE Group's 2024-2025 activities.

To ensure that we continue to build authentic partnerships between researchers, health and social care providers, older adults, caregivers, funders and policymakers who are interested in working together to create meaningful change in mental health care in Canada, we have sought opportunities to highlight the importance of authentic engagement, and the benefits of including diverse perspectives of those directly affected by the challenges being addressed. Most recently, two members had the opportunity to present their experiences as part of the CAARE Group at 1) the Advancing Indigenous Policy and Practice Knowledge Exchange and 2) the Research Institute for Aging's Walk With Me 2024 conference. Members shared and discussed the benefits of including experts-by-experience in action-oriented projects and were provided with the opportunity to engage and

interact with like-minded individuals to raise awareness of the CAARE Group.

In the last month, we have also established the *CAARE in Action* working group comprising of 6 active members of the larger CAARE Group. These members will be leading the group's prioritized activities forward.

What are the next steps?

Continuing the momentum and progress over the past few years, the CAARE Group's planned activities in 2024-2025 include:

- Collaborating with organizations and groups on mental health research and initiatives, leveraging the lived experiences and perspectives of CAARE Group members.
- Planning and leading monthly *CAARE in Action* working group meetings to co-develop plans for prospective action-oriented activities rooted in the research priorities of aging Canadians. These plans will then be proposed to and discussed with the broader group and then led by the working group.

How is this research funded and supported?

This work is currently funded and supported by SE Health, one of Canada's largest social enterprises.

To learn more about this work

If you are interested in joining the CAARE for Mental Health Group, sharing our materials with your network, or learning more about us, you can contact Ryan McLeod at ryanmcleod@sehc.com.

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References

