



The Phoenix Sings



Photo: Toronto Star, August 18th, 2026

Wringing Hands

Nothing Says Care Quite Like Coercion

Ontario Mayors Urge Province to Expand
Involuntary Treatment for People who are
unhoused and People who Use Drugs



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OUR MISSION

AS A SPACE FOR DIALOGUE AND COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES, THE PHOENIX SINGS USES A COMMUNITY-JOURNALISM APPROACH BY AND FOR THE MAD AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE USER COMMUNITY.

WE BRING TOGETHER VOICES TO EXPLORE ART AND CULTURE, AS WELL AS THE LAWS, POLICIES, AND PRACTICES THAT SHAPE EXPERIENCES OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES.

THE EMPOWERMENT COUNCIL (EC) CONTINUES A TRADITION OF COMMUNITY-LED STORYTELLING THROUGH A HUMAN RIGHTS AND ADVOCACY LENS.

Follow Us



for more information:
contact lucy.costa@camh.ca





WE HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE **FORCED TREATMENT IS NOT A SOLUTION**

RESPONSE TO THE ONTARIO'S BIG CITY MAYORS "SOLVE THE CRISIS-REACTION TO RECOVERY" CAMPAIGN

On August 16th, 2026, [Ontario's Big City Mayors](#) (OBCM), representing 29 of Ontario's largest cities, launched the next phase of its [Solve the Crisis – Reaction to Recovery campaign](#) at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario conference. They are calling on the province to review the ***Mental Health Act and Health Care Consent Act***, potentially opening the door to **expanded forced and coercive treatment under the guise of “compassionate care”** for people who use drugs and people experiencing homelessness.

This is a step backwards. Mental health service users and druguser movements have **spent decades fighting for human rights protections** grounded in informed consent, bodily autonomy, self-determination and the right to make decisions about their own lives and care. Expanding the legal pathway towards forced treatment risks rolling back these hard-won protections, while Ontario **closes supervised consumption sites**, voluntary treatment has lengthy waitlists, homelessness is rising, and the **toxic drug supply** continues to take lives.

CAMH, CMHA Ontario and Addictions and Mental Health Ontario (AMHO) have urged the province to prioritize access to voluntary care, warning that involuntary treatment carries significant clinical, ethical and safety risks, and pointing out that people who want help are already waiting months to receive it. **Compassionate care** means investing in voluntary, evidence-based treatment, harm reduction, affordable and supportive housing, lowbarrier health care, outreach.



A Big Win for the Drug User Liberation Front

Safer Supply Programs across Canada: BC Supreme Court Ruling

“You should be very proud of yourselves. It’s people like you who make a difference. Go do great things; I have no doubt that you will.”

--Justice Catherine Murray

While Ontario’s Big City Mayors are pushing the province to consider more involuntary treatment, a B.C. court has moved in a very different direction.

On September 29th, 2026, B.C. Supreme Court Justice Catherine Murray ruled in favour of **Drug User Liberation Front (DULF)** co-founders **Eris Nyx and Jeremy Kalicum**, finding that criminalizing their community-led safer-supply initiative violated the *Charter* rights of people who use drugs. DULF’s **compassion club** tested and labelled heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine and sold them at cost to members, offering a known alternative to B.C.’s unpredictable and deadly toxic drug supply.

The Court found that DULF’s compassion club **reduced harms without negatively affecting community or public safety** and recognized the urgent need for access to non-medicalized safer supply.

At a moment when governments are debating more coercion and forced treatment, **the DULF decision offers another way forward**: trust people who use drugs, protect their Charter rights, and support community-led solutions.

