

Election Toolkit

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Introduction

This election in June, **make schizophrenia and psychosis relevant.**

Every year, psychosis touches the lives of hundreds of thousands of Ontarians. About three out of every hundred people will experience an episode of psychosis in their lifetime, and about one in a hundred people will develop schizophrenia. Schizophrenia and psychosis can affect anyone, regardless of culture, race, socioeconomic status or gender.

Although individual experiences vary, generally symptoms of schizophrenia effect how one perceives reality, and how one thinks, feels and communicates. The impact of schizophrenia on various aspects of life extends beyond individuals to families, communities and society.

Ongoing access to a range and combination of treatments and supports is essential for people to live healthy lives. These include community-based services (e.g., psychosocial programs, peer supports and counselling); social supports (e.g., housing, income and employment supports); medical supports (e.g., medications and psychiatry); and informal supports (e.g., friends and family).

Yet our mental health and addictions system is in crisis. Lengthy wait times, fragmented and inadequate services, chronic underfunding and inaccessible treatments and supports means people and families affected by schizophrenia and psychosis are not getting the help they need.

Often it is stigma, barriers to accessing care and supports and a lack of accommodation which affect a person's health and quality of life, rather than a diagnosis or the presence of symptoms.

To ensure every Ontarian's right to access evidence-based health care, the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario (SSO) is calling on all parties to:

- Follow the recommendations of the Mental Health Commission of Canada and commit to investing 9% of the health care budget towards mental health and addictions.
- Ensure that this investment, and Health Accord funding, targets much-needed treatments and supports for people with schizophrenia and psychosis and their families.

In this election toolkit, you will find information on ways to effectively convey these "asks" to candidates and to help you spread the word about making schizophrenia and psychosis matter this election.

For more information visit: schizophrenia.on.ca

Sign SSO's petition [here](#)

Where the Parties Stand on Mental Health and Addictions

To date, two out of three of Ontario's main political parties have released their official election platforms. Here is some information about where each party stands on the issue of mental health and addictions.

Liberal

- Committed an additional \$2.1-billion to mental health and addictions care over the next four years and increased annual operational funding for mental health and addictions care to \$3.8-billion.
- This investment includes:
 - \$187 million for more hospital beds including new mental health beds.
 - Increasing access to publicly funded psychotherapy – to help more people across the province with anxiety and depression – and providing standardized training to primary care teams and community mental health and addictions agencies to provide this service.
 - \$425 million for creating 2,475 supportive housing units over four years including 525 newly built units for people with complex mental health and addictions needs.
 - \$570 million specifically for child and youth mental health services in Ontario including:
 - \$300 million to the new funding allocation model for child and youth mental health services.
 - Access to an additional mental health worker in every secondary school in Ontario, with about 400 new positions being added within two years
 - The creation of at least 15 additional youth wellness hubs over four years to improve access to services, fill critical service gaps for youth aged 12 to 25 and improve transitions to adult services.
 - \$116.6 million over 4 years for targeted support to help priority groups of children and youth including LGBTQ2S+, racialized, and Indigenous children and youth.

Ontario New Democratic Party

- Dedicated Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions.
- Fighting the opioid emergency.
- Hiring 2,200 new mental health care workers.
- 30,000 new supportive housing units.
- Investing \$590-million in child and youth mental health, cutting wait times to a 30-day max.
- Will establish the province's first universal Pharmacare program.

Ontario Progressive Conservative Party

- (New) Platform Plan not yet released.
- Committed to \$1.9 billion over the next decade to bolster mental health, addictions and housing supports across the province.

Meeting Your Local Candidates

The provincial election is set to be held on June 7, 2018. It's important to get out and meet your candidates, get to know their positions and educate them about schizophrenia and psychosis.

A face-to-face meeting gives you a chance to learn more about what your local candidates know about mental health and addictions and provides an opportunity for you to educate them about what's needed for people and families directly impacted by schizophrenia and psychosis.

Meeting with candidates also gives you the opportunity to get into more detail about local issues, and to reinforce key messages.

How to Meet with Your Candidates

Scheduling the meeting:

- Find out who your local candidate is. Once the election is officially called, this information can be found on Elections Ontario's website (www.elections.on.ca) under "Find my Candidate". You can also check individual party websites.
- Send your request for a meeting in writing, stating who you are and why you are requesting the meeting. You can send the written request by email.
- See the next page for a letter template that you can edit and personalize – note that sections that need to be tailored are bolded in purple font.
- A week or two after sending your letter, call the candidate's campaign office to follow up on making an appointment to meet.
- Confirm how long the meeting will be and plan an agenda for this amount of time.
- It is helpful to attend these meetings with others if possible – the broader the group the greater the impact – but it is best not to invite more than two or three people. Attendees should live in the candidate's electoral district/riding.
- If an individual with lived experience of schizophrenia or psychosis, or a family member or caregiver of someone with these health issues attends the meeting, it is helpful for them to share some of their personal story to highlight how some of the key issues have affected them if they are comfortable doing so.

