



Mental Health
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Roots of Hope

A Community Suicide
Prevention Project



Roots of Hope Case Studies

Spotlight on Windsor-Essex, Ontario

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THE ROOTS OF HOPE MODEL

Roots of Hope is a community-based model that supports populations across Canada in reducing the impact of suicide in their local context. The model builds on community expertise as it implements suicide prevention and life promotion interventions.

In the first Roots of Hope cohort in 2018, eight communities across Canada became part of a research demonstration project. The aim was to support them as they built their capacity to reduce the impact of suicide and to gather evidence on the model's effectiveness with an eye to establishing best and promising practices for wider adoption in the future.

In the Roots of Hope model, communities tailor their suicide prevention efforts around its 5 pillars:

1. **Means Safety.** Identify “hot spots” and implement measures to limit access to the suicide methods being used.
2. **Public Awareness.** Create local educational campaigns (e.g., posters, brochures, social media).
3. **Research.** Set research priorities, surveillance, and monitoring and evaluation to increase the suicide prevention evidence base.
4. **Specialized Supports.** Develop a range of possible prevention, intervention, and postvention services (e.g., peer support, support groups, workplace interventions, and coordinated planning and access to services).
5. **Training and Networks.** Provide training and learning opportunities for community gatekeepers (e.g., physicians, first responders, nurses, HR staff and managers, and teachers).

ROOTS OF HOPE EARLY ADOPTERS (2021-23)

The second Roots of Hope cohort involved 11 additional communities — or Early Adopters — from coast-to-coast-to-coast. As the initial demonstration project continued, these new communities were eager to learn about the model's potential benefits and use it to support their own suicide prevention and life promotion projects, including those for specific groups such as youth, men, and Indigenous populations.

Early Adopters are scaling up Roots of Hope by advancing its implementation and testing how effective Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) supports are for sustaining the model.



THE WINDSOR-ESSEX EARLY ADOPTER COMMUNITY

Windsor and Essex County has a population of more than 420,000 across seven municipalities. Windsor itself, with about 230,000 residents, is home to Canada's busiest border crossing with the U.S. and is Ontario's most diverse city outside the Greater Toronto Area.

Based on locally available data and a situational assessment, the Windsor-Essex County Suicide Prevention Coalition (WECSPC) has chosen to focus on the following priority populations:

- Men (ages 45-64)
- Youth (ages 10-19, especially girls/women)
- People who experience mental illness/mental health concerns
- People who use substances (e.g., alcohol, opioids)
- People who identify as 2SLGBTQ+

- People who identify as First Nations, Inuit, and Métis
- People who live in a low socio-economic status household



COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

1. Means Safety Promoting awareness and building additional safeguards.

An important aspect of our Roots of Hope initiative has been encouraging our member organizations to look for opportunities to promote means safety awareness and to build additional safeguards where suicide attempts and completions are known to occur in our community.

One example was the idea of putting up [crisis signage at the Windsor waterfront along the Detroit River](#). The river is a site where people are known to attempt and/or complete suicides by entering the water, both at the riverbank and at the [Ambassador Bridge](#) linking Windsor to Detroit.

We have also worked to increase awareness about the importance of returning unused medications, both to pharmacies and at designated drop-off events. These efforts include cultivating ways to work with community partners such as the [Windsor-Essex Community Opioid and Substance Strategy](#) and Crime Stoppers (to support drop-off opportunities that align with activities like the Suicide Awareness Month community walk).



2. Public Awareness Reducing stigma to increase help seeking.

The local situational assessment indicated that stigma is a barrier to help seeking among individuals impacted by mental health concerns or suicidal thoughts and behaviours. Public education campaigns are a key way to reduce stigma and increase rates of help seeking, and the evidence shows that the best results come from engaging multiple sectors when developing and disseminating these messages. So our partners actively promote the idea that [everyone in the community](#) can support someone who is thinking about suicide by [asking about it openly and honestly](#), providing supportive listening and hope, and connecting the person to additional supports.

Examples of WECSPC member awareness initiatives:

- Canadian Mental Health Association, Windsor-Essex (CMHA-WE) and Windsor-Essex County Health Unit (WECHU): [Suicide Awareness Month](#)
- University of Windsor: [It Matters that You're Here](#)

Based on our participation in Roots of Hope, the WECSPC is planning to develop a website, an independent social media presence, and visual branding to raise the profile of the collective work being done to promote life and prevent suicide. This plan is also meant to position the WECSPC as a local resource to help professionals and community members find reliable information about suicide and best practices for prevention and intervention.

3. Research Using local data to enhance knowledge and improve programs and services.

The WECHU created a [dashboard](#) that provides information on completed suicides and self-harm-related emergency department (ED) visits and hospitalizations.

WECSPC member organizations are also planning to undertake several activities to support the expansion of research, surveillance, and local monitoring. Examples include:

- Conducting an environmental scan of activities, services, and supports related to suicide training, services and treatment, and postvention that local organizations involved with the WECSPC (and other community partners) are offering.
- Investigating locally available usage and outcome data for programs, services, and supports while articulating data-sharing agreements to promote more effective information and knowledge sharing. These steps are meant to enhance understanding, improve resource allocation and development, and help us plan future initiatives and evaluate ongoing work.
- Exploring academic partnerships and student placements.



