

Family Support Service Plan

Families play an important role in supporting the recovery process of their loved ones living with mental illness, and research has demonstrated that involving families in the treatment planning process leads to better care and improved outcomes.

Fraser Health recognizes the need to have a comprehensive and co-ordinated plan of action to address gaps in service with regards to family involvement, strengthening the role of family members, and having consistent family support services across the region. Nationally, the Mental Health Commission of Canada has also recognized the importance of supporting families as one of seven key goals for a transformed mental health system.

With this in mind, and over the coming months, a Mental Health and Addictions Family Support Service Plan Task Group, led by Len Polak, Specialist, Mental Health and Addictions Rehabilitation and Recovery Services will consult with a large number of stakeholders to help inform the development of a **Family Support Service Plan**.

The overarching goal of the Plan is to progressively transform mental health and addiction services to enhance the capacity of family members to participate effectively in the treatment process with their loved ones.

Background

Over the past few years, Fraser Health has consulted with family members in an attempt to understand and address their service and support needs. Some of the issues identified that families face when dealing with mental illness include:

- Difficult decisions about treatment, hospitalization, housing and contact with the family member experiencing the mental illness
- Anxiety of an uncertain future and the stress of what can be a severe and limiting disability
- Physical and emotional demands of care leading to burnout
- Fear that they caused the mental illness
- The cost of medication, time off work, and extra support, resulting in financial burden
- Both the care requirements and the stigma attached to mental illness often result in isolation of family members from the community and their social support network
- Training in coping skills as well as good communication, information and support reduces the level of crisis in families, as well as, reducing the relapse rate

Recommendations made by family members on how to enhance family support and involvement in services target two areas of need: **well resourced family services and a system-wide culture of family inclusiveness at all levels of service delivery in Fraser Health.**

The development of the Family Support Service Plan will build on the valuable contributions that family members, partner agencies and Fraser Health staff are already making to support the inclusion of family in the care their loved ones receive.

The Plan

The Task Group will develop a written action plan providing recommendations on:

1. How to enhance services to family members;
2. How services can become more comprehensive in scope, collaborative in generating solutions, and co-ordinated for consistency and implementation of services;
3. How to address gaps in service and service delivery;
4. Identify priority areas to focus on.

A comprehensive consultation process will further augment and inform the overall report with:

- A comprehensive mapping of existing family support services;
- Considerations on how to progressively address Ethno-Cultural aspects of family support;
- Identified significant service gaps;
- Draft strategies to address systemic practices related to family support;
- Strategies identified to improve family support services.

Informing the Plan

The success of developing a comprehensive meaningful Family Support Service Plan is dependent on the critical input of health care providers, family members and those living with mental illness.

Through a variety of mediums such as: focus groups, staff meetings, print and on-line surveys, the task group will consult with:

- Family members, and/or significant individuals in the life of the consumer
- A large cross section of Fraser Health Mental Health & Addictions staff
- Consumers
- Other service providers

Timelines

Consultation process (Jan. 2010 – June 2010)

Report completion date (Oct. 2010)

Findings presented (Nov. 2010 – Dec. 2010)

For more information please contact:

Clinical Lead - Len Polak, Mental Health and Addictions, Rehabilitation and Recovery Specialist at: Leonard.Polak@fraserhealth.ca or Anthony Neptune, Manager Mental Health and Addictions, Rehabilitation and Recovery Services at: Anthony.Neptune@fraserhealth.ca