- **To learn more:** <https://drugpolicy.ca/bc-supreme-court-finds-drug-law-unconstitutional-frees-dulf/>
- **Written judgement available** via the BC Supreme Court: <https://www.bccourts.ca/jdb-txt/sc/26/18/2026BCSC1855.htm>



Check out
DULF’s
website

Toronto Police to Decommission Vulnerable Persons Registry November 3rd 2026

On November 3, Toronto Police will shut down its **Vulnerable Persons Registry (VPR)**, a voluntary program that allowed people with disabilities, service users, caregivers, legal guardians and/or family members to share information that could help during police interactions — things like communication needs, medical conditions and de-escalation strategies. TPS points to low participation and newer digital options such as **RapidSOS**. But ending the registry doesn't end the need it was supposed to address. Disabled people and people experiencing mental distress still face risks, violence and death during police encounters, particularly Black, Indigenous and racialized community members.

Also introducing a **privately-owned data platform like RapidSOS** into a policing system with documented racial profiling, racism, ableism, sanism and violence raises questions that TPS needs to answer. **Advocates against surveillance technology in policing are concerned about RapidSOS** and have flagged how people who call 911 in crisis **have no way of knowing or controlling whether their personal information** is being shared with one of RapidSOS's many private partners, which include **Apple, Google, and Uber**.



Unaddressed concerns: the previous VPR “low uptake” process needs to be unpacked. A 2024 Ombudsman Toronto investigation found major problems with how TPS ran and communicated the registry, including poor promotion, gaps in training and accountability, and an incomplete review of privacy impacts.

So what happens now? Why was RapidSOS already implemented before any public discussion or consultation about what should replace the VPR and any TPS transparency about how the 2024 Ombudsman recommendations were implemented? Any replacement of the VPR should be followed by transparent and ethical engagement using Nothing About Us, Without Us principles: and it should be co-designed with the people most affected and address longstanding concerns about privacy, safety, surveillance, access and trust.

TOBACCO CLASS ACTION

lung cancer, certain throat cancers, severe emphysema...

ARE YOU ELIGIBLE ?

Information Session Coming in 2027

Tobacco Claims Canada: Could You Be Eligible?

The Empowerment Council is planning an **information session** about the [Tobacco Class Action Settlement – Pan-Canadian Claimants’ Compensation Plan \(PCC Plan\)](#).

You may be eligible for compensation if:

- you smoked cigarettes manufactured by one of Canada’s major tobacco companies for a minimum **12 pack-years** between **1950 and 1998**, *for example, one pack a day for 12 years or half a pack a day for 24 years
- and were **diagnosed between March 8, 2015 and March 8, 2019** with lung cancer, certain throat cancers, or severe emphysema/COPD (GOLD Grade III or IV).

The deadline to submit a PCC claim is September 3, 2027.

Interested in learning more? Reach out to Lucy Costa at lucy.costa@camh.ca

or join our **information-session RSVP [here](#)**.

**Eligibility
information
at:**

**Official
Tobacco
Claims Canada
website**

The Empowerment Council (EC) is exploring how AI is being used in health care and what patients need to know. We're especially interested in your questions, hopes, and concerns about AI.

Artificial Intelligence can be used in different ways , for example, to summarize medical notes, analyze health information, or support decisions about treatment and services.

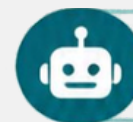
This raises some important questions:

- Is AI being used in my care, and will I be told when it is?
- What role does my health care provider have in reviewing decisions or recommendations made by AI?
- What information from my medical record is being shared with an AI system?
- Where is my health information stored, and who can access it?
- How is my information protected from being viewed, changed, or used by someone who should not have access to it?
- Is the AI system owned by the health care organization, or by a private company?
- What can I do if I think an AI system has made a mistake or contributed to unfair or discriminatory treatment?

About AI & Patient Rights

What should you be able to ask about AI in health care?

AI is increasingly being used to summarize medical notes, analyze health information, and support treatment and service decisions.



Is AI being used in my care?



Can a person review the decision?



What information is being shared?

