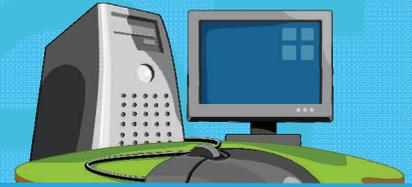


# Webinar Summaries



September 2017

Hearing from “the experts” through interactive, web-based events

## Promising and established practices for family caregiver engagement: Three perspectives on Family Support : Exploring the Family Matters Peer Support and Recovery Program

*The Family Caregiver Community of Interest hosted a three-part webinar series to identify and share promising and established practices for family caregiver engagement across Ontario. The following is a summary of “Exploring the Family Matters Peer Support and Recovery program,” presented by Becky Curran and Daniel Farb, Mood Disorders Association of Ontario, one component of the second webinar titled “Three Perspectives on Family support.”*

### What is the Family Matters program?

While family members and supporters are essential to the support team when addressing the needs of a loved one with mental health and addiction challenges, they often need services and supports themselves. The Mood Disorders Association of Ontario (MDAO) developed the Family Matters program, a comprehensive support program for family members and supporters who are experiencing the complex

challenges associated with providing care to those living with mood disorders and/or addictions.

Created in 2013, the [Family Matters Peer Support and Recovery Program](#) supports individuals 16 years and older who are struggling with a range of mental health and/or addiction issues and their family members and supporters.

## What types of services does the program include?

The Family Matters program offers family members and supporters the following services:

- Clinical support for family members with complex mental health and addiction needs;
- Structured recovery programs, such as the Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) for Families and From Chaos to Calm: Developing Stronger Boundaries;
- Family peer support groups;
- Educational resources;
- Psycho-educational programs; and
- System navigation support.

## What are the key components to putting this program in place?

Following a successful application for funding from the Toronto Central Local Health Integration Network, staff at the MDAO looked at current family supports in the Greater Toronto Area so the Family Matters program would complement existing supports and address gaps. They also developed a formal intake assessment process, which includes referral to other community resources or other services at MDAO. To raise awareness about the program, they also reached out to various community agencies and primary care practitioners. Throughout the implementation of the program, important collaborations included the [Sunnybrook Family Navigation project](#) and St. Michael's Hospital.

The philosophy of MDAO prioritizes family members' needs and the recovery journey, as well as having champions in the organization to advocate for support of family members. This approach has been critical to the success of the program's implementation.

## What are the challenges to implementing this program? How did the program address them?

### *Challenges in supporting the family as a whole*

Challenges include differences in willingness to seek help between supporters and their loved ones and concerns regarding privacy and confidentiality when both the family member/supporter and their loved one are clients. This can be addressed by requesting that individuals make their own appointments and by using separate counsellors. One gap in the Family Matters program is that it currently does not have any groups that the family members and their loved ones can attend together.

### *Challenges for family members and supporters*

The various demands facing family members and supporters, including the mental health status of a loved one, can impact attendance at group sessions. To address this, the program added more open-ended groups, counselling sessions by phone and video-conferencing, and evening hours. To help family members feel more comfortable talking to and supporting their loved ones, the program also provides crisis and safety planning, as well as resources on how to talk about suicide and how to hand off a loved one to a mental health professional.

## Next Steps

The Family Matters program will continue to provide support for families and supporters and is working to address challenges and build collaborations with other organizations who are doing similar work.

*Author:  
Alexandra Harrison*



**Watch the webinar here:**  
<http://eenet.ca/resource/three-perspectives-family-support-promising-and-established-practices-family-caregiver>

**Find out more about the Family Caregiver Community of Interest here:** [eenet.ca/initiative/family-caregiver-community-interest#about](http://eenet.ca/initiative/family-caregiver-community-interest#about)