



Minding Our Bodies

physical activity for mental health

Issue No. 1

I N T R O D U C T I O N

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welcome to minding our bodies.

Minding Our Bodies is a new and exciting initiative designed to help people with mental illness become more physically active. Over the next year and a half, the Minding Our Bodies project team will develop and test new resources to help organizations create sustainable and evidence-based physical activity programs.

The Minding Our Bodies newsletter is here to communicate with all of our stakeholders in mental and physical health promotion. We want to keep you informed about our program and what it has to offer. This first issue introduces the project and the partners involved, explains our vision and why we think this project is important, lays out our next steps, and describes how you and your organization can participate.

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Our Partners

Minding Our Bodies is an initiative of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), Ontario, in partnership with YMCA Ontario and York University's Faculty of Health, with support from the Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion through the Communities in Action Fund.

Since the conception of the Minding Our Bodies project, there has been overwhelming support from health promotion stakeholders across the province.

In addition to our three main partners, an advisory committee has been formed to guide the project and oversee the development of the Minding Our Bodies toolkit and pilot programs. Members of the advisory committee represent a wide range of organizations who share an interest in promoting healthy lifestyles:

- Canadian Diabetes Association, Ontario
- CMHA, Champlain East Branch
- Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario
- Mood Disorders Association of Ontario
- Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (Physical Activity Resource Centre)
- Parks and Recreation Ontario
- Ontario Public Health Association (Heart Health Resource Centre)
- Schizophrenia Society of Ontario

Why Physical Activity for Mental Health?

Mental health and physical health are not related, right? Wrong! Research confirms what many people already know from their own experience: that the mind and body are closely connected. Studies focusing on the physical health of people with serious mental illness are finding that this population is at greater risk than the general population of developing chronic physical illnesses such as diabetes and heart disease.

Poor mental health can contribute to poor physical health in a variety of ways: people with mental illness are often more isolated and lack social supports. They

tend to lead a more sedentary lifestyle, smoke more, and eat a less healthy diet. In addition, some psychiatric medications can cause significant weight gain. Obesity is a significant risk factor for developing diabetes and heart disease, among other conditions.

Living a healthy lifestyle, which includes being physically active, can help people with mental illness to manage their chronic physical conditions and, in many cases, prevent chronic illnesses from occurring in the first place. Research also indicates that increased physical activity can have a positive impact on people's mental health. Physical activity has been reported to alleviate primary symptoms of depression and anxiety, as well as secondary symptoms such as low self-esteem and social withdrawal.

Although research clearly supports physical activity as part of a recovery plan for someone with a mental illness, few mental health organizations provide physical activity programs. At the same time, social exclusion, financial limitations, lack of transportation and other barriers may prevent people with mental illness from accessing resources in their community. Overcoming these gaps and barriers is what Minding Our Bodies is all about.

Minding Our Bodies supports ACTIVE2010, the provincial health promotion strategy designed to increase participation in sport and physical activity throughout Ontario. Its goals are to improve quality of life, reduce the incidence of chronic diseases associated with inactivity, and ultimately ease health care costs. ACTIVE2010 focuses on: creating opportunities for children and youth; Ontarians with lower incomes; ethnic minorities; women and girls; Aboriginal Ontarians; and older adults and Ontarians with a disability, including people with mental illnesses.



What Is Minding Our Bodies, Really?

The vision for Minding Our Bodies grew out of an identified need to make physical activity resources and programs more available and accessible to people with serious mental illnesses. We also recognize the need to increase awareness among health care providers and policy makers that physical activity is an important part of the recovery process for people with mental illness.

The goal of the Minding Our Bodies project is to increase capacity within the mental health system in Ontario to promote active living, create new opportunities for physical activity, and reduce barriers to inclusion in the community. To achieve our vision, we will be creating a toolkit and training program that builds on existing physical activity resources, encourages new partnerships among mental health service providers and community organizations, and promotes peer leadership development.

We understand that organizations need support to create evidence-based, sustainable programs that will encourage mental health consumers to become more physically active. Through our environmental scan, we have learned from organizations that already have a physical activity program for people with mental illness. Their experience is invaluable. We look forward to sharing those stories and the lessons learned, so that others will be inspired to create their own programs.

We've also been learning about what prevents an organization from starting a new program and what knowledge and resources are required to overcome those hurdles.

The core product of Minding Our Bodies will be a toolkit designed to help organizations create successful programs in their local communities. Resources will include:

- a business case for developing physical activity programs for people with mental health issues;
- a literature review that supports an evidence-based approach to planning and implementation;
- profiles of existing programs and lessons learned;



- up-to-date information on safety and liability issues;
- a website to support training and knowledge exchange among participating organizations.

What Minding Our Bodies will not provide is a one-size-fits-all physical activity program. It will support organizations to develop their own programs and take advantage of local community resources.

The Minding Our Bodies project will also include a six-month pilot phase in 2009. Three pilot sites will be chosen to help evaluate how well our toolkit supports organizations to create successful physical activity programs for people with mental illnesses. The results of these three trials will help us to improve the Minding Our Bodies toolkit to ensure that it meets the needs of mental health agencies and their community partners.

To launch the pilot phase, a training session is planned for April 15, 2009. This training session will familiarize participants with the toolkit and prepare staff for the planning, implementation and evaluation of their physical activity programs.

Following the pilot evaluations, the final toolkit will be launched in March 2010.

How to Get Involved

Minding Our Bodies needs your support and participation to help us develop the best possible resource. Whether you are a consumer or family member, mental health worker, health promotion specialist, trainer, or anyone else with an interest in physical activity and mental health, we want to hear from you. Your knowledge and personal experience are invaluable.

Here are a few ways for you to get involved in the Minding Our Bodies project:

- Visit our website at www.mindingourbodies.ca and complete the online survey. Tell us about your organization's physical activity program for people with mental illness, or tell us why you don't have a program. We want to learn about the opportunities and the obstacles.
- Interested in being one of our pilot sites? Use the sign-up form on our website to let us know you're interested and we'll keep you up-dated and in the loop. A formal Request for Proposals will be issued in January 2009.
- Let us know if you are interested in contributing resources or ideas to the Minding Our Bodies project. Contact our project manager (see below) and tell us how you can help.
- Sign up for the Minding Our Bodies newsletter. Visit the website and subscribe online.
- Spread the word about Minding Our Bodies. Encourage your colleagues to visit the website and subscribe to the newsletter.



Minding Our Bodies
Kendal Bradley, Project Manager
kbradley@ontario.chma.ca

Four good reasons to get involved

1. Minding Our Bodies will promote inclusion and support recovery
2. Minding Our Bodies will provide opportunities for peer leadership
3. Minding Our Bodies will build partnerships
4. Minding Our Bodies will be evidence-based

Dates to Keep in Mind!

January 5, 2009: Request for Proposals (RFP released)

February 6, 2009: RFP submission deadline

We will be choosing three organizations to be pilot sites. If you are interested in applying, visit our website at www.mindingourbodies.ca and sign up online to receive more information as it becomes available. Pilot sites will be announced in March 2009.

April 15, 2009: Spring Training Workshop

Topics will include:

- The connection between physical and mental health
- Physical activity primer (physical activity basics – how to get started)
- Delivering physical activity programs
- Program evaluation
- Networking
- Idea sharing

180 Dundas Street West, Suite 2301
Toronto ON M5G 1Z8
416.977.5580 x 4133