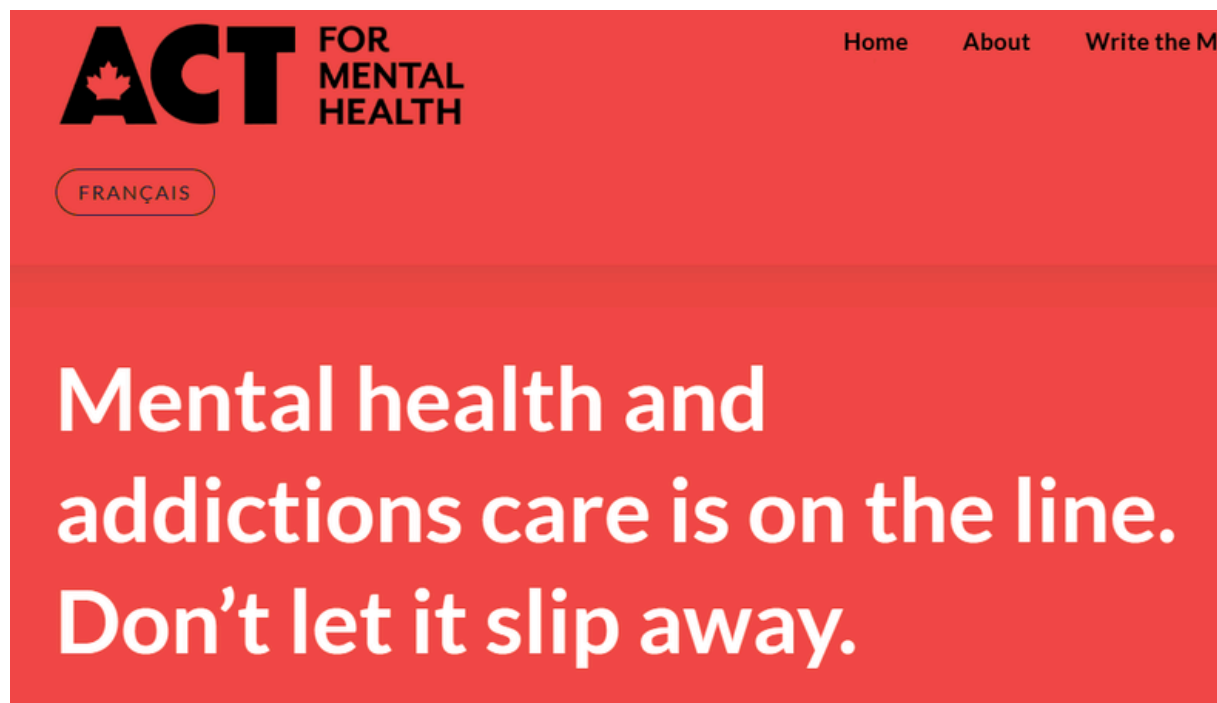


How is my information protected?

These are just a few of the many questions that people have about AI.

Reach out with any questions or concerns you may have and we will do our best to address them for you.

No Federal Funding Tran\$fer for Mental Health and Addiction?



OTTAWA — Health ministers from across the country say they're worried about “**profound and negative**” effects on patients and mental health-care jobs if federal funding agreements for mental health, addictions and home care are not renewed in this year's budget.

The ministers met in October 2026, along with their counterparts from finance departments, to talk about the **expected loss of \$1.2 billion in funding** next March. **Their next meeting will be October 15th in Winnipeg.**

Unhoused Persons, Encampments and Law

Waterloo Region V. Named Respondents & Persons Unknown

Online Discussion

October 23

1:00pm

Online

The Empowerment Council and the Mental Health Justice Clinic are pleased to host lawyer Mercedes Perez (Perez Procope Leinver LLP) for a discussion of *Waterloo Region V. Named Respondents and Persons Unknown*, the landmark ruling on the 100 Victoria Street encampment in Kitchener.

