

Meeting Reminders

2023 Survey

Over the past 62 years, our annual meeting has changed a lot, and all of those changes have started with one key ingredient: quality member feedback. Please help us chart the future of the CSG East annual meeting by filling out this year's survey, available in your email inbox tomorrow morning or at this link: <https://tinyurl.com/2023CSGEastSurvey>

Thanks for attending!

These meetings aren't possible without your presence, your participation, and your perspectives. Thank you for joining us in Toronto this year. It has been our honor to work for you and with you, all made possible by our incredible hosts here in Ontario. Get home safe!



Stephanie Pasternak, Director of State Affairs for the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) reviews the current state of affairs on the mental health crisis in the United States.

Diagnosing the Future of Mental Health Care

"The demand for mental health care has never been higher," said Stephanie Pasternak, Director of State Affairs for the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). A sentiment echoed by Rebecca Shields, Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Mental Health Association, York Regional Branch. Shields went on to describe how hospital data has led Ontario to create treatment categories for the most prevalent mental health issues that we are seeing today. Categories that include: depression and anxiety, schizophrenia and psychosis, eating disorders, and substance use disorders. By following a stepped approach, each individual is treated and then monitored, with additional care being provided only for those who need it. "What would it take if someone came into our care and their first crisis was their last?" asked Shields. This is the question behind the new stepped approach in Ontario, and it seems to be working.

Across the border, Stephanie Pasternak described the recent launch of the '988' program throughout the United States. This national suicide emergency line is available to anyone who knows someone or is themselves suffering from a mental health crisis. She went on to explain that there are currently over 200 call centres nationwide and that individuals can call or text the number for support. Since its launch last year, the 988 helpline has experienced over 4 million callers. This important initiative aims to relieve the pressure on hospitals, specifically to eliminate the

'psychiatric boarding problem' whereby individuals are overburdening emergency rooms because of a lack of psychiatric beds. Despite its success, the 988 helpline still lacks funding and buy-in from individual State Legislatures. Thus far, Delaware is the only eastern State to have passed legislation to incorporate state-wide funding for the program.

"Combating stigma is an ongoing issue," says Pasternak. Representative Susan Johnson from Connecticut and Delegate Karen Toles from Maryland each explained some of the current efforts taking place in their respective States to lessen the stigma of mental health. Connecticut has begun coordinating special mental health first aid training for teachers to help recognize students who are struggling. "We are finally able to coordinate with our school system," said Rep. Johnson. Meanwhile, Del. Toles described the mental health court system that is being piloted in Maryland to help incarcerated individuals with mental health issues. "The criminal justice system is plagued with individuals with mental health challenges," she said. The mental health court provides a supervised treatment plan and aims to decrease individuals' contact with the penitentiary system.

Despite all of these initiatives, the panel was unanimous in agreeing that mental health care has a long way to go in supporting patients on both sides of the border.

MOMENTS



CSG East delegates visited the South Riverdale Community Health Centre yesterday afternoon as part of a health policy site visit. Delegates learned about the different models of safe injection sites currently in operation in the city of Toronto. Paula Tookey explained that the site works best when there is collaboration between patients, staff, and the community. Open house days help to demystify the space and go a long way towards ending the stigma of drug abuse, she said. Delegates got a chance to see the actual safe injection centre before the end of the visit.

State Leaders Advance New Policies for Military Families in Eastern Region

In launching Tuesday morning's Military and Veterans Affairs roundtable, Senator Sharon Carson, Presiding Chair and Majority Leader from New Hampshire, opened by emphasizing the importance of military families to her state. She made the point that they should not only be recognized for their public service contributions, but also for the depth of their skills and experience gained during their careers – experience, she stated, that would be extremely valuable in the state workforce. She elaborated that although the population of her state was relatively small at just over 1 million, there was a proportionally high representation of veterans (10%), making the need to develop appropriate programs and legislation to support them in a transition to civilian life highly relevant. "We need a workforce, we need to find them and work with them," she offered.

Chris Arnold, from the Defense-State Liaison Office of the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), followed, leading an overview of some of the jurisdictional challenges and opportunities between state and federal levels to develop and sustain better support mechanisms for military families and how to go about them.

"What do military families need to be resilient?", he asked session participants, pointing out that many such individuals coming into the community have been underserved. The need for a sense of belonging to a community – especially connection to other veterans, access to services such as healthcare and mental health support, and overall flexibility

were some of the important considerations that he suggested. Arnold also described some of the current challenges when it came to interstate licensing compacts – or the lack thereof – that often sees individuals fall between the cracks when moving from one jurisdiction to another. To mitigate this problem, he pointed to the DOD-CSG Cooperative Agreement supported by the Defense-State Liaison Office of the DOD and the compacts that are managed between state and federal jurisdictions to help create stability. "Compacts ensure economic stability, mobility, and agility for mobile military families," he emphasized.