4. Specialized Supports Identifying remaining gaps to further improve current supports.

The environmental scan will seek to more effectively identify gaps in the available suicide prevention supports in Windsor-Essex. That said, the number of specialized supports for suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention recently implemented by WECSPC member organizations is encouraging. These include:

- Youth Wellness Hub Windsor-Essex
- Mental Health and Addictions Response Team
- Mobile Outreach and Support Team
- Mental Health and Police Teams (Windsor Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team [MCRRT]; Community Outreach and Response Teams in Windsor, Amherstburg, and LaSalle; Essex County Mental Health Response Unit; and Essex County MCRRT and Youth Crisis Response Team)
- Crisis and Mental Wellness Centre
- Mental Health and Addictions Urgent Care Centre
- Discharge transition partnerships between hospital systems and community mental health agencies
- Grief and bereavement support (e.g., webinars, groups)
- Workplace supports (e.g., specialized training, webinars)
- Education to support the mental health and resilience of first responders
- Post-secondary student support (UWindsor's [It Matters That You're Here campaign](#))

5. Training and Networks Strengthening and developing relationships to expand capacity.

Involvement in Roots of Hope has revitalized the WECSPC. The significant impact of the pandemic limited the capacity to engage with coalition work in 2020-22. We have now articulated and approved a new terms of reference document, which will support the creation of a steering committee and three working groups to facilitate collaborative action on locally developed initiatives. As we move forward, we are also looking to re-establish relationships with partner agencies, reach out to new partners, and develop relationships with community organizations that reflect the diversity of our community, which needs to be part of our planning and discussions.

Service gatekeeper training has been a long-standing priority for our community, and it will continue as our Roots of Hope implementation proceeds. To date, more than 1,600 members of the Windsor-Essex community have completed ASIST training (48 per cent work in health care, 15 per cent as first responders). Hundreds more community members have taken safeTALK and/or Suicide to Hope training. This capacity will continue to expand by means of a local safeTALK instructor who is able to train other trainers.



COMMUNITY IMPACT

Windsor-Essex County's Roots of Hope initiative could not have come at a better time. The program has led to valuable and timely conversations among WECSPC partners. Like most communities, we are seeing unprecedented increases in suicide ideation- and self-harm-related ED visits and hospitalizations. To address the issue, member organizations will need better communication and collaboration strategies to coordinate their resources and

reduce the number of individuals who reach the point where thoughts of suicide and suicide-related behaviours occur. As our community and organizations look to recover from the pandemic, aligning our activities with the Roots of Hope pillars is a concrete and approachable way to develop new activities and expand our past success.

COMMUNITY TESTIMONIALS

Since 2015-16, when our community first came together to mark Suicide Awareness Week, Suicide Awareness Month, and develop the WECSPC, the local public awareness campaign slogan has been #YouAreNotAlone. The goal to have no one feeling isolated when they experience a mental health concern or mental illness or suicide ideation, behaviours, completions, and bereavement. While this journey is imperfect and ever-evolving, it has impacted the lives of many community members with lived and living experience.

At community events throughout the years, we have sought feedback from participants in various forms. The following quotes, collected from survey responses at Suicide Awareness Month walks, provide a sense of what can happen when someone's isolation ends.

"I am the one who attempted suicide – I learned someone might actually care that I survived. I felt witnessed during the event and that my life had worth."

"It helped reduce for me how stigmatized I have felt by everyone in my life because strangers were there to support me and one another and all who suicide has touched. That was healing for me."

We will continue our work to dismantle stigma around mental health issues and suicide in the hope that all members of the community will one day be able to speak openly about them and support one another through such challenges. We will also continue to collaborate with community partners to develop the resources, services, and supports to promote and protect well-being.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Social Media handles (2022):

- #YouAreNotAlone
- #SuicideAwareness2022

Backbone organizations:

Canadian Mental Health Association Windsor-Essex County Branch

- Website: <https://windsoressex.cmha.ca/>
- Twitter : [@CMHAWECB](https://twitter.com/CMHAWECB)
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/CMHAWECB/>

Windsor-Essex County Health Unit

- <https://www.wechu.org/>
- Twitter : [@TheWECHU](https://twitter.com/TheWECHU)
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/TheWECHU/>

Windsor-Essex County Suicide Prevention Coalition website (planned for 2023)

Sample news coverage from WECSPC member activities:

- PHOTOS: [Annual Suicide Awareness Month Community Walk \(2022\)](#)
- [East Windsor hill officially named 'Hope Hill' with council approval](#)
- [Sign of help on Windsor's Riverfront hopes to steer people away from crisis](#)
- [UWindsor tells students 'it matters that you're here' with new year-round suicide prevention program](#)
- PHOTOS: [Suicide Prevention Awareness Walk Raises Awareness at St. Clair College \(2019\)](#)





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