

EMPOWERMENT COUNCIL PRESENTS

Rights are Good for our Mental Health:

Scaling Up Health Justice Partnerships in Mental Health Settings



Friday, March 27th, 2026



9:30 AM – 2:00 PM



100 Stokes Street, 2nd floor Sacred Space



H O S T E D B Y :



Windsor Law
University of Windsor



Welcome!

The Symposium examines the growing role of Health Justice Partnerships (HJPs) at the intersection of legal and health systems. As these systems increasingly collide, this Symposium asks: **What does the expansion of HJPs in mental health and addiction settings reveal about the unique rights experiences of service users?** The Symposium will address this question through reflection and cross-sector collaboration, to build competencies that thoughtfully strengthen trust, facilitate the advancement of rights, and address structural injustices.

Pre-Event Survey

Thank you for taking a few minutes to complete this short survey before the symposium. Your anonymous responses, reported only in aggregate, will help us understand participants' experiences, perspectives, and goals for the event.



Program

Introduction | 9:30 am

The Symposium will open with an Invocation from Chantell Morais from Shkaabe Makwa, followed by opening remarks from CAMH Senior Policy Analyst Roslyn Shields and Dean Reem Bahdi (Windsor Law). The "Setting the Stage" session will frame the day with critical perspectives on Health Justice Partnership, featuring an Ontario example from Lucy Costa and a literature overview by Tess Sheldon that highlights key themes, tensions, and future directions.

Keynote Speaker | 10:10 am – 10:45 am

Health Justice Partnerships: Best Practices, Risks, and Opportunities in Mental Health Settings

Speaker: Amy Slotek

Facilitators: Magfoor Nafeel Ahmed, Mustafa Kashif, and Darius Jahanshahi

This keynote examines emerging models of HJPs, drawing on research and practice to explore both the promise and risks of integrating legal advocacy within mental health and addiction settings. It will also consider how these partnerships can be reimagined through trauma-informed, disability-justice, and community-led approaches.

- What are HJPs, and what problems are they trying to solve?
- What distinguishes MHJPs from HJPs in other health contexts?
- How common are MHJPs, and what structural, institutional, or funding barriers interfere with their uptake?
- How can MHJPs support broader social justice strategies?
- What does it mean to design MHJPs in ways that are trauma-informed and community-led?
- What role can students play in shaping the future of MHJPs?

PANEL 1 | 10:45 am – 11:30 am

Scaling Health Justice Partnerships: Comparative and International Perspectives

Panelists: Yael Cannon, Princess Doe, and Michele Leering

This panel brings together comparative perspectives to examine HJPs across jurisdictions. The discussion will also consider the risks that arise when growing HJPs in systems shaped by resource inequities and historical injustice.

- What does an ideal HJP look like in a mental health setting?
- How do HJPs work in practice? What makes them effective?
- What lessons emerge from international HJP models?
- How does applying a disability justice lens change how we design or evaluate HJPs?
- What risks arise when scaling HJPs in systems that have been shaped by structural injustice?
- What does "success" mean for a HJP in a mental health setting? Who defines success? What outcomes matter?

PANEL 2: | 11:30 am – 12:15 pm

Cross-Discipline Collaboration in Mental Health Justice Partnerships

Panelists: Dr. Patricia Cavanagh, Norma Hannant, and Dr. Siham Elkassem

This panel explores how health care providers collaborate with legal advocates in HJPs. It will examine interdisciplinary tensions around confidentiality, risk assessment, and reporting obligations. It will also consider how teams can foster meaningful collaboration without reproducing colonial or carceral dynamics.

- Where do clinicians' and lawyers' responsibilities align?
- How do you approach interprofessional advocacy under structural constraints?
- How can HJPs avoid reproducing surveillance and coercion in mental health and addiction systems?
- How do interdisciplinary teams navigate differing ethical and professional obligations?
- How do advocates navigate the ethical tensions of supporting clients within systems that both provide services and produce surveillance, exhaustion, or exclusion?
- How can MHJPs move beyond serving "vulnerable populations" toward challenging the structural conditions that produce vulnerability?
- What would it mean for interdisciplinary partnerships to play a role in transforming systems, rather than simply helping people navigate them?

PANEL 3 | 12:15pm – 1:00 pm

Building Partnerships of Trust in the Face of Structural Injustice

Panelists: Emily Hill, Jennie Stone, and Dr. Sheila Wildeman

This panel offers a critical conversation on building HJPs that centre racial justice, disability justice, Indigenous sovereignty, housing injustice and gendered marginalization. Panelists will examine how partnerships can build trust with communities historically (and ongoingly) harmed by legal and health systems.

