

# Ottawa Guiding Council for Mental Health and Addictions

## Introductory Statement

We know we can do better as a community. We can take better care of each other.

2021 was a call for action in our City. We were asked to deeply examine our responses to community members experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis. The starting point of our work was the convergence of a number of incidents and tragedies that magnified the weaknesses and gaps in our current Mental Health and Addictions systems, including responses to crisis situations, and recognized the need to place diversity, Indigeneity, race, and inclusion at the centre of this work. The key events included:

- Recent OPS interventions in incidents involving community members, particularly Indigenous and Black members with mental health issues, that resulted in injury or their deaths.
- Consistent chronic underfunding of mental health and addictions services and programs for over 40 years.
- A disproportionate and inappropriate reliance on police services to respond to the mental health and substance use crises.
- Chronic gaps in appropriate community-based programs, services and response strategies for Indigenous, Black and racialized community members and the absence of community engagement and ongoing involvement in the programs and services that are intended for them.
- The mobilization of the Black Lives Matter movement internationally that focused attention on the relationship between police and racialized communities, and locally the work of Justice for Abdi Coalition.
- A universal recognition that we can do better.

This communique is intended to provide you with a brief introduction to the Guiding Council for Mental Health and Addictions that is overseeing this initiative.

## Who makes up the Guiding Council?

The membership of the Guiding Council is made up of representation from Ottawa-based community, health and social service networks working to respond to mental health crises; and public institutions that have mandated responsibilities to respond to mental health and substance use crises.

<b>Current Membership:</b>
City of Ottawa
Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres
Kids Come First – Mental Health & Addictions
le Réseau de Soutien à l'immigration francophone de l'Est de l'Ontario (RSIFEO)
Ottawa Paramedic Service
Ottawa Police Service
Ottawa Public Health
The Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition
The Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership: Health and Well-being Sector Table
The Champlain Mental Health & Addictions Network
The Community Development Framework Coalition
Tier 1 Hospital Network

# What we have been doing

## 1. Establish the focus of the work

The Guiding Council created its Terms of Reference with a mandate to “Establish a strategy to support an enhanced or new Mental Health and Addiction crisis response system that will improve the outcomes for those experiencing crises related to mental health and substance use in the City of Ottawa.”

This work has been integrated into the City of Ottawa’s Community Safety and Well Being Plan.

## 2. Establish the structure for the work

- The Guiding Council met every 3 weeks in 2021, and every 2 weeks since January 2022
- Three co-chairs were selected
- The Secretariat's role was clarified
- Two Directors were hired to lead the project
- The Guiding Council's workplan was integrated with the City of Ottawa

## 3. Relationships and Communication

- Connected with other networks
- Received presentations by Ottawa stakeholders establishing new models of response
- A comprehensive communication strategy is under development

## 4. Establish the processes for the work

- Community engagement will start in April, 2022 based on a framework that acknowledges that different parts of our community can play a role in responding to mental health and substance use crises
- Research on the current call systems in operation in Ottawa (e.g. 911, 211)
- Research on alternative community-based models elsewhere
- Identify and implement potential pilot projects on alternative responses to crises

## 5. Build the body of knowledge

- Environmental scans
- Research results
- Community engagement results
- Data analysis that includes community members from equity groups



Graphic: City of Ottawa  
CSWB Plan

# Meet the two Directors



**Liz Wigfull, Secretariat Director**

Liz is an experienced leader in mental health stakeholder engagement, facilitation, training and knowledge mobilization. She is coming to us from the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) where she has held positions as Manager, Knowledge Exchange and more recently, Manager, Program Development for Mental Health First Aid and Opening Minds.

Liz's work at the MHCC has allowed her to work on a variety of population-based mental health projects including for youth, emerging adults, older adults, immigrants and refugees. Community and stakeholder engagement was a key part of this work. She was also responsible for the MHCC's SPARK Knowledge Translation Training Program targeting people with an interest in mental health including people with lived experience, family caregivers, researchers, policy-makers, clinicians, healthcare institutions and not-for-profit organizations, amongst others.

Liz is a Director on the Board of Options Bytown, a supportive housing provider that helps people move from homelessness into stable, permanent housing in Ottawa.

Liz's educational background includes a Bachelor of Arts in French and History from York University, a Bachelor of Education from the University of Ottawa and a Masters of Arts in Conflict Studies from Saint Paul University.



**Sahada Aolo, Community Engagement Director**

Sahada is the Manager of Community Engagement and Volunteers at Multifaith Housing Initiative working with different faith communities to promote affordable housing.

Sahada Aolo has spent her career working with organizations striving to create meaningful connections between diverse communities. She is the president of the Ottawa Muslim Women's Organization, an Executive Member of the African Canadian Association of Ottawa and a board member of the Snow Suit Fund. She is also the co-chair of the Community Equity Council of the Ottawa Police Service and serves on the City of Ottawa Anti-Racism Advisory Table. Sahada is the founder and president of the Northern Girl initiative, an organization that seeks to create and facilitate processes and opportunities for the empowerment of girls from the Northern Region of Ghana. The Initiative envisions a new generation of girls who are empowered to act as catalysts of change as evidenced in their well-being, in their communities, and in the country at large.

Sahada earned her Bachelor's degree from the University of Cape Coast in Ghana with a major in English language and comparative religious studies, a Master's degree in human service specializing in nonprofit management, and a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from Creighton University, U.S.A.

## Contact Us

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