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## Column Submission

### Interior Health marking Mental Health Awareness Week

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COVID-19 has impacted each of us in many ways. One of the areas that we are monitoring closely is mental health. Mental health affects all of us.

As we mark the 70<sup>th</sup> annual Mental Health Awareness Week I'd like to take this opportunity to recognize the toll that the ongoing pandemic is having on people's feelings of stress, loneliness, and anxiety.

After one year into this challenging pandemic, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health has reported about one in five Canadians is experiencing high levels of mental distress.

But hope is not lost.

While the pandemic initially impacted our ability to offer in-person counselling and other services, we quickly pivoted to provide counselling [virtually](#), with great feedback from participants and clinicians.

We are also making it easier to access services by launching the 310-MHSU phone number, which works across Interior Health and puts callers directly in touch with their local Mental Health and Substance Use centre.

We know that involving family members can make a big difference in supporting the well-being of clients. Guided by people with first-hand experience, we developed a new family involvement approach for clinicians based on respect, sharing information, and working together so that people can include their loved ones in their journey and access to care.

From prevention programs to intensive treatment and support, we are committed to strengthening care at all levels of the continuum.

That's why we continue to enhance mental health and substance use services throughout the Interior region. [Integrated treatment teams](#) are working to create multidisciplinary outreach for people who need flexible support that works for them; new [treatment beds](#) are coming this spring to serve youth experiencing substance use issues; and access to Opioid Agonist Treatment is expanding, with the [first cohort of Interior Health's nurse prescribers](#) for Suboxone having just completed training.

For many people, stigma related to mental illness continues to be a significant barrier to accessing help. This is why it is important to support efforts such as Mental Health Awareness Week's #GetReal

campaign, which encourages people to talk about how they feel, and to show support for each other through difficult times.

They say there is no health without mental health and I believe this is true. We need to end the stigma, and continue to improve access.

For more details regarding Mental Health & Substance Use services within Interior Health, visit [www.interiorhealth.ca](http://www.interiorhealth.ca).

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