

Canadian Aging Action, Research, & Education (CAARE) for Mental Health Group

The CAARE Group is a group of 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's work is grounded in the priorities identified by older adults, caregivers, and health/social care providers from across Canada. Our three goals are to: 1) build and sustain authentic partnerships to advance mental health; 2) support research and action-oriented projects on the priority questions; and 3) advocate and/or apply for funding to support the priorities and activities of the group.

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. Our mental health is not a static state of being ‘healthy’ or ‘ill’. Instead, it ranges along a continuum and can change over time. For example, aging-related changes like declining health, retirement or experiencing the loss of friends/family can impact overall mental health and well-being. However, there are major gaps in our knowledge of how mental health interacts with aging. Older adults may experience both ageism and negative attitudes towards mental health, making it more difficult to access needed support, care, or treatment.

In partnership with the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) National office and a steering group of experts-by-lived-experience, the SE Research Centre developed a project to learn more about the needs of the diverse and growing population of older adults in Canada. Over a 3-year period, starting in Fall 2019 and continuing through the COVID-19 pandemic, [we identified priority unanswered research questions on aging and mental health according to older adults, caregivers, and health/social care providers living in](#)

[Canada](#)⁴. More information about the priority questions is [available on our website](#).

In Fall 2021, the Canadian Aging Action, Research, and Education (CAARE) for Mental Health Group was formalized and included members from the original project's steering group and interested members of the public.

Who are we?

The CAARE Group is a group of experts-by-lived-experience from across Canada. Our members include older adults, family and 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 CAARE strives to challenge the traditional definitions of ‘experts’ and ‘allies’ in mental health research. Our goal is to be inclusive, equitable, and non-hierarchical, with a diverse representation of the many perspectives of aging Canadians.

What are our goals?

The goal of CAARE is to promote awareness of and action on the top 10 unanswered questions on aging

and mental health *as well as* the answered questions. 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 questions as well as the 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.

The CAARE Group meets quarterly, and our activities include:

- Creating opportunities to incorporate the perspectives of experts-by-lived-experience in aging and mental health initiatives;
- Providing practical and strategic advice to research scientists on the design and implementation of mental health research and action projects;
- Identifying opportunities for collaboration with researchers, funders, policymakers, etc. on the questions on aging and mental health that Canadians have identified; and
- Promoting aging and mental health projects (e.g., recruitment, uptake of knowledge, etc.) with local communities and contacts.

What are we doing?

We were supported by a CIHR – Institute of Aging Voluntary Sector Knowledge Mobilization Support Grant between 2022-2023 to: formalize the group (e.g.,

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How is this research funded and supported?

This research is funded and supported by: SE Health, one of Canada's largest social enterprises and a CIHR Institute of Aging Voluntary Sector Knowledge Mobilization Grant.

establish a group name, logo, member honoraria); start recruiting additional members; and begin preliminary knowledge mobilization activities (e.g., developing an information video about the group and priority questions).

Our planned activities in 2023-2024, with funding support from SE Health, include:

- Leveraging the CAARE Group's lived experience with partner organizations by providing feedback, support, etc. on upcoming older adult mental health initiatives;
- Recruiting more individuals to the CAARE Group who are representative of Canada's diversity; and
- Expand on the SE Research Centre's existing [webpage for aging and mental health initiatives](#), while establishing a 'resource hub' of information related to the priority questions.

How can you get involved?

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

The CAARE Group is committed to inclusive and equitable practices and working with you to remove any barriers you or others may experience. Some examples we have implemented include mailed materials in advance of gathering, honoraria in recognition of the time involved, flexible scheduling, phone and video support for meetings, translation of materials into French, and synchronous and asynchronous opportunities to provide input and share ideas and feedback.

References

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4. SE Research Centre. Aging and Mental Health: What Research Priorities Matter Most to Canadians? [Internet]. 2022. Available from: https://research.sehc.com/SEHCResearch/media/Research_Centre/pdfs/AIS-320-2022_04_20-Research-on-the-Run.pdf