

For Immediate Release

Calgarians book more than 1,000 social support appointments in 4 Months through online tool Community Connect YYC

As of January 2021, Community Connect YYC (www.CommunityConnectYYC.ca) has doubled agency participation (5 agencies offered services at launch on August 28: in January, 10 agencies participate), providing 16 social supports

Calgary, Alberta, January 6, 2021: Community Connect YYC, a one-stop website for Calgarians seeking social supports launched on August 28, 2020, has since resulted in more than 1,000 appointment bookings, twice as many participating agencies (from 5 at launch to 10 in January), and an offering of 16 social supports, including first languages counselling. Community Connect YYC was envisioned before the COVID-19 pandemic to reduce barriers to accessing social support for Calgarians, and the need has only grown.

As of January 2021, participating agencies include Catholic Family Service, Canadian Mental Health Association – Calgary Region, Centre for Sexuality, CUPS, YW Calgary, Hospice Calgary, Immigrant Services Calgary, Carya, Sagesse, and The Alex and social supports include:

- Rapid Access Counselling: connect to a counsellor within three business days
- Grief Supports: counselling for all types of grief and loss, including a loss to suicide, long-term illness, and support for children
- Family Support: counselling for those supporting someone with a mental illness
- Counselling for Children and Families: counselling and mental health supports for children and families
- Domestic Violence Support: individual and group supports for families impacted by domestic violence
- Sexual Health Counselling: support related to sexuality, sexual health, and healthy relationships, including LGBTQ2S+ youth
- Counselling for Immigrants and First Languages: general counselling for immigrant communities and those with first language needs
- Low-Income Family Supports: an initial consultation service for low-income families to learn more about available programs
- Rapid Access Addiction Medicine: support for those experiencing a challenge with substance use

Demand for Mental Health Support Dire Before COVID-19

Community Connect YYC was developed as a new model of service offering designed to reduce barriers to accessing social support. In 2018, 5.3 million Canadians age 12+ indicated that they

needed help with mental health—of those who sought help, 43.8% felt their needs were unmet or only partially met. Barriers included not knowing where to get help and unaffordability. (Source: Statistics Canada Mental health care needs, 2018 Health Fact Sheet published October 7, 2019, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-625-x/2019001/article/00011-eng.htm>). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the need for simplified, modern access to social supports.

Catholic Family Service's Co-CEO Jessica Cope Williams says, "The vision of Community Connect YYC has always been to help Calgarians connect with the social supports they need when they need it—day or night." Williams adds that this was a huge need before the pandemic, and "the need has only grown more essential, for people from all walks of life – and many of these people need help right now."

People expect modern-day access to services, including mental health support. Now Calgarians can go online, select the service that best meets their needs, and make an appointment, when it works for them, versus only being able to access help by calling or emailing an intake line and having to go back and forth in making an appointment. "The last thing you need when you are in crisis is a complicated path towards getting help," says Williams.

A Made in Calgary Solution: Calgarian-centric, Collaborative, and Funded in Calgary

The project was spearheaded by Catholic Family Service as a new model, centred on those in need, and capitalizing on collaboration between Calgary social support organizations. Funding for Community Connect YYC initially came from The City of Calgary's Change Can't Wait! Program, which is part of developing the City's Community Action on Mental Health and Addiction Strategy. The second round of funding was received from The City of Calgary's Emergency Resiliency Fund.

About Community Connect YYC:

Finding the right support in times of need can be a challenge. Community Connect YYC is a group of Calgary based agencies dedicated to supporting community members in accessing social service supports when they need it most and in the simplest way possible. Partners want to put access to their services in the community's hands through simple 24/7 direct online booking. Calgarians can book in with one of the agencies to access support as soon as possible. They can choose from a variety of available virtual appointments. Learn more:

www.communityconnectyyc.ca/#AboutUs

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