Template Candidate Meeting Request Letter

DATE

Your Name
Your Address

NAME OF CANDIDATE
Address

Re: Meeting request from YOUR NAME / ORGANIZATION / GROUP

Dear _____ (First Name/Last Name),

I am/We are writing to request a meeting, at your convenience, to discuss my/our concerns about improving supports for the thousands of Ontarians affected by schizophrenia and psychosis. Enter a personal line – what makes this issue so important to you?

Characterized by symptoms affecting how one perceives reality, and how one thinks, feels and communicates, schizophrenia is one of the most severely stigmatized mental illnesses. But the reality is, people can – *and do* – get better. With the help of family and friends, social and peer supports, counselling and crisis services, and supportive housing – individuals living with schizophrenia and other psychotic illnesses can have every opportunity at leading healthy lives.

Currently, however, there are few schizophrenia- and psychosis-specific supports in Ontario, and for those services that do exist, waits can be as long as 55 days. Supportive housing wait lists can be several years long. Waiting can be detrimental for a person in need of care and can risk symptom relapse, repeat emergency room visits, contact with the criminal justice system, loss of motivation to seek care and possible loss of life through suicide.

I/We have recently signed a petition by the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario to urge the province to invest 9% of the health care budget in mental health and addictions and to ensure that this investment targets much-needed community treatments and supports for people with schizophrenia and psychosis.

I/We would like to share our recommendations with you for improving services for individuals and families affected by schizophrenia so they can get the mental health care they need when and where they need it.

I/We appreciate your consideration of this request, and look forward to a productive meeting. I/We will be in touch with you shortly to arrange a mutually convenient meeting date.

Sincerely,

Your Name

In advance of the meeting:

- Call the candidate's campaign office to confirm the date, time and who will be at the meeting, about three to five days before the meeting. If the appointment needs to be rescheduled, be friendly and polite as schedules may change due to other campaign work.
- Let the office know who will attend with you.
- Research the candidate. Find out about their background, and look for experience or connection to the mental health and addictions sector.
- Think about what your "key messages" are – these are the points that you want to make sure to get across. Write them down and bring them with you to the meeting so you can be reminded to repeat them often. You can use SSO's key messages, which can be found in Appendix 1 of this toolkit.
- Gather information on local data and statistics, particularly information that demonstrates poor access to services by people in your community. Some up-to-date information is included in Appendix 2 of this document.
- Develop a few "asks" related to mental health and addictions. Some suggestions:
 - Commit to increasing funding for mental health and addictions services in your community, including services for people and families directly impacted by schizophrenia and psychosis, such as early intervention, case management and Assertive Community Treatment and psychosocial programs.
 - Commit to increasing the number of supportive housing spaces in your community.
 - Commit to expanding access to programs which divert people with mental illness from the criminal justice system in your community.
 - Commit to getting to know local service providers and community organizations; and in doing so, understand the gaps and opportunities within your riding.

At the meeting:

- Arrive on time.
- Focus on discussion, not debate. Present your issues in a clear way, referring back to your key messages as much as possible.
- Be sure to discuss how schizophrenia, psychosis or other mental health issues directly affect you, your friends and your family. Personal stories make an impact.
- Give the candidate statistical facts such as one in three people will experience a psychotic episode in their lives, and one in 100 people live with schizophrenia.
- Listen carefully to the candidate's views, beliefs and values.
- Present your "asks" – what the candidate should commit to in this election campaign and how this would help address mental health and addictions in your community.
- Offer your assistance – ask "What can we do to help you to advance mental health and addictions issues impacting people and families affected by schizophrenia and psychosis and work towards these changes?"
- Leave enough time for discussion and questions.

What to leave behind:

- Prepare a package that includes SSO documents (including the key messages in Appendix 1), any information on local issues and your contact information.

After the meeting:

- Send a letter to the candidate, thanking them for meeting with you. Offer your expertise or assistance on the issue in the future.

Attend an All-Candidates Meeting

All-candidates meetings are events where political candidates come together to discuss election issues before a public audience. These meetings offer the local candidates and parties the opportunity to reinforce key messages and share positions on different issues. As a voter, an all-candidates meeting offers a chance to ask questions to your local candidates, and have them make a public commitment to your issues.

