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## Mood Walks Partnership Package



**CMHA (Canadian Mental Health Association) Ontario Division**

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## **Mood Walks for Wellness**

Access to nature has been proven to help with sleep, reduce stress, increase happiness, and promote positive social interactions. In 2013, Mood Walks was developed by the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario Division (CMHA Ontario), in partnership with Conservation Ontario and Hike Ontario in leading a province-wide, walking program designed to use the healing effects of nature to support mental and physical health.

Working closely with local partners like yourselves, we are committed to helping you deliver Mood Walks to promote positive mental health and well-being and encourage social interaction amongst members of your community. You can offer this program to clients already receiving services at your organization (closed registration) or open it up to community members at large (open registration).

This information guide is intended to help potential partners understand the application process, the requirements for being a host partner (roles and responsibilities), areas of program flexibility and what can be modified based on your organizational needs.

If you're interested in becoming a host partner, please reach out to the Mood Walks Provincial Program Coordinator at: [moodwalks@ontario.cmha.ca](mailto:moodwalks@ontario.cmha.ca).

We look forward to working with you!

## **Benefits for Participants**

Mood Walks offers participants aged 12 years and older the opportunity to improve their mental health with an evidence-based, low-barrier, physical activity program as an alternative or adjunct to traditional mental health interventions (CMHA 2022)<sup>1</sup>. Studies have shown that engaging in physical activity while spending time in nature can improve concentration, mood, and decrease stress levels. Walking groups are a valuable tool for mental health service providers, which can benefit clients, families, staff, organizations, and communities. Your knowledge of your community, resources, and expertise, alongside training on how to lead safe hikes and walks, can be a great benefit to participants.

Walking in nature provides participants a connection with nature and is associated with greater well-being. When somebody feels a connection with the natural world, the more they will report having a greater sense of happiness - more positive (and fewer negative) emotions, a

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<sup>1</sup> <https://cmhaontario.sharepoint.com/:b:/r/sites/MoodWalks/Shared%20Documents/Partnership%20with%20Dr.%20Lisa%20Nisbet%20-%20October%202022/2%20pager%20mood%20walks%20infographic%20Aug%203.pdf?csf=1&web=1&e=og0R0I>

greater sense of vitality, as well as more satisfaction with life. (Nisbet, 2020)<sup>2</sup>. “There is mounting evidence, from dozens of researchers, stating that nature has benefits for both physical and psychological human well-being,” says Lisa Nisbet, PhD, a psychologist at Trent University in Ontario, Canada, who studies connectedness to nature. “You can boost your mood just by walking in nature, even in urban nature.”

Research has also found that contact with nature is associated with increased happiness, subjective well-being, positive social interactions, and a sense of meaning and purpose in life, as well as a decrease in mental distress.<sup>3</sup>

Hiking is a fun, low-cost activity and green exercise has been shown both a preventative measure and an effective way to improve mental health outcomes for all involved. It is especially effective for those who are at risk of having challenges with their mental health. Green exercise alleviates symptoms of depression, anxiety, improves self-esteem and is a great way to maintain social connection. A study done by Stanford ([Bratman 2015](#)) found that time spent in nature has positive effects on mood, aspects of cognitive function, including working memory and lowering anxiety levels. Walking has also been found to have positive effects on health and can help us live longer. A study done by Women’s Hospital in Boston and Harvard Medical School ([Lee, Shiroma, Kamada 2019](#)) found that by taking 7,500 steps per day lowers mortality rate by up to 4.3 years longer.

## Benefits of Walking Groups

While walking in nature can be beneficial, walking in groups is beneficial to build life skills, develop a sense of self-efficacy, and a great way to foster positive mental health. Group activities, such as hiking clubs, promotes social interactions and provides opportunities for peer support. A study published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine ([2015](#)), was designed to assess the physical and mental benefits of outdoor walking groups. This systematic review analyzed 42 other studies, involving 1,843 participants in 14 countries. Results showed that walking in the company of others, manifested positive changes in blood pressure and heart health.

Walking in groups challenges participants, learning strategies to maintaining health, accountable for others and enjoyed being engrossed in conversation. According to scientists from Anglia Ruskin University ([Meads and Exley 2018](#)), “Walking in groups increased life satisfaction and improved social connectedness.” People were more likely to stick to exercise goals if they walk in groups, which lead to a better quality of life.

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<sup>2</sup> Review of the benefits of connection with nature (Capaldi, C.A., et al., [International Journal of Wellbeing](#), Vol. 5, No. 4, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> ([Science Advances](#), Vol. 5, No. 7, 2019)



## Benefits for Host Partners

Along with the health benefits of participating in the program, Mood Walks' team members benefit from the breadth of programs being offered.

This includes:

- Increasing staff knowledge around the availability and health benefits of local trails, conservations, parks and green spaces.
- Learning practices for safe hikes/walks through Hike Ontario training.
- Improving the mental health of participants and staff.
- Supporting a health-oriented workplace culture.
- Providing staff with a new way to connect with clients.
- Creating new program model and programs for community populations, such as those in underserved communities, older adults, new Canadians, youth, and Indigenous populations.