- What role can HJPs play not only in addressing immediate legal needs but also in challenging the structural conditions that produce them?
- How do colonialism, anti-Indigenous racism, and poverty operate as social/structural determinants of mental health?
- How can MHJPs begin to build trust from the outset with people who have good reasons to distrust these institutions?
- What does meaningful trust-building look like in contexts shaped by resource scarcity?
- At what point does a partnership become transformative rather than transactional?
- How do we guard against lawyers becoming another arm of institutional control?

Closing Remarks & QA | 1:00 pm – 1:15 pm

The Symposium will conclude with closing remarks and group reflections on key themes from the day. The session will highlight next steps, including how HJPs can be evaluated and open the floor for discussion and questions.

Post-Event Survey

Thank you for participating in the symposium and completing this survey. Your anonymous responses, reported only in aggregate, help us assess the event's impact and how effectively it advanced learning and dialogue on Mental HJPs.



Meet Our Speakers

Speaker | Chantell Morais

Chantell Morais is Mohawk from Bay of Quinte and European, she sits with the Bear Clan and calls Toronto her current home. Chantell is the current Project Manager for Strategy and Planning at Shkaabe Makwa. She actively works towards advancing programs and projects that support First Nations, Inuit, and Metis mental health and wellness in health care and advocates for the inclusion of culture and community connections at every stage of life.

Speaker | Roslyn Shields

Roslyn Shields is a Senior Policy Advisor on the Strategy, Corporate Planning and Partnerships team at CAMH. In this role, she communicates evidence-informed public policy advice to stakeholders and policymakers through written and oral submissions to governments, policy frameworks, position papers and strategic relationship building. With a focus on mental health, criminal justice and the social determinants of health, Roslyn works in collaboration with internal and external partners to advance public policies that are responsive to the needs of people living with mental illness and substance use disorders. Roslyn has over 20 years of experience in the mental health field and has held a variety of roles at CAMH, including clinical management, community development, research and direct service. Roslyn has a M.A. in Community Psychology from Wilfrid Laurier University

Speaker | Dean Reem A. Bahdi

Reem Bahdi was appointed the Dean of Windsor Law on July 1, 2021. She joined the faculty in 2002 where her teaching and research has focused on access to justice in both Canada and Palestine. Dean Bahdi co-created and co-Directed KARAMAH, The Project on Judicial Independence and Human Dignity, a multi-million dollar initiative which aimed to support human dignity in Palestine through research, continuing judicial education and directed civil society engagement. She has served as the Editor-in-Chief of the Windsor Yearbook of Access to Justice and the Associate Dean of Windsor Law between 2012 and 2015. Reem was awarded the Hala Salam Maksoud Award at the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee National Convention. Her leadership was also recognized by The Canada Arab Business Council which presented Bahdi with its Outstanding Arab Canadian Achievement Award for contributions to the business and cultural fabric of Canada at its annual gala dinner, May 29, 2023. As well, she is the recipient of the 2017 Guthrie Medal for her research, teaching and advocacy in furtherance of access to justice in Ontario and was appointed a member of the Royal Society of Canada's College of New Scholars, Artists, and Scientists in 2015 for national research excellence. The Student Law Society at Windsor Law has bestowed the award for exemplary teaching and dedication to Windsor Law on her three times and the University of Windsor has recognized her research with five distinguished teaching awards. Professor Bahdi is the first Palestinian Law Professor in Canadian history and the first Palestinian Law Dean in North America.

Speaker | Lucy Costa

Lucy Costa, LL.M. is Deputy Executive Director of the Empowerment Council, an independent, service user-led rights organization based at CAMH in Toronto. A longstanding advocate for the rights of mental health service users and survivors, she promotes meaningful inclusion and critical engagement within the mental health sector. She has developed educational curricula for diverse stakeholders, including psychiatry residents at the University of Toronto, and has written extensively on mental health, ethics, and service user leadership. She is co-editor of *Madness, Violence and Power: A Critical Collection* (University of Toronto Press, 2019) and a special issue of the *Journal of Ethics and Mental Health* (2019). Lucy holds a Master of Laws (Research LL.M.) in Health Law and Advocacy from Osgoode Hall Law School, and a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) from York University. She has served as Board Vice Chair of Sound Times and as a Board Member of ARCH Disability Law Centre, reflecting her commitment to disability rights, governance, and legal advocacy.

Speaker | Dr. Tess Sheldon

Dr. Tess Sheldon, LL.B. PhD. is an Assistant Professor at the University of Windsor Faculty of Law. She practiced exclusively with Ontario's legal clinic system, including at ARCH Disability Law Centre and Justice for Children and Youth. Dr. Sheldon's research, including coercive medication administration practices in psychiatric settings, scrutinizes the role of law to protect and promote our communities' health. She explores the law's possibilities (and perils) to confront the regimes that reflect and reinforce economic and social exclusion, inclusive of persons with disabilities and consumers/survivors of the psychiatric system.

