



2024–27

# CMHO STRATEGIC PLAN

**Together for a Better Tomorrow**

Infants, Children, Youth & Families First

# Working Together for a Better Tomorrow

## *Message from the CEO*



I am excited to present CMHO's new strategic plan to guide our organization over the next three years. This plan represents the culmination of a comprehensive strategic planning process, which, using an equity-informed approach, included the engagement of youth and families, CMHO members, and key partners to ensure it reflects their diverse voices, needs, and priorities.

This plan builds on the incredible success we have had together over the past years in getting child and youth mental health on the agenda, leading to a historic funding increase of over 35% for community-based child and youth mental health. It is clear that when we come together with a compelling message across many strong partners to put infants, children, youth, and families first, much can be achieved. Building on this success, we know there remains much to do to advance a system of care that is easy to access, can deliver equitable, measurable outcomes for all, and is centred around the intersecting needs of infants, children, youth, and families.

This plan takes our reflections and learnings over the past few years and digs deeper to explore the challenges and understand the outstanding questions in child and youth mental health and addictions to determine our path forward. We heard from you that now is the time to think boldly and differently as we use this strategic plan to lay the foundations for the next ten years and beyond.

A cornerstone of this plan is a strong focus on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression, and Truth and Reconciliation. We recognize that an inclusive approach is essential for achieving equitable mental health and addictions services. Our strategy is designed to advocate with and for all those in our system, regardless of their background and intersecting needs, ensuring they have access to the mental health and addictions supports they need to thrive.

Partnership, adaptability, and responsiveness are at the core of this plan. We recognize that the landscape of mental health and addictions services is dynamic, with health system transformation underway. Our plan is structured to be flexible, allowing us to respond effectively to emerging challenges and pivot, when necessary, while never losing sight of our priority—Ontario's infants, children, youth, and families. This adaptability ensures that we can continuously provide high-quality and relevant support to our members and continue to advocate and raise youth and family voices.

This strategic plan is not just a roadmap; it is a commitment to our community. We are dedicated to working collaboratively with all partners to bring our vision to life, driving towards a brighter, healthier future for all infants, children, youth, and families.

Tatum Wilson  
Chief Executive Officer

# No Infant, Child, Youth, or Family Left Behind

## *Message from the Board Chair*



On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am honoured to share CMHO's new strategic plan, which will guide us over the next three years.

The mental health and addictions needs of infants, children, youth and families continue to rise across our province—in particular, the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized individuals, those from equity-deserving communities, as well as those with co-occurring and intersecting challenges. The pandemic was an unprecedented challenge for the province, and in many ways, children bore the brunt—whether because of lockdowns, school closures, isolation from friends and extended family, or cancelled and delayed treatments in the health system. It became even clearer that we need to look at these needs in a more integrated way.

Community child and youth mental health is a critical part of the broader children and health systems. We understand that young people and families come into services and treatment in a context of co-occurring, individual and unique needs that intersect with other settings and sectors. That is why it has never been more important to partner in a system of care approach, preventing fragmentation and siloes and collectively wrapping around the needs of infants, children, youth, and families.

This plan is not just a document but a testament to our dedication to advancing the mental health and well-being of all infants, children, youth, and families in our province.

The Board of Directors extends our heartfelt thanks to the team of visionary leaders and partners who are passionate about driving positive change and improved outcomes for Ontario's infants, children, youth, and families. Their expertise and commitment have been instrumental in achieving meaningful results over the past years and shaping a strategic plan that is both comprehensive and forward-thinking. We are confident that with their guidance, we will achieve our goals and make a lasting impact on the lives of those we serve.

Thank you for your continued support and partnership. Together, we will create a brighter future that provides the best possible start for Ontario's infants, children, youth and families.

Melanie Barwick, Ph.D. C.Psych.  
Board Chair

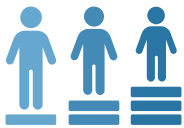
# Our Foundational Commitments

Children's Mental Health Ontario is dedicated to improving the mental health and addictions system for all infants, children, youth, and families by centering their voices in everything we do, delivering exceptional support to our members, and collaborating with partners across children and health and social service systems. We are committed to:



## **Centering the Voices of Children and Families**

We believe youth and family voices and meaningful partnership is central to all that we do. We will elevate the lived expertise of youth and families across the continuum of needs, from birth to young adulthood and across the province.



## **Advancing Equity, Anti-Racism, and Anti-Oppression**

We commit to advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion in our work and actions. We will actively seek to identify, acknowledge, and address the impacts of racism and oppression in child and youth mental health and addictions.



## **Honouring Truth and Reconciliation**

We honour the principles of truth and reconciliation and learning from Indigenous wisdom and expertise, in recognition of the historical and generational trauma caused by colonization. We acknowledge the need for Indigenous-led solutions and building meaningful relationships with Indigenous partners.



## **Addressing the Social Determinants of Health**

We recognize that mental health, addictions, and wellbeing are intersectional and are influenced by a range of social, economic, and environmental factors. We commit to bringing a social determinants of health lens to our work.

# Our Strategic Plan

Through an extensive engagement process that included surveys, interviews, and focus groups with youth, families, CMHO members, and partners, using an equity-informed approach, four key themes were clear that informed the development of this plan:



## **Increasing Needs, Acuity, and Complexity**

Recent data, trends, and reports from young people and families directly indicate that needs are becoming more complex and acute. The compounding impact of the pandemic, global events, social media, and smartphones means that demand for services continues to outpace availability.



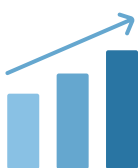
## **Long Wait Times and Barriers to Accessing Care, Especially for Equity-Deserving Communities**

Despite recent investments, we have much work to do to ensure that all infants, children, youth, and families, regardless of their race, gender, religion, language, orientation, ability, where they live, or the complexity of their needs, have timely access to high quality care.



