

diversity is working

SPARC BC's *Diversity is Working* project provides seventeen (17) case studies of Lower Mainland organizations that have taken steps to make their workplaces more welcoming and inclusive for employees with diverse backgrounds. The purpose of the case studies is to celebrate successes in workplace diversity by highlighting best practices.

The set of case studies includes examples from organizations with small Human Resources departments to larger organizations with large Human Resources departments and designated diversity managers. The case studies are also drawn from a range of different sectors including businesses, non-profit organizations and government institutions. Some of the organizations being profiled have been implementing diversity and employment equity initiatives for decades while others have started to look at diversity in recent years. Because of the diverse range of organizations being profiled, there are relevant best practices for any organization that is working to make their workplace more welcoming and inclusive of people from diverse backgrounds. Refer to the adjacent diagram for a list of participating organizations.

The following pieces of information are provided in each organization's case study:

- diversity business case or mandate for diversity;
- diversity initiatives and results; and,
- advice for other organizations considering undertaking similar work.



Canadian Mental Health Association
British Columbia
Mental health for all

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) was founded in 1918 and is one of the oldest voluntary organizations in Canada. As a nation-wide voluntary organization, CMHA promotes the mental health of all and supports the resilience and recovery of people experiencing mental illness. The BC division of CMHA supports the work of nineteen (19) branches throughout the province.



Canada Mental Health Association (BC Division)

About Canada Mental Health Association

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) was founded in 1918 and is one of the oldest voluntary organizations in Canada. Each year, it provides direct service to more than 100,000 Canadians through the combined efforts of more than 10,000 volunteers and staff across Canada in over 135 communities.

As a nation-wide voluntary organization, the Canadian Mental Health Association promotes the mental health of all and supports the resilience and recovery of people experiencing mental illness. The CMHA accomplishes this mission through advocacy, education, research and analysis. The British Columbia Division headquarters is located in Vancouver and supports the work of 19 branches across the province.

CMHA's Diversity Mandate

CMHA is committed to ensuring that it is inclusive of the whole community and encouraging the entire community to participate and benefit from its services. Since 1989, CMHA has been working towards becoming more reflective of, and accessible to, the diverse cultural groups making up our communities. This organizational shift was initiated in response to recommendations put forth by the Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees. In its 1988 report, (After the Door Has Been Opened: Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees in Canada), the Task Force concluded that the current mental health system was largely inaccessible to diverse ethnic communities outside of the mainstream.¹

Because CMHA's mandate includes a commitment to being inclusive of all community members, this prompted the organization to look into this issue. In 1992, CMHA received a grant from Canadian Heritage to lead a national project across three (3) sites (including BC) around creating culturally inclusive organizations. As part of this, CMHA conducted a diversity assessment and produced a resource titled: Creating a Culturally Inclusive Organization: A Resource Action Guide.) While the funding ended after this project was completed in 2002, it became an impetus for change.

¹ Canadian Mental Health Association. (2002). *Creating a Culturally Inclusive Organization: A Resource Action Guide*. Accessed March 28th at http://www.marketingisland.com/mi/tmm/en/cataloguemanager/CMHA/CMHA_diversity_guide_EN.pdf



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According to CMHA, fostering a culturally inclusive organization and work environment is imperative if the organization is to be successful at serving increasingly diverse communities. CMHA staff and volunteers need to be able to reflect the communities that it serves, in order for the organization to understand how to connect with clients within diverse communities.

CMHA has also found that creating a welcoming and inclusive work environment that makes people from diverse backgrounds feel included is essential if you want to compete for the best talent in an increasingly diverse talent pool.

CMHA BC's Diversity Initiatives

As part of the Cross Cultural Mental Health Project, CMHA BC adopted a Multicultural and Anti-Racism Policy in 1998 (which was later updated to be CMHA BC's Intercultural/Anti-Racism policy in 2008). The policy includes the following statement:

The Canadian Mental Health Association, BC Division (CMHA) recognizes and values the diversity of the community we serve and the fundamental human rights of all people. CMHA is committed to ensuring that its mission and operations embrace the whole community. It actively encourages the entire community to participate and benefit fully from its services. CMHA acknowledges the barriers to employment, education, access to health and other social and economic opportunities. We are committed to working towards the elimination of these barriers.