Register here

[https://us02web.zoom.us/
meeting/register/1Zwpcu2trij8sG9Z-
bcZ6u_vBaNXXwDgVwpVP](https://us02web.zoom.us/join/1Zwpcu2trij8sG9Z-bcZ6u_vBaNXXwDgVwpVP)





RIGHTS ARE GOOD FOR OUR MENTAL HEALTH

The Empowerment Council and The Health Justice Clinic presents:

Unhoused Persons, Encampments and Law
Waterloo Region V. Named Respondents & Persons
Unknown

Friday October 23rd
1:00PM - 2:00PM

Register here : https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/1Zwpcu2trjj8sG9Z-bcZ6u_vBaNXXwDgVwpVP



Human Rights Systems in Ontario

Friday, November 13th

12:00 PM - 1:00 PM

Register: [HERE](#)



Working with your lawyer

Friday, November 20th

12:00PM - 1:00 PM

Register: [HERE](#)

**Health Justice Clinic
in Mental Health
and Addictions**

The Empowerment Council in partnership with a Windsor Law Program provides support to CAMH clients through our Mental Health Justice Clinic. Areas of legal support focus on: refugee/immigration, housing and family law issues. This partnership also supports legal students learn about mental health law and how to work with clients with psychosocial disabilities.



The Symposium examined the growing role of Health Justice Partnerships (HJPs) at the intersection of legal and health systems. This Symposium asked: What does the expansion of HJPs in mental health and addiction settings reveal about the unique rights experiences of service users?



On August 18, the Mad Studies Hub organized a community collaboration workshop that brought together leaders from the Gerstein Centre, Working for Change, Across Boundaries, and the Empowerment Council with researchers at York University and peer leaders from CMHA to share experiences, identify needs, and explore how community-research partnerships can strengthen service delivery, evaluation, and funding for non-profits working in mental health and addictions.



In collaboration with Working for Change, Eviance, the Gerstein Centre, CERC – Health Equity & Community Wellbeing at TMU, and York University, the Empowerment Council participated in the Global Leadership Exchange promoting the longstanding leadership of people with psychosocial disabilities. This global leadership event challenged the marginalization of community-based models as mere “alternatives,” highlighting their expertise and established practices.



A delegation of physicians and lawyers from Japan stopped by to learn about the Empowerment Council and health justice partnerships in Toronto.

"EXTRA EXTRA"



- **Toronto Municipal Election**
- **Monday, October 26 from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.**
- Eligible voters can find where to vote by using [MyVote](#).



New to Canada ?

**Find Library Material in your language
at the [Toronto Public library](#).**



- **Rendezvous with Madness Film Festival**
- Tickets available beginning October 10, 2026 at 12PM (EDT). View schedule [here](#)



The BIPOC Student Guide to Accommodations

This guide supports Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students in accessing and navigating accommodations in post-secondary education.

The complete digital guide is free for students, and I am committed to keeping it that way. It is available at:

www.bipocstudentguide.com



IT IS WRITTEN

Once upon a time
in the land of Dread
There was a young man
With shadows in his head.
He turned to me, and told me his plight
And so we began a journey, towards the land of Light.
And when we arrived, what did we espy?
Carved into an old oak tree.
Words that were meant for you and I.

“When life is a mess,
what do you do, to pass this test.
Is it worth the risk,
to prove to yourself that you exist?”

And after seeing these words, the young man spoke.
As if he suddenly became awake.
“I now know what my purpose should be.
It’s to leave something
behind, for all to see.”
And when it was time to say Goodbye,
I finally noticed, there was hope, and a glint
in his eye.

The End



mark guttridge

COMMUNITY

How do we feel about what is real?
How do we decide which lane to ride in?
Do we yearn for more,
As we peek behind the door.
Can we open it, and see within?
As we absolve ourselves of sin.
Can we exist outside the norm?
Can we consider ourselves reborn?
The Consumer Survivor encompasses it all.
You've been through the system.
But you're no fool.
Having experienced abuse and forced treatment.
Your energy is spent,
Cleansing your psyche
Relying on your senses,
Stringently trying to remain free.
I observe the Circle,
Through various advisory Boards.
One, a non-clinical approach to crisis intervention.
Another to join managing the hoards,
Invested in Supportive Housing
While also espousing advocacy on behalf
Of the disabled.
Taking advantage of the dismissive attitude,
That is given to labels.
An overview of housing, crisis, and advocacy.
Allows me to see, engage,
And volunteer my time.
Within this community, that I have made mine

I Feel Welcomed



CLASS ACTION FOR ONTARIO CORRECTIONS LOCKDOWNS

CLAIMS PROCESS OPEN

**Deadline to submit a Claim is
December 1, 2026**

**Ontario Corrections Staffing-Related Lockdowns
Class Actions Settlement Statute-Barred Claim:**

Who: Incarcerated persons and immigration detainees who were legally unable to start a lawsuit due to a mental health or other health condition.

