Supporting caregivers planning for when they are gone or no longer able to provide for the required supports

Background

The question of 'what will happen to the people we care for when we can no longer care for them?" has long been an issue of concern for families and other caregivers of people experiencing mental health and/or substance use challenges – and it's an issue of concern not only for families and other caregivers in Canada, but also for those in Australia. Mental Illness Caregivers Association (MICA) and Arafmi (the peak body for unpaid carers of people experiencing mental ill-health in Queensland, Australia) have embarked on a collaborative effort in order to map out and develop solutions aimed at addressing this pressing concern.

The path forward

A Caregiver Future Planning Pilot Project that explores how caregivers can be supported based on:

- A caregiver-focused approach supported by an organization with the mandate, authority, and resources to assist caregivers develop sustainable care, housing, legal, financial, and property management plans for those in their care. This would include access to resources that support a coordinated, collaborative and integrated approach to the implementation of caregiver plans when they are gone or no longer able to provide for the required supports.
- A pilot project in the Ottawa region supported by the Ministry of Health (and possibly – Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services and Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing).

Supporting rationale:

- Caregivers are often the only source of supports and without a plan in place now our most vulnerable are at risk of increased 911 calls, visits to ER, hospitalizations, substance abuse, isolation and loneliness, food insecurity, homelessness, contact with the law, arrest, and incarceration in the future. The challenges are significant: as the current mental illness caregiver community ages, it is becoming increasingly more urgent to plan for "when they are gone."
- When caregiver networks collapse, municipal systems frequently become the first point of contact bearing costs such as those associated with paramedic and police services, emergency shelter usage, supportive housing costs, public health expenditures and so on.
- Although healthcare is provincial, municipalities such as Ottawa absorb many of the consequences when caregiving arrangements collapse. A modest investment in supporting caregiver future planning efforts is a cost-effective way to provide for continuity of care while both improving long-term outcomes and, in many cases, preventing crises before they occur. Running a pilot will allow for the proper analysis of the cost and socio/health benefits, prior to any launch at the provincial level.

- **NEXT STEPS – CAREGIVER AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

CAREGIVER ENGAGEMENT

1. **A Workbook – A planning guide**

   - Continue development of a workbook in consultation with the caregiver community to be used as a guide in planning for the future needs of those they care for living with mental illness and/or substance use disorder – a range of supports that include emotional, practical, mental and physical health and for some legal, financial and housing supports.

2. **Outreach – Did we get it right?**

   - Share a progress report and a draft workbook with caregivers and others that provided a letter in support of the proposed 'caregiver future planning pilot project' for review and comment.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

3. **Host a Workshop – Setting things in motion**

   - The workshop will include establishing links with similar initiatives and involve participants from community organizations/agencies and others that share MICA's concerns regarding the need to support caregiver future planning efforts focused on ensuring those they care for have continued access to personal and community supports as well as safe and secure housing.

4. **Reporting**

   - MICA will prepare a report on what heard and learned along the way for review and comment by all concerned including recommendations regarding next steps to be submitted to the Ministry of Health.