Melissa Willette, New England Region Liaison at the DOD, provided an overview of how the issue of military interpersonal violence (IPV) had wide ranging implications not only within the military, but on a broader social level. By enacting best known methods to improve coordinated community response to domestic abuse and sexual assault, "state level policies can empower victims, deter offenders and create an environment for military families that is conducive to enhanced resilience and readiness," she offered.

Project Manager Stephanie Shaw of the Corrections and Reentry office at the CSG Justice Center provided a focus on concurrent juvenile jurisdiction. Her presentation outlined how states are working to remove barriers to the transfer or relinquishment of federal jurisdiction over juveniles on military installations, allowing states to address harmful behavior in state and local juvenile courts, using state

resources. She also indicated that it was critical to collaborate with other local services for best outcomes, stating that "the juvenile justice system cannot do it alone."

"Working to keeping youth in the community as opposed to being incarcerated is beneficial," she stated, "youth are still not appropriately matched to the right level of service and especially for youth of color – we need to continue improving."



Chris Arnold of the Defense-State Liaison Office at the U.S. Department of Defense addresses Tuesday morning's Military and Veterans Affairs session

States discuss regional strategies to address PFAS

In recent years, a growing number of states have established policies to address contamination from per- and polyfluorinated alkyl substances (PFAS), which have been used in the manufacture of thousands of products, including cookware, cosmetics, food packaging, carpets, and firefighting foams. There are thousands of different PFAS, some of which have been more widely used and studied than others. One common characteristic is that PFAS do not break down in the environment or in our bodies – hence the nickname "forever chemicals."

During a panel discussion on Tuesday, Maine State Representative Lori Gramlich described a situation that she called the "perfect storm." In November 2016, Fred Potter, a dairy farmer, learned that his water contained PFAS at levels that were two times higher than what the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency considered to be safe. Potter later learned that the PFAS contamination stemmed from the spreading of municipal sludge back in 1986. The PFAS levels were so alarming that Potter could no longer sell the milk produced by his dairy cows. He had to euthanize most of the herd. "And he and his family have been plagued with health problems ever since," said Gramlich.

During Gramlich's first term in the legislature in 2019, she learned about Potter's experience from a colleague who represented his district. Since then, Maine has become a leader in addressing PFAS contamination. Governor Janet Mills created a task force bringing together state agencies and other stakeholders to explore the extent of PFAS contamination in the state and create a plan to address it. Gramlich, who serves as House chair of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee, introduced several measures that have been enacted, including legislation that requires transparency from manufacturers who add PFAS to their products, and will compel them to phase out their use in Maine.

During the panel, Gramlich was joined by Rhode Island State Representative Terri Cortvriend, and Maryland State Senator Katie Fry Hester, who discussed efforts among them and their colleagues to assess the extent of PFAS contamination in drinking water, pesticides, and other products; remediate where possible; ban or phase out their use in a wide range of products; and promote safer alternatives.

Given the pervasiveness of PFAS contamination and

broad concerns about how to protect communities from harm, several members suggested that CSG East organize a regional summit in the coming months, to convene officials from all three branches with a range of experts to explore alternatives to PFAS and discuss best practices. CSG East looks forward to continuing this important conversation with our members going forward.



State Representative Lori Gramlich from Maine presents at the roundtable discussion on State Policies Governing PFAS.

Disruption Necessary for Meaningful Change

"There can be no decisions about us, without us," said Zulene Mayfield, founder of Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living. That motto summed up, in large part, the spirit of Tuesday's Council on Communities of Color meeting, which explored how state-level leaders can better serve and collaborate with communities of color.

Panel moderator, Delegate Joseline Peña-Melnyk of Maryland, opened with her personal story of her life path from the Dominican Republic to becoming a legislator, noting that her story is an American story; one that many people share. "There is a voice in legislatures across the country that represent communities that are struggling today and can talk from their personal experiences," Peña explained. Tommy Joshua Caison, Founder and CEO of North Philly Peace Park, provided insight as a community organizer and activist. Giving Philadelphia a D across the board, he said that the "Ds in Philly are displacement of peoples, Devaluing of community input, Devolution of civic society, Deferment of a dream, Destruction of the American fabric, and a dissolution of community wealth." Representative Enrique Sánchez of Rhode Island echoed that there is an attack on working class communities in urban centres across the country. The feeling of being priced out of one's community is a widespread feeling. Delegate Peña-Melnyk added that "when the majority communities get a cold, communities of color get pneumonia."

The panel conversation looked at how government could ameliorate the situation in low-income Black and brown communities. The consensus was that the affected communities needed to be involved

in the decision making process. The panel agreed that community members must be equal partners at the table and must be seen as equal in order to create a pathway to meaningful change. Joshua posits that the best models for addressing the issues in marginalized communities have been coming out of grass roots organizing. The policies that make the most direct community benefit are those that had politicians empowering a community-born proposal. Mayfield went on to explain that communities of color are the last to know about things and are left out of the process, but "if you don't give us a seat at the table, then we'll bring folding chair." Representative Rabb of Pennsylvania also highlighted a need to address the top-down hierarchical processes that currently exists, where decisionmakers are insulated from the strife affecting their regions' marginalized communities.

