



FREE CALL-IN COUNSELLING

THE CHALLENGE

As the pandemic progresses, the demand for mental health and addictions supports is increasing. Many Canadians say their mental health is worse than before the COVID-19 pandemic ([CMHA/UBC, 2020](#)). To continue to support the community during this stressful and uncertain time, Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Halton Region Branch seamlessly transitioned our in-person free walk-in counselling service to telephone.

THE SOLUTION: FREE CALL-IN COUNSELLING

- The existing walk-in counselling service that had been provided four days a week transitioned to a phone-based, free call-in counselling service provided five days a week. Clients call in and leave a voicemail that is returned by a counsellor within 24 hours, Monday to Friday.
- Counsellors support clients with a wide range of concerns and vulnerabilities, including depression, anxiety, anger, grief and loss, life changes, relationships, self-esteem, alcohol and drug use, gambling, and anything else that may be affecting their lives.
 - They work with clients to help them understand their challenges, improve their coping strategies, and find community resources for more support.
- This service is for adults, seniors and youth aged 16+ and helps to:
 - Improve clients' wellness and coping abilities
 - Provide timely service by not requiring diagnosis, referral, or appointments with calls back within 24 business hours
 - Complement other supports clients are receiving
 - Meet clients' immediate needs while they are on waiting lists for other services
 - Provide financial accessibility – since the counselling is free, it is available to everyone regardless of ability to pay

FUNDED IN PART BY:



WHO IS THIS PROGRAM FOR?

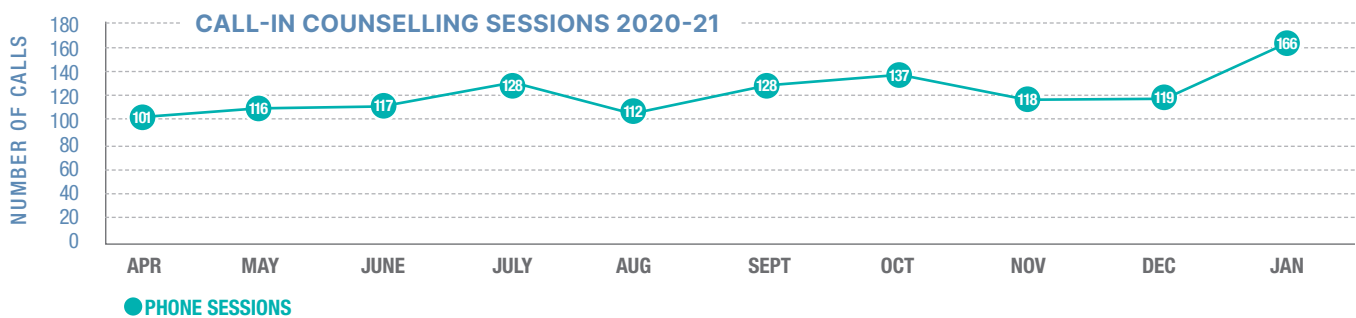
- Anyone aged 16+



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THE OUTCOME

- During the pandemic, the demand for the service has increased and the service has connected with a wide range of community members with diverse needs, some for the first time in their lives.
 - Many clients are calling due to the sudden shift in their lifestyle, such as loss or changes in their employment position, completing school or working online, isolation, lack or change of routine, and/or struggle to figure out how to cope in this new world.
- The call-in model has removed possible barriers to clients attending an in-person service, such as lack of transportation, mobility concerns, anxiety, and lack of childcare. With the expressed appreciation for clients able to talk from the comfort of their home, CMHA Halton Region Branch plans to offer both phone-based and in-person service on a longer-term basis.
- Since April 2020, when clients were asked about what they liked most about free call-in counselling:
 - **100 PER CENT** of callers said having the chance to talk
 - **83 PER CENT** said feeling better about myself
 - **72 PER CENT** said thinking about positive changes I can make
- When asked what they likely would have done if free call-in counselling wasn't available:
 - **56 PER CENT** said they'd have gotten worse
 - **44 PER CENT** said they'd have done nothing



TESTIMONIAL

“Twenty-three-year-old Rachel felt the impacts of the pandemic from the start. She lives with anxiety and depression, was very fearful of becoming ill, and experienced frequent panic attacks. Since her mother is an essential worker, Rachel had to live alone at the family cottage for the summer to prevent exposure to COVID-19. She reached out to our free call-in counselling program for support during this difficult time and was able to connect by phone no matter where she was. She is learning to cope with her anxiety and has also begun to attend virtual peer support groups to continue to improve her wellness.”