Keynote Speaker | Amy Slotek

Amy is a Staff Lawyer and Project Lead with Legal Aid Ontario who practices criminal and administrative law. For the past nine years, she has coordinated an initiative focused on meeting the interconnected legal needs of homeless accused who manage complex mental health disabilities in the downtown Toronto area. Ms. Slotek has over twenty years of experience working in the non-profit sector, both in Canada and internationally. In these roles, she has developed and facilitated training to law enforcement, lawyers and non-profit professionals on human rights and anti-discrimination law, trauma informed practice and disability rights.

Meet Our Panelists

PANEL 1 | Yael Cannon

Yael Cannon is a Professor of Law at Georgetown Law and Director of the Health Justice Alliance (HJA) Law Clinic, a medical-legal partnership training the next generation of leaders in law and medicine to remove legal barriers to health. The HJA Law Clinic brings together students and professionals in law and health to provide holistic civil legal advocacy to address the social and structural drivers of health for pediatric patient families living in poverty in Washington D.C. Professor Cannon is also the Associate Director of the Urban Institute–Georgetown Law Project on Health Equity, an interdisciplinary initiative to develop strategies for reducing racial and ethnic disparities in diagnosis and treatment, empowering medical institutions to address social determinants of health, and incorporating health into economic and environmental policy. Her research focuses on the role of law in promoting health equity and child and family well-being. She previously taught at University of New Mexico School of Law, served as Acting Director of the Disability Rights Law Clinic at the American University Washington College of Law, and practiced law in the Children’s Law Center’s medical-legal partnership in Washington, D.C.

PANEL 1 | Princess Doe

Princess Doe is a Toronto-based lawyer with a growing practice in public law, health policy, and governance, and has appeared before the Court of Appeal for Ontario, the Federal Court, the Ontario Divisional Court, and several administrative bodies, and is currently engaged in studies abroad. Prior to law, she worked as a social worker in community health with individuals affected by drug use and mental health disabilities. Her legal experience includes roles with the Health Justice Legal Clinic in Mental Health and Addictions, Canadian Centre for Housing Rights, Refugee Law Office, UNHCR, Windsor Law Centre for Cities, and the Ontario Human Rights Commission, where she contributed to systemic human rights cases and public interest inquiries. She currently serves as a Board Member for Street Health Community Nursing Foundation in Toronto, which provides health services to unhoused and precariously housed individuals in the downtown east-side of Toronto. She holds a JD and BSW from the University of Windsor and a certificate in public policy analysis from York University.

PANEL 1 | Michele Leering

Michele Leering (PhD, CM) is a Visiting Scholar at Queen’s University Faculty of Law and former Executive Director/Lawyer of Ontario’s Community Advocacy & Legal Centre. She practiced law conventionally and also led local participatory action research projects into poverty, homelessness, unmet legal needs and access to justice. She works to transform legal services to be more holistic and evidence-based to respond more effectively to the multi-faceted needs of marginalized communities. She promotes a wide diversity of approaches including early intervention and prevention, systemic advocacy, law reform, and community legal education – reflecting her passion for encouraging legal health, literacy, and empowerment. She believes in the power of trusted intermediaries – service providers, community helpers, and others – for reaching people who need legal help, and advocates for a people-centred justice ecosystem. She researched health justice partnerships (HJPs) in four countries as an access to justice and health equity intervention (Measuring What Matters), to supplement practitioner-based knowledge gleaned from CALC’s local work and Ontario’s HJP Community of Practice. She has worked with the Open Society Justice Initiative, Namati, International Legal Aid Group, and others internationally to share information about legal clinics as a vibrant model for meeting access to justice and legal empowerment needs. Her recent doctoral study explored integrative reflective practice as an essential professional competency and enabler of innovation and people-centred justice. She was inducted in 2022 as a member of the Order of Canada.

PANEL 2 | Patricia Cavanagh

Patricia Cavanagh completed her training in Psychiatry in 1996 at the University of Toronto, where she is an Assistant Professor. She served for several years as Medical Director for the Complex Care and Recovery program at CAMH. She provides psychiatric services at a number of community housing projects, and also works as a psychiatrist on the Downtown Central FACT (Flexible Assertive Community Treatment) team at CAMH. She has served in the past as the Director of Emergency Psychiatry at the University Health Network, and also launched their ACT program, IMPACT, in 1998. She has always worked with the homeless population, largely at the Women’s Residence shelter, Toronto’s largest women’s hostel. She was a founding member of the Inner City Health Associates, and previously chaired their Board.