As part of the Cross Cultural Mental Health Project, CMHA also developed a Diversity Lens to assist CMHA Branches and Divisions in removing barriers within the organization that may impede access and full participation of underserved groups within their communities. The Diversity Lens was developed to help Board members, staff, and volunteer coordinators to take a closer look at how they can effect change within the workplace and reach out to diverse communities.



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The Diversity Lens was designed to help identify systemic barriers in the workplace. Systemic barriers are defined as barriers that are typically invisible to those within the system. An example of a systemic barrier would be a lack of advertising about an organization's programs and services within a specific segment of the community, since not knowing that something exists prevents access. The Diversity Lens consists of a checklist and a framework. It can be used to both remove systemic barriers and develop more inclusive policy and procedures. It is focused on the following areas: Communications (access to information, language, visuals), policy and procedures, personnel procedures, and recruitment/evaluation.

In 2008, CMHA's BC Division formed a Diversity Committee to assess the organization's ongoing progress in meeting the Multiculturalism and Anti-Racism Policy established in 1998 and to support the ongoing application of the Diversity Lens to the BC Division's programs and policies. This group is regularly involved in reviewing and recommending changes to existing policy, recommending diversity training that is applicable to the Board, and assisting hiring committees.

Awareness Training

CMHA BC provides periodic diversity and inclusion awareness training to staff members and the Board of Directors. For example, the Board of Directors has a tradition of allocating one hour out of every board meeting for a diversity sensitivity exercise. These are short exercises that stimulate conversation. Some examples include asking board members:

- What are your traditions for celebrating major holidays during the winter season?
- Come with a picture of your family and friends from when you were young and explain it.

These exercises help the individuals and the team realize how much experience and culture they are bringing into board meetings.



At the staff level, CMHA BC holds an annual event that is focused on understanding culture that all staff participates in. The event varies each year. The last event was focused on understanding First Nations culture and what it means. CMHA invited a representative from the Aboriginal Friendship Centre to come and speak. CMHA reports that many staff members were quite surprised at how much they did not know about First Nations culture and history.

CMHA BC has also formed creative partnerships with different groups in order to better serve the needs of diverse communities. For example, CMHA BC formed a partnership with the Ismaili Council of BC where CMHA BC provided some mental health training to their organization and some other tools that can be shared within the Ismaili community. In addition, some individuals from the Ismaili Council of BC now volunteer with CMHA BC.

Similarly, CMHA BC has partnered with an Aboriginal Friendship Centre around the mental health of young Aboriginal families. CMHA BC worked with the Friendship Centre to share its expertise and leave it with the community, and to support the Aboriginal Friendship Centre's capacity to support its clientele.

CMHA BC's Results

As a result of CMHA BC looking at all of its policies and practices through the Diversity Lens, CMHA reports that there has been an increase in diversity within the composition of the staff and the Board of Directors. In addition, there is an overall heightened sensitivity of diversity and inclusion within the organization that positively impacts how CMHA designs policies, initiatives and approaches partnerships with other organizations.

Now that the Diversity Lens is well established within the BC Division Office, the best practices are permeating throughout the organization and are now influencing practices within CMHA's nineteen (19) branch offices throughout BC.



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CMHA BC's Advice for Other Organizations

When asked if CMHA has any advice for other organizations implementing similar initiatives, the following advice was provided:

- It is an ongoing learning process—it's being aware. A lot of times we do things out of good intentions and they aren't as useful as we hope. It is important to be open to feedback from other cultures. You just have to keep on going forward, and be open to hearing feedback.
- For the Board, one of the best things we did was the hour out for inclusivity. In the end, diversity and inclusion just has to get incorporated into what you do.
- Other organizations can access CMHA's Diversity Lens by referring to Creating a Culturally Inclusive Organization: A Resource Action Guide which can be accessed at http://www.marketingisland.com/mi/tmm/en/cataloguemanager/CMHA/CMHA_diversity_guide_EN.pdf

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