## Support from the Provincial Program Coordinator

CMHA Ontario will provide participating host partners with guidance and support on engaging your community, connecting with partners who offer walks, connecting to local conservation areas through Conservation Ontario, connecting with Hike Ontario for safe hike/walk training, and keeping you apprised of new resources.

Other types of support may include:

- Sharing experience of working with new and diverse groups.
- Knowledge of mental health services and supports available in your community.
- Information about upcoming workshops or events that may be of interest to you.
- Staying connected with Mood Walks partners across Ontario through quarterly Community of Practice meetings.
- Access to resources, marketing tools, and curriculum.

The Provincial Program Coordinator is available to address any concerns, questions, or feedback you have about being part of the Mood Walks program.

## Requirements of Host Partners

Participating organizations are expected to enter into an agreement with the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario Division, Mood Walks program. Your organization must adhere to the agreed upon conditions to support program outcomes.

1. **Applications for Potential Partners:** For mental health organizations wishing to facilitate the program, you must complete an application and submit it to CMHA Ontario for

approval. The Mood Walks application process opens two times per year; if you wish to be placed on our waitlist, please contact our Provincial Program Coordinator.

2. **MOU:** Host partners need to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), initiating an agreement with CMHA Ontario before starting a local Mood Walks program. If the host partner is not a CMHA branch, there must be written consent from the local branch stating that they grant permission to the host partner to facilitate Mood Walks within their region.
3. **Public Health Measures:** For the health and safety of our participants, volunteers, students, Mood Walks leaders, and any other affiliates, you must follow local public health safety measures, including local laws, based on the best advice and recommendations received from public health experts.
4. **Orientation, Hike Ontario training and CPR certification:** Each host partner must have two staff members or volunteers who will be responsible for facilitating walks. All leaders need to be trained by Hike Ontario and at least one of them must be CPR certified (proof is required). For Hike Ontario training, host partners can choose one of the following: *Certified Hike Leadership Training* (consisting of three sessions, two hours each), or *Introduction to Hiking* (two hours). The host partner is responsible for the hike training cost which varies from \$10-\$65. Mood Walks leaders are also expected to complete the orientation session (free, three-hour training) before the start of their Mood Walks series. All training is coordinated by CMHA Ontario, except for CPR.
5. **Group Duration:** Each host partner is expected to host at least one walk series per year. Group walks are facilitated once per week and the length of the series is entirely at the discretion of the host partner, choosing anywhere from four to twelve consecutive weeks. There is a curriculum outline on how to conduct a walk program, complete with activities for each session.
6. **Introduction session:** Participants are provided information about what to expect from your Mood Walks groups before committing to join. An introductory session is recommended to help recruit participants and screen readiness to engage in physical activity. A sample introduction session can include icebreakers and activities, information about your walking groups, and health screenings (e.g. PAR-Q) and other documentation required to ensure the safety of the participants in the walking group.
7. **Orientation and goal setting:** Once participants are committed to being part of a group, an orientation session will allow you to get to know your participants' goals and needs. This will provide detailed information, including goal setting, reviewing group rules, norms, and weekly tracking attendance, completing the pre-program questionnaire, and signing waivers and forms.
8. **Evaluating groups:** CMHA Ontario has a set of evaluation tools and is a requirement of the host partner on an ongoing basis. This includes a post facilitation report completed

9. by the facilitator and pre-series walk surveys and post-series walk evaluations completed by the participants. Host partners are required to collect data and provide an accumulated report to CMHA Ontario on a quarterly basis (March, June, September, and December). Reporting on the number of active Mood Walks leaders (including contact information), number of Mood Walks groups held, and number of participants. The collection of data is intended to help with continuous improvement of programming, provide equitable access to mental health support, and demonstrate the benefits to funders.

## Responsibilities of Host Partners

1. **Planning your groups:** It's important to be observant of your participant's physical needs (e.g., physical abilities, older adults, youth) when planning Mood Walks' groups, along with frequency, accessible location, routes, and terrain. Mandatory completion of an Upcoming Walk Survey must be done before the group commences.
2. **Community of Practice:** Mood Walks leaders are required to participate in quarterly Community of Practice meetings and contribute to program development and expansion.
3. **Volunteers & students:** A volunteer or student can be a valuable addition to a walking group. It is essential to gauge volunteers' and students' understanding of mental health and well-being, comfort levels engaging with people who experience mental health issues. Group leaders must be trained by Hike Ontario to facilitate walks with participants.
4. **Modifications & Licensing:** CMHA Ontario provides Mood Walks free of charge to host partners. To ensure the fidelity and quality of the program model, no adaptations should be made to any mandatory components (outlined above) without discussion and the written approval from CMHA Ontario. Areas for adjustment are outlined below in the *Areas for Flexibility & Modification* section.
5. **Inclusivity and accessibility:** Accommodation should be made available. A successful group will ensure participants feel included and positive about their involvement. Location, pacing, walking speed, and social interactions are some areas where adaptation is required to help participants feel safe and valued members of the group.
6. **Sharing contact information:** Host partners must share Mood Walks leaders' contact information and keep CMHA Ontario informed of staff changes. Training may need to be arranged for new leaders.
7. **Financial responsibility:** Each host partner is responsible for the cost of facilitating walking groups and the Hike Ontario training that's necessary for all group leaders.