How to Find Your Local Events

Find out more through:

- Local candidate headquarters or offices
- Political party websites or riding association offices
- Local media
- Some community organizations

Asking Your Candidates a Question

All-candidates meetings or debates typically have set questions, it would be a good idea to ask the organizers ahead of time to include a question about what commitments the candidates will make to enhancing mental health. As well, there is often an opportunity for members of the public to ask their own questions. Here are some ideas for questions to ask at your local all-candidates meeting or debate about both provincial and local mental health and addictions issues:

Possible Questions

SSO has developed five priorities that we would like each political party to address:

1. Invest in community mental health and addictions supports that respond to the full range of needs for people with schizophrenia and psychosis (such as early intervention, psychotherapy and psychosocial supports, peer supports and specialized services and crisis supports), including extending the current support approved for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy to schizophrenia and psychosis.
2. Improve access to supportive housing across Ontario.
3. Increase Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates to help lift people out of poverty and adopt “Income Security: A Roadmap for Change” as a blueprint for reforming income security in Ontario.
4. Expand access to programs that divert people with mental illness from the criminal justice system.
5. Improve mental health care in correctional institutions by investing in transformation as outlined in the *Correctional Services and Reintegration Act, 2018* and ensuring timely implementation of its provisions, including ending segregation for people with mental illness.

Some sample questions you can ask that relate to these five priorities include:

Sample Question: “The Schizophrenia Society of Ontario is asking Ontario’s next government to **[state one of the six priorities that is most important to you]**. Will you commit today to move this recommendation forward both at the party level and in this community, and if so, what specifically will you do?”

Sample Question: “Mental health and addictions touch each and every person in this province. Will you commit today to being a champion for mental health and addictions within your party, and if so, what will you do to help ensure that this area is a priority?”

Sample Question: “There are currently huge disparities in access to mental health and addiction services for people with schizophrenia and psychosis across the province. In this community, people simply cannot get the services or supports they need, when they need them **[state a fact about your community]**. What will you do to ensure that a comprehensive core basket of services is available to all members of this community?”

Framing a Local Question

You may have concerns or suggestions about what needs to be done to address mental health and addictions in your local area. When posing a question at an all-candidates meeting on local issues, we offer the following suggestions:

- **Be specific.** A broad question such as “will you support mental health and addictions in this riding” invites a vague or high-level answer. Try to narrow down your question so that the candidate is forced to give you a more specific answer.
 - **Sample Question:** “Housing is critical to recovery for many. What would you do to address the need for more supportive housing in this community to help people with mental illness and/or addictions, including those with schizophrenia and psychosis, stay out of hospital and live in the community?”
- **Provide context.** Your local candidates may not be fully aware of the issues impacting people with mental illness or addictions in your riding. Before posing your questions, provide 1-2 sentences that explain the situation, so that the candidates understand the problem that they have to address. (Keep this short, however.)
 - **Sample Question:** “Access to services for people and families directly affected by schizophrenia and psychosis is poor, and is very unequal across Ontario. In this community, for example, a person with schizophrenia can wait over [X number of days] for counselling or [X number of days] for supportive housing.”
- **State the facts.** Facts and figures are a powerful way of demonstrating the severity of a problem. If you have a specific concern in your area, try to find some facts that will back it up. ConnexOntario has an e-services site for organizations which provides data on local wait times and availability of services – go to www.connexontario.ca for more information. More general facts on mental illness and addictions can be found by entering “mental health facts Ontario” or “addictions facts Ontario” into your internet search engine. For more information about

schizophrenia and psychosis, visit schizophrenia.on.ca. There is also information in Appendix 2 of this toolkit.

- **Sample Question:** “The average wait time for schizophrenia-specific services in the Waterloo Wellington Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) is 114 days. That is simply too long for someone to get the help they are looking for. What will you do to address this?”

Social Media

You may have Facebook friends and Twitter followers who you didn’t even know were affected by schizophrenia, psychosis or other mental health and/or addictions issues. Here are some simple things you can do to start engaging people:

Facebook

- Share information with your Facebook friends that schizophrenia and psychosis needs to be a priority for the next government, and that each party must take a stance on how they will make mental health and addictions an election issue.
- Do this regularly to keep the momentum going!
- Keep your posts short and to the point and use links to connect people to more in-depth information about the issue.

Learn how to set up a Facebook account [here](#).

Twitter

- Follow SSO @peace_of_minds
- Keep followers informed of events, or advocacy actions, as they happen.

Learn how to set up a Twitter account [here](#).

A tutorial on how to use Twitter can be found [here](#).

Instagram and Snapchat

- Let your followers see what you are up to by sharing photos and videos.
- Share pictures or videos with messages that tell people about your issue.
- Remind people about important events, like local all-candidates meetings.
- Select a group of recipients that you want to receive certain information.

Learn how to set up an Instagram account [here](#).

Learn how to set up a Snapchat account [here](#).