What: Experienced 16 or more staffing-related lockdowns.

When: Incarcerated between May 30, 2009, and August 14, 2014 (for inmates) or August 10, 2014 (for immigration detainees).



CALL FOR WRITERS

The Landlord and Tenant Board



Are you interested in issues affecting tenants with mental health and addiction challenges and their experiences at the **Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB)**?

We are seeking writers to explore the barriers tenants face at the Landlord and Tenant Tribunal, including challenges, gaps in existing processes, and potential solutions.

ARE YOU A TENANT IN RENT-GEARED-TO-INCOME HOUSING? DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO SHARE ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES NAVIGATING EVICTION?

Partner with us

Organise for change together



OUR FOCUS

The Empowerment Council work is rooted in the history and knowledge and activism of Mad, consumer/survivor, service-user, people with psychosocial disabilities, drugs user and peer support communities.



OUR PRIORITY AREAS

We work on issues affecting our communities through advocacy, policy change, service-user-led research, knowledge mobilization, community engagement and coalition building.



OUR COMMITMENT

At the heart of our work is a commitment to human rights, self-determination, health justice and ensuring that people most affected by decisions have a meaningful role in making them.

THANK YOU
TO ALL OUR CURRENT RESEARCH PARTNERS,
VOLUNTEERS & STUDENTS



PITCHING A NEWS STORY TO THE PHOENIX SINGS

by Maverick Smith

In journalism, 'pitching' a story refers to a short proposal sent to an editor or journalist to sell a story idea, aiming to spark interest for coverage.

To help everyone in the process of pitching stories and other material for the new newsletter, The Phoenix Sings, here are some questions that should be answered when deciding if your material is appropriate. Answering the following questions when pitching stories for Phoenix Sings should lead to researched and focused pieces that align with the mission of the newsletter. **Please see the mission of the newsletter.**

Knowing how to pitch a piece to this particular publication is also good practice for writing query letters for other publications.

- What is your proposed headline? What is the story about in a nutshell?
- Why is this story relevant to the readership of The Phoenix Sings (meaning the Mad and Service User community)?
- What section would this story fit in? The current sections in The Phoenix Sings are:
- 1) Law News, 2) About ART, 3) About AI 4) Announcements 5) City Happenings 6) "Extra Extra"
- What is the value of this story, meaning what is "new" about this information? For example, is this new information for the Mad and Service User community?
- What background research have you done on this story?
- What or who are the primary (first-hand) and secondary (second-hand) sources for your story?
- Are you ready to pitch this story, or do you need to do more research first?
- How much space, meaning word count, do you need for your story?
- What pictures, graphics, or video material does your story have or need?
- Is your story written in as plain language as possible so people can understand?

There is a lot going on for people across Canada (Turtle Island), and we would love to hear your stories and or, ideas , or art.





The naming of this zine is both a nod to the past as well as a powerful statement about the future of our community. Referencing the title of the Canadian magazine Phoenix Rising (1980-1990), the passion project of psychiatric survivor activists, this zine speaks to a different phase in the 'life of the Phoenix'. Many people think of the Phoenix in its triumphant flight out of the ashes of the scorched earth around it. However, the Phoenix is a story that exists in a never-ending cycle - growing out of the ashes of its ancestors. Often overlooked is the part of the myth where the Phoenix Sings out and stops the Sun in its tracks. This zine both grows out of the work of many Mad and Service User ancestors before us, and we hope its song will be a powerful force in our community today.