PANEL 2 | Norma Hannant

Norma Hannant (she/her), MSW, RSW is a social worker at the New Beginnings Clinic within the Mood and Anxiety Services at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). She provides culturally sensitive, trauma-informed mental health interventions for refugees and immigrants, including brief counselling, linkage to community and settlement resources, and group-based support. Her work is grounded in evidence-based practices that address post-migration stressors—such as legal uncertainty, housing instability, and social isolation—as central to newcomer mental health. Norma has over 20 years of experience across hospital-based programs, community counselling agencies, and child and family services. Her practice focuses on supporting individuals and families affected by forced migration, trauma, and systemic barriers. In addition to her role at CAMH, Norma provides psychotherapy in the community as a Registered Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) provider, supporting refugee claimants navigating displacement, legal processes, and resettlement. She works closely with legal professionals, physicians, and settlement services, emphasizing the importance of integrated mental health–legal collaboration in supporting newcomers. Norma holds an Honours Bachelor's degree from the University of Waterloo, majoring in Spanish, and earned her Master of Social Work from the University of Toronto.

PANEL 2 | Dr. Siham Elkassem

Siham Elkassem is an Assistant Professor at the School of Social Work at the University of Windsor. Her teaching and scholarship are grounded in over a decade of direct social work practice and more than twenty years of community engagement and advocacy. This extensive experience informs her dynamic teaching approach, which integrates rigorous research, critical theory, and practice-based knowledge. Dr. Elkassem's work centers on advancing equity and social justice for racialized and equity-denied communities. She draws on critical race and anticolonial theorizing to examine structures of power, resistance, and transformation in social work practice and policy. Her research engages issues of minority stress and racial trauma, with particular attention to children and youth mental health. She is committed to promoting racial trauma-informed care and developing critical praxis approaches that bridge scholarship and community action. An advocate of community-based and participatory research, Dr. Elkassem collaborates closely with communities to co-produce knowledge that is responsive, ethical, and transformative. Her methodological expertise includes qualitative research approaches that foreground lived experience and voice. Passionate about teaching and mentorship, she is dedicated to cultivating the next generation of critically engaged social work professionals and scholars.

PANEL 3 | Emily Hill

Emily Hill is a Senior Staff Lawyer at Aboriginal Legal Services (ALS) in Toronto. Prior to that, she clerked at the Ontario Superior Court and worked as a legal aid staff lawyer in Whitehorse, Yukon. Since joining ALS in 2011, she has appeared at administrative hearings, Coroner's inquests, the Superior Court of Justice, the Ontario Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court of Canada. In 2021, Emily took a leave from ALS to work as Senior Commission Counsel with the Mass Casualty Commission, the joint public inquiry created to examine Canada's largest mass shooting which occurred in Nova Scotia in April 2020. Emily is a volunteer with Toronto Public Library Leading to Reading program. Since 2020 she has also been a member of the Board of the South Riverdale Community Health Centre.

PANEL 3 | Jennifer Stone

Jennifer Stone is the Executive Director of Neighbourhood Legal Services and Manager of the Health Justice Program, a partnership with St. Michael's Hospital's Academic Family Health Team (with advisory support from Aboriginal Legal Services, the HIV/AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario, and ARCH Disability Law Centre). She has extensive experience in administrative and social justice law, with a focus on immigration, income security, and housing. Her work centers on advancing equity in access to justice through trauma-informed and interdisciplinary approaches that bridge law and health. Jennifer is also an Adjunct Professor at the University of Toronto Faculty of Law, where she teaches Public Health Law and Policy in Canada and supervises a clinical placement. She is the co-editor of *Health-Harming Legal Needs: A Guide for Primary Care Clinicians in Canada*, a national resource for integrating legal advocacy into clinical care. Earlier in her career, she co-founded and co-directed the Hong Kong Refugee Advice Centre (now Justice Centre Hong Kong) and has published widely on access to justice, immigration, and international human rights.

PANEL 3 | Sheila Wildeman

Sheila Wildeman is Director of Dalhousie University's Health Justice Institute and Professor at Dalhousie's Schulich School of Law, where she teaches Administrative Law, Poverty Law, Public Health Law and Imprisonment Law. She is Co-Chair of East Coast Prison Justice Society, which hosts a community-based provincial jail oversight and prisoner support line. Her recent research focuses on disability-based isolation, exploring possibilities and limits of legal remedies for isolation in prison and health spaces (eg, Ch. 46 in Anita Szigeti et al, *Canadian Anthology on Mental Health and the Law* (2024)). Since 2020 Sheila has supported arts-based action research collective My Home My Rights to produce videos and an art show celebrating the intersectional justice insights of individuals who learn and communicate in ways described as intellectual disability.