## Areas for Flexibility and Modification

*This section includes areas where Mood Walks Leaders can use program material provided by CMHA Ontario.*

1. **Goal-Setting:** A goal of the Mood Walks program is to help participants recognize walking as a health-promoting tool and make suggested strategies to be used outside of the group. Goal-setting can be a great way for participants to link their participation in a group with strategies to be used outside of Mood Walks.
2. **Themed Walks:** Mood Walks leaders can develop themes for their walks, and these can reflect staff experiences and/or feedback from participants to meet their needs. Additional themes can be created by the host site but must be approved by CMHA Ontario.
3. **Keeping Participants Engaged:** Mood Walks Leaders are welcome to use their own techniques and strategies to keep participants engaged and promote participation.
4. **Promotion:** Spreading the word can help you to attract new participants, partners, and sponsors to your local Mood Walks program. Host partners can use Mood Walks promotional materials (e.g., fillable flyers and socials).
5. **Continuing programming:** Although host partners are required to offer Mood Walks at least once per year, we hope your group chooses to continue with a path to wellness by offering walks year-round. Support participants' engagement in physical activity for all seasons, stay connected with Mood Walks leaders, and maintain relationships with your community partners.

## Cost Considerations

### Funding Groups

The cost of running a Mood Walks program will vary based on organizational needs and resources. On average, groups have been able to successfully start a program with \$1,500 to \$2,000, this may be added to existing programs and can be facilitated with little to no cost. If you wish to enhance your Mood Walks programming, some funding could cover costs for transportation, food, or other materials associated with participation.

Program contributions can come from your own budget, cash donations or corporate sponsors, grants, or from in-kind contributions, such as donated goods, commodities, services (e.g., volunteer hours), equipment, or meeting space.

Mood Walks group leaders should track their budget related to the group, as well as the value of in-kind contributions. Keeping a record of in-kind contributions is just as important as tracking cash expenditures, as it helps to show the 'real' cost of running a program.

## Calculating the Value of In-kind Support and Contributions:

- A local sporting goods store donates T-shirts and water bottles to your group. The cost is the estimated total cash value of the donation.
- Your local conservation area waives entry fees for your group or provides a training space for your Safe Hiker training, free of charge. The cost is the estimated cash value of entry or rental fees.
- Volunteers/Staff pre-walk a hike for your group. Volunteer hours are calculated at minimum wage (\$16.55/hour) unless acting in their professional capacity, which is calculated at a fair market value. The attributed cost is the total cash value of their time.
- A permanent staff member (other than one of the group’s designated leaders) provides a portion of their time to the project.

## Time needed to Plan a Walk Program (16-week plan)

Here is an outline of how you could conduct a group starting with training, preparation, marketing, and planning each walk session. This plan is complete with total amount of time needed to implement your Mood Walks program; the series can range from four to twelve-weeks. Each host partner can choose the length of the series:

Number of preparation weeks	Activity	4wk series	6wk series	8wk series	10wk series	12wk series
1-2	Advertising your group and recruiting participants (5hrs/wk)	10hrs	10hrs	10hrs	10hrs	10hrs
1-3	Facilitators attend hike training, planning walk activities, location, pick curriculum, introduction session, registration, orientation sessions (6hrs/wk)	20hrs	20hrs	20hrs	20hrs	20hrs
4 - 12	Facilitating walks with participants (2.5hrs/walk)	10hrs	15hrs	20hrs	25hrs	30hrs





1 - 2	Completion session – evaluation and feedback from participants (2hrs/session)	2hrs	2hrs	2hrs	2hrs	2hrs
		Total of 42hrs	Total of 47hrs	Total of 52hrs	Total of 57hrs	Total of 62hrs

**Application requirements:**

- Organization overview (values, vision and mission)
- Community partnerships
- Inclusive and accessibility policy and practices
- Evaluation and research
- Why do you want to partner with Mood Walks
- Delivery of Mood Walks programming

**Timeline for Applications and Onboarding**

Application Process	2025 Spring Dates	2025 Autumn Dates	2026 Spring Dates
<b>Applications Open</b>	February 24 <sup>th</sup> , 2025	October 20 <sup>th</sup> , 2025	February 23 <sup>rd</sup> , 2026
<b>Deadline for Applications</b>	April 7 <sup>th</sup> , 2025	December 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2025	April 7 <sup>th</sup> , 2026
<b>Announcements of New Mood Walks Partners</b>	April 22 <sup>nd</sup> , 2025	December 15 <sup>th</sup> , 2025	April 21 <sup>st</sup> , 2026
<b>Mood Walks Onboarding process:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MOU Agreement</li> <li>• Hike Ontario’s training</li> <li>• Start marketing your program</li> <li>• Mood Walks Training</li> <li>• Start facilitating program</li> </ul>	May – June 2025	January - February 2026	May – June 2026