FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**COVID-19 impact weighs more heavily on those living with mental illness**

*IAM broadens services, opening digital doors & live support line to anyone who needs support at this difficult time*

**TORONTO, May 7, 2020** – While many of us are grappling with the effects of social distancing on our own well-being, and mental health concerns are on the rise for many, we are now hearing of the much greater impact of COVID-19 on individuals living with or affected by mental illness.

Since the pandemic hit a few weeks ago, the Institute for Advancements in Mental Health (IAM) **saw calls to its mental health support line jump by 353%**, most of them related to COVID-19. IAM directly supports some of the most vulnerable people in our communities, and, striving to meet needs during the rising demands of the pandemic, took responsibility to further expand support options to help anyone struggling.

“IAM directly supports people impacted by mental illness, many with already fragile mental health even before the pandemic hit. We are now seeing COVID-19’s heavy impact on clients and families, especially as their usual means of support or connection is becoming suddenly unavailable,” says Kayla Nicholls, program manager, IAM. “Our counsellors are hearing that many are struggling to cope each day, especially due to heightened anxiety brought on by loss of support networks or vital activities. Many who care for others are calling in distress, feeling overburdened by the extra responsibilities and lack of respite that being shut-in during the pandemic brings,” she says.

“When COVID-19 hit, we stepped up to the plate right away to deliver uninterrupted services. We recognized that now, more than ever, continuity of care is critically important to the people we serve, and to many more who may not have another option right now,” says Mary Alberti, CEO, IAM. “We also wanted to be part of rallying a community pandemic response, and have partnered with others to make sure those who need help can access it as quickly as possible, opening our digital and telephone support doors,” she says.

IAM’s support line is staffed by a team of mental health counsellors who provide 1:1 care, system navigation, and resources for those living with or affected by mental illness. Whether you’re dealing with increased stress and anxiety due to the pandemic, other life event or are experiencing challenges related to a mental health or addictions issue, they are here to help. Reach out confidentially to one of IAM’s counsellors at **1-855-449-9949** or email IAM at [support@iamentalhealth.ca](mailto:support@iamentalhealth.ca) **.** The line is open from **9am to 5pm weekdays**, with **expanded hours until 7pm**, on **Tuesdays and Thursdays**.

Filling a critical service gap, IAM offers counselling services available to anyone, and has a live counsellor available when you call, getting people the help they need when they need it.

IAM is more than **70% donor funded** and like many charities, are drastically impacted in their operations by the pandemic. Yet since the pandemic hit in March, **demand for services has gone up exponentially.** At the same time, critical fundraisers the charity relies on to fund operations were either cancelled or moved to a virtual platform, impacting fundraising potential tremendously. The need is real, and we need support to keep going. Find out how you can support us at [www.iamentalhealth.ca](http://www.iamentalhealth.ca).

**About the Institute for Advancements in Mental Health**

The Institute for Advancements in Mental Health (IAM), formerly the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario, is a community mental health organization with a 40+ year history in mental health services. Inspired by what innovation can do in community mental health, we created IAM in 2020 to be agile and flexible in responding to the needs of those we serve. Putting people (not diagnosis or illness) first, we wanted IAM to help even more people impacted by mental illness, thereby expanding our service offerings beyond schizophrenia and psychosis while remaining a pillar of support to our clients. **We are also the home to Canada’s first community-based mental health innovation platform** where we co-create services to improve the quality of life for people who use them. With a bold vision to redesign society for better mental health and drawing on our vast experience in serious mental illness, IAM aims to change society’s relationship with mental illness.

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