Joshua believes that 'transformative disruption' is simply a matter of giving power to people and empowering the folks who are taking civic responsibility to advocate for themselves. Rep. Rabb emphasized the need for civic literacy among all communities, but particularly in BIPOC communities. "Most constituents are not aware of the intricacies of the legislative process, if we allow ourselves to be transparent. Explain how government spending and the legislative process presently function, then policy makers can receive feedback on how to make the process more meaningful and transparent. Make sure stakeholders can influence the process and can feel a sense of connection, respect, and empowerment," Representative Rabb summarized.



Tommy Joshua Caison, Founder and CEO of North Philly Peace Park, discussing the importance of BIPOC community involvement in policy making processes.

Regional Leaders and Experts Explore New Ideas to Address Housing Crisis

"We weren't that popular 15-20 years ago, talking about affordable housing," said Jennifer Keesmaat, a Canadian urban planner and former chief city planner of Toronto from 2012-2017.

"Calling for a serious effort to build more affordable housing was considered progressive and relegated to the fringe of the political spectrum," she said. "But that has led us to exactly this moment today, when every community is talking about this issue and feeling the impacts."

Keesmaat, who now leads The Keesmaat Group, along with her team of city-building experts, has more than a little skin in the game. As a former planner, one-time candidate for mayor of Toronto, and now a major developer of new housing in the Greater Toronto Area, she has seen how the gap between housing supply and demand has sent prices skyrocketing, both here and around the continent. Moderating a Tuesday afternoon panel of Canadian and American housing experts for the 2023 CSG East annual meeting, she urged state and provincial leaders to consider not only "how we got here," but also that some solutions are beginning to emerge and that - when and where those ideas can be identified - "we need to do the things that work and do them at scale - to amplify and multiply" the best practices.

Kicking off the panel presentations, Ryan Fecteau - former speaker of the Maine House of Representatives - helped explain some of those ideas.

He highlighted efforts in Maine to create a state-level affordable housing tax credit, create a rural community rental program, and - perhaps most importantly - to enact zoning reforms that would allow for greater density, accessory dwelling units, and other new construction that could provide much-needed housing. Zoning reform, he said, was

especially important - something that he was proud to lead as a legislator and commended fellow attendees from Maine for continuing to improve and expand. He cited California, Oregon, and Vermont as other states also working at the forefront of the zoning reform movement.

But changing the permitting and zoning won't be enough on its own, said Jesse Helmer, who joined the panel from the Ontario-based Smart Prosperity Institute.

"We approved a 400-unit building downtown, but it's still vacant," he said, citing his hometown of London, Ontario, where he served two terms as a city councillor. "They have all the permissions, but nothing is there. Whether it's counter-cyclical public investment or something else, we need to find ways to actually have development and build in a smarter way."

Finally, adding vital perspective to the panel, Dr. Tim Aubry - a professor at the University of Ottawa - spoke about solving the crisis for the most vulnerable people in our societies - the chronically homeless.

Aubry said that point-in-time studies - recently resumed following the pandemic - showed an uptick in chronic homelessness. Those affected, he said, were the least likely to find housing and escape the cycle of homelessness without direct and long-term assistance.

"It's really a failure of social policy - and an equity issue too. The people who end up chronically homeless are disproportionately Black, Indigenous, and new immigrants," Aubry said.

But that doesn't mean we don't know how to fix it. Building on solutions being put to effective use in countries like Norway and Finland, Aubry cited a few key strategies for solving chronic homelessness.

These include laws establishing housing as a fundamental right, emergency supports to keep people in housing or rapidly rehouse them upon becoming homeless, and housing first - an approach that pairs immediate rehousing with support services.

"We do have evidence-based strategies and policies that can solve this problem, we just need the commitment to put them into place," he said.

That idea was echoed throughout the plenary session, and presenters stressed the importance of sharing these solutions across state and provincial lines as they continued to be tested and implemented locally.



Jennifer Keesmaat, Urban Planner, moderates a discussion on North America's Affordable Housing Crisis with Professor Tim Aubry, Senior Researcher at the University of Ottawa and co-chair of the Canadian Housing First Network alongside Ryan Fecteau, Senior Advisor of Community and Strategic Initiatives at the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future in Maine, and Mike Moffat, Assistant Professor in the Business, Economics and Public Policy group at Ivey Business School.



CSG's 62nd Annual Meeting and Regional Policy Forum came to an end with a closing dinner and entertainment provided by The Fox Duo and Red Sky Performance. CSG East Co-chairs Ted Arnott, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and Jamie West, Member of Provincial Parliament, Ontario gave remarks to thank all attendees for 'Seeing the Other Side' at this year's conference.