

For Immediate Release

Calgarians can now book counselling the same way they book fast food orders and haircuts—Online at the right time through new Community Connect YYC tool

New online tool helps meet immediate mental health needs, makes it easy to access counselling and social supports within a week, and reduces the stress of asking for help

Calgary, Alberta: Calgarians in need can now book a counselling session within a week through the new online booking tool Community Connect YYC (www.communityconnectyyc.ca). Rather than calling multiple agencies, going on months long waitlists, and retelling traumatic stories to numerous intake lines, Community Connect YYC allows people to go online, select the right counselling session for themselves, and access support quickly. Currently, the website offers access to these services:

- Rapid Access Counselling: See a counsellor within 48 hours through Catholic Family Service (CFS)
- Suicide Bereavement: Individual or group counselling for those experiencing loss due to suicide, through the Canadian Mental Health Association – Calgary Region
- Family Support counselling for those supporting someone with a mental illness through the Canadian Mental Health Association – Calgary Region
- Counselling for children and families to support mental health: an initial appointment to create a counselling plan through YW Calgary
- Low-Income family supports: Initial consultation service to learn about available programs through CUPS
- Sexual health and counselling: Support related to sexuality, sexual health and healthy relationships including LGBTQ2S+ Youth through the Centre for Sexuality

Community Connect YYC Imagines a Better Way for Calgarians to Access Social Supports

The new tool reflects a significant shift in how Calgarians find and access counselling and other social supports. Community Connect YYC offers Calgarians a single location to find and book support. Importantly, each service has a specific focus and Calgarians' seeking support are able to choose the specialist they need. Getting the right support at the right time can make a significant difference in the duration and severity of mental health challenges. Community Connect YYC can also provide interim service for those wait-listed for other counselling and social support.

Offering Services for Calgarians Across Agencies

Community Connect YYC is a collaboration of an initial five agencies (Catholic Family Service, Canadian Mental Health Association – Calgary Region, Centre for Sexuality, CUPS, and YW Calgary). It grew from the collective desire to make counselling and other supports easy to access.

Jessica Williams, Co-CEO of Catholic Family Service, says the tool allows “people to explore available services and immediately book an appointment at a time that works for them – without needing to explain to anyone why they need help. In your darkest hour, the last thing you need is to jump through a bunch of hoops to get a counselling session.”

Building strong agency relationships is also part of improving access, says Robert Perry, Senior Director, Program and Service Assessment at CUPS. “Many times, people have several issues. They come in for a session on anxiety, and are getting evicted.” Addressing both issues may require inter-agency collaboration. Calgarians can use the site to connect with multiple supports, and agency partnerships behind the site may also help them to bridge between services, relieving stress from the person in need.

Allowing people to find support options from agencies specializing in sensitive areas, such as sexuality and suicide bereavement, is inclusive, says Talia Bell, Vice-President Programs and Services, YW Calgary. “There is a comfort in connecting with an agency that is expecting you—versus having to tell your story to a general intake line.”

An online tool also brings counselling delivery into alignment with modern-day expectations, says Pam Krause, CEO of the Centre for Sexuality. Online service is “super important to youth and is more responsive to the world we live in.”

Ensuring Calgarians can connect with support early in their experience of mental health challenges is crucial to prevent challenges from becoming difficult to manage, offers Sonya Quinlan-Jacob, Lead Counselling Therapist at the Canadian Mental Health Association – Calgary Region. “Supports that are easy and quick to access can help Calgarians stay in control of their mental health journey. Community Connect YYC is an important step toward better access.”

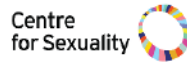
Collaboration and Funding

Community Connect YYC received funding from an anonymous donor, and from round one of *Change Can't Wait!*, a 2019 and 2020 City of Calgary funding program for projects that respond to mental health and addiction issues through early and/or targeted intervention. Learn more at www.calgary.ca/csps/cns/prevention-investment-framework-with-mental-health-and-addictions-lens-funding.html

A second round of funding was received from an anonymous donor, and from phase two of The City of Calgary's Emergency Resiliency Fund.

Early Interest...from Calgarians and Agencies

All five agencies have had bookings through Community Connect YYC since the soft launch on August 31. Community Connect YYC is an online booking tool, and for now, appointments are delivered virtually. Soon support will be offered in multiple ways, from in-person to online sessions, depending on each agency. Services and agencies available on the website are slated to increase as "two to three agencies a day reach out about Community Connect," Williams says.



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