Appendix 1: SSO's Election Key Messages

About schizophrenia and psychosis

Every year, psychosis touches the lives of hundreds of thousands of Ontarians, with most first episodes occurring in adolescence or early adulthood. About three out of every hundred people will experience an episode of psychosis in their lifetime, and about one in a hundred people will develop schizophrenia.

Although individual experiences vary, generally symptoms of schizophrenia effect how one perceives reality, and how one thinks, feels and communicates. The impact of schizophrenia on various aspects of life extends beyond individuals to families, communities and society. Schizophrenia and other psychotic illnesses can affect anyone, irrespective of culture, race, socioeconomic status or gender.

There is help

Ongoing access to a range and combination of treatments and supports is essential for individuals to direct their own care. These include community-based services (e.g., psychosocial programs, peer supports and counselling); social supports (e.g., housing, income and employment supports); medical supports (e.g., medications and psychiatry); and informal supports (e.g., friends and family). Often it is stigma, barriers to accessing care and supports and a lack of accommodations which affect a person's health and quality of life, rather than a diagnosis or the presence of symptoms.

Ontarians living with schizophrenia are not getting the help they need.

The need

- Intervening early is key to treating psychosis, yet real and perceived stigma often prevent people from reaching out for help.
- People with schizophrenia continue to experience higher rates of death for all causes and die, on average, eight years earlier.
- The lifetime risk of suicide among people with schizophrenia is between four and 10 per cent.
- Ontario has less than half of the supportive housing stock it needs to meet current demand.
- People with mental health disabilities make up nearly half of ODSP clients, with psychoses, such as schizophrenia, accounting for 20% of these cases.
- The hospital readmission rate within 30 days is highest for schizophrenia or psychosis among mental illness or addictions, suggesting challenges to accessing appropriate community supports.
- People with mental illness come into contact with the criminal justice system at disproportionate rates than the general population; these individuals are also placed in segregation at disproportionate rates if incarcerated.

Recommendations

- Invest in community mental health supports that respond to the full range of needs for people with schizophrenia and psychosis including early intervention, psychotherapy and psychosocial supports, peer supports and specialized services and crisis supports.
- Extend the current support approved for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy to schizophrenia and psychosis.
- Improve access to supportive housing across Ontario.
- Increase Ontario Disability Support Program rates to help lift people out of poverty and adopt “Income Security: A Roadmap for Change” as a blueprint for reforming income security in Ontario.
- Expand access to programs which divert people with mental illness from the criminal justice system.
- Improve mental health care in correctional institutions by investing in transformation as outlined in Bill 6, *Correctional Services Transformation Act* and ensuring timely implementation of its provisions, including ending segregation for people with mental illness.

About SSO

SSO is Ontario’s largest charitable health organization that supports individuals, families, caregivers and communities affected by schizophrenia and psychosis across the province. Last year alone, through our programs and services, we served over 1800 people, including individuals, families and professionals from various sectors. We reached communities across Ontario and worked with community partners to improve policies affecting the people we serve.

Appendix 2: Key Points about Schizophrenia and Psychosis

- The total direct and indirect cost of mental illness to the Canadian economy is estimated at over \$50-billion, with schizophrenia accounting for the highest expense in terms of direct costs such as hospitalizations and medications.
- The early onset of schizophrenia and psychosis often disrupts the accomplishment of major life milestones, such as completing high school and pursuing post-secondary education, relationships and marriage, and entry into the labour force. The often episodic and recurrent nature of these conditions has the potential to cause further life disruptions and can exert a significant toll on the individuals, their families and the health care system.
- People with mental illness continue to face considerable barriers to full participation in society and make up nearly half of Ontario Disability Support Program clients, with psychoses, such as schizophrenia, accounting for about 20 per cent of these cases.
- According to ConnexOntario 2017 data, the average wait times for schizophrenia- and psychosis-specific services in Ontario is 55 days. In some LHINs, the average wait time for Assertive Community Treatment services can be more than three years. When someone in need of care waits to receive help they could risk symptom relapse, repeat emergency room visits, contact with the criminal justice system, loss of motivation to seek care and possible loss of life through suicide.
- It can take as long as seven years for people to access supportive housing, according to the 2016 Annual Report of the Auditor General. Short falls in supportive housing in Ontario are linked to higher service use, more hospitalizations, adverse health outcomes, more homelessness and lower life expectancy.
- The above-noted challenges experienced by individuals living with schizophrenia and psychosis are amplified further for newcomer populations, refugees, racialized communities, Aboriginal communities, and members of the LGBTQ2S+ community. While the experiences of these populations with schizophrenia and psychosis in Ontario are not well known, overall research shows that members from these communities experience increased barriers to accessing mental health services, are often misdiagnosed and discriminated against within the mental health system, and that the mental health system overall lacks diverse and culturally sensitive programs and services.