## **Partnership and Systems of Care Approach is Essential**

To continue moving forward, partnership between members, youth, families, and system partners has never been more important to strengthen the community-based child and youth mental health system within a systems of care approach that prioritizes responding to the integrated needs of infants, children, youth, and families, while minimizing fragmentation and siloes.



## **Building on our Collective Strengths and Success**

Leveraging the lessons learned and successes of the past few years, we must continue to build our advocacy voice while further embedding youth and family partnerships and the principles of equity, anti-racism, and anti-oppression across all facets of our work.

# Our Vision & Mission

## VISION

An Ontario where infants, children, youth, and families with mental health needs thrive.

## MISSION

Ensure all infants, children, youth, and families get the mental health treatment they need within a high-performing system.

# Our Strategic Goals

**CHAMPION** a system that centers the needs of infants, children, youth, and families.

**COLLABORATE** to improve access, quality, and outcomes.

**PRIORITIZE EQUITY** and social justice across child and youth mental health and addictions.



# Strategic Goal #1: **Champion a system that centers the needs of infants, children, youth, and families.**

## WE WILL:

- ▶ Amplify advocacy and solutions that advance the important role of community child and youth mental health and addictions within a systems of care approach.
- ▶ Integrate and elevate the voices of children, youth, and families as a fundamental part of all advocacy endeavors.
- ▶ Explore and identify new advocacy approaches and partnerships with an explicit focus on equitable access, quality, and outcomes for Ontario's diverse populations and regions and those with co-occurring and intersecting needs.
- ▶ Empower local advocacy among members, youth, and families.

*“CMHO gets that the youth voice matters and that we can help shine a light on the issues and solutions.”*

*– Youth Advocate*

*“We’re in a period where we no longer need to explain what mental health is, but community services are yet not well understood. We need to build awareness around that and about the potential it has to meet many of the unmet needs.”*

*– CMHO Partner*

# Strategic Goal #2: Collaborate to improve access, quality, and outcomes.

## WE WILL:

- ▶ Collaborate with members, youth, families, and partners to address gaps and reduce barriers across children and health systems to improve access, quality, and outcomes for infants, children, youth, and families.
- ▶ Advocate and partner to advance system quality improvement, including standardized data collection and evaluation.
- ▶ Work with members and partners to explore and evaluate the potential benefits, challenges, and opportunities of sector integration and mergers to strengthen system efficiency, increase accessibility, and improve quality.
- ▶ Research alternative avenues for sustainable revenue to strengthen CMHO's capacity and programs.



*"I believe we need to engage in visionary planning with the children's service sector as a whole to engage families in early intervention and ensure services are available at the time of need and regardless of diagnosis or family structure."*

*– CMHO Member*



*"We need a system and actors in it who dare to be brave and challenge the status quo and improve the mental health system."*

*– CMHO Partner*



*"Finding a way to overcome all barriers is important so everyone has the opportunity to get timely and appropriate care."*

*– Family Advocate*



# Strategic Goal #3: **Prioritize equity and social justice across child and youth mental health and addictions.**

## WE WILL:

- ▶ Embed Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression, and Truth and Reconciliation principles throughout our organization.
- ▶ Drive forward Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Anti-Racism, and Anti-Oppression through thought-leadership and initiatives across the system.
- ▶ Collaborate with partners to address the social determinants of health and systemic barriers to access and services for equity-deserving communities.

*“We can’t serve young people in a vacuum—mental health is connected to all of the determinants of health.”*

*– CMHO Board Member*

*“I think we should continue to pursue coalition-building in order to be effective and provide sector leadership, for example with child welfare and special needs.”*

*– CMHO Member*

*“[We need to] focus on equity, inclusion, and diversity so all children, youth, and families have access to the services they need.”*

*– CMHO Member*

# What Progress Looks Like to Us

Infants, children, youth and families **more easily access the help they need**, when and where they need it.

**Equity-focused, anti-racism and anti-oppression approaches are advanced** within community child and youth mental health and addictions and within our organization, reflecting our commitment to transformative change and continuous improvement.

**Strong, collaborative partnerships with existing and new partners**, which enhance our capacity to drive change and amplify our impact through collective action.

**Youth and family voices and partnerships are further embedded** within CMHO's work, and across the sector at both the local and system level.

The community child and youth mental health and addiction sector is supported to **advance systems of care** approaches that prevent fragmentation and center the needs of infants, children, youth and families.

**A more streamlined and efficient system** that responds swiftly and effectively to the integrated needs of infants, children, youth and families.

# About CMHO

Children's Mental Health Ontario (CMHO) is the association representing Ontario's publicly funded and community-based child and youth mental health centers. Our 85 member organizations operate in every region of the province, providing treatment and support to infants, children, youth, and families. Services include targeted prevention, early intervention, short- and long-term counselling and therapy, addictions services, intensive services, and acute care.

With the combined strength of our members, partners, youth, and families, our primary goal is to promote a coordinated and high-performing system of care that puts infants, children, youth, and families first so that young people get the mental health supports they need to thrive.

Our provincial programs, Parents for Children's Mental Health (PCMH) and The New Mentality (TNM), elevate the voices and expertise of youth and families through family peer support and youth advocacy. PCMH offers monthly peer support groups, webinars, and resources to parents and caregivers of children with mental health challenges.

CMHO's youth engagement program, TNM, is a network of youth advocates and adult allies working to Disable the Label (which is also the name of our annual TNM Conference) of mental health and mental illness. TNM amplifies youth voices to create change within the mental health system through local leadership projects, affinity groups like the Gifts of our People and Rainbow Connections, and our provincial Youth Action Committee.