

# Let's work to improve lives, not end them



**THOMAS FROESE**  
OPINION

Wander just about anywhere in our time and find something about mental well-being.

In Berlin, I once passed a bus shelter ad saying "Schweigen kostet Leben," or "Silence costs lives." An aging gentleman has his mouth taped shut. Someone's father, likely? Grandfather? It's an image to slow you down. Give words to your sorrow is its message in any language. Don't bottle things up. And don't be silenced. It might kill you. Or others.

"Give Sorrow Words" is also a worthwhile book by Lynn Keane, a mother who once shared at a Hamilton breakfast gathering — we were about 400 — about her son Daniel, just 23 when he died by suicide.

That St. Joe's Healthcare Foundation event also gave microphones to others to share about their own loved ones lost to suicide. Broken hearts everywhere amid the bacon and eggs and toast and clattering of dishes. I'll never forget it, the sorrow expressed.

But the politics of suicide, the zeitgeist that sucks and blows at the same time, brings special grief. On one hand, let's live well. Get help. Give help. Let's especially support our youth. On the other hand, in Canada we're exiting this world with increasing and frightening indifference. Forget about living well, my friend, in truth you don't have to live at all. The voices are there.

The Suicide Prevention Community Council of Hamilton — it's having a fundraising meal next week — is one local organization to thank for its ongoing work in this baffling space.

About 4450 Canadians now die by suicide annually. Despite surging during COVID-19, this is its lowest level in 20 years. But suicide is the first cousin, MAID (medical assistance in dying), has risen sharply



since its 2016 start. About 16,000, or five per cent of all annual deaths in Canada, are now from MAID.

And Ottawa still has the nagging question of expanding this state-sanctioned death to people suffering solely with mental illness. Before summer break, a joint parliamentary committee will recommend to government to keep the expansion on track for 2027, or not.

First scheduled for 2023, then 2024, now 2027, expansion has been delayed repeatedly because there's no consensus on abandoning the most vulnerable people in our society. It's simply impossible to separate someone's treatable mental illness with their desire for death.

We're not ready, nor should we be. This is the message from various communities, including concerned physicians and people with disabilities. As citizens and policymakers the need is to work together to im-

prove the lives of the vulnerable, not end them.

One warning recently came from Dr. Jim van Os, a psychiatric expert from the Netherlands, the Netherlands, hardly a bastion of conservatism. He told the committee's MPs "Don't do it." Suicide contagion is one possible price of expanding MAID.

The overwhelming majority of the world has this understanding. Of 195 countries, only 11 have fully-regulated MAID. Three — the Benelux nations of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg — have it for solely mental illness. Three.

No wonder. Physicians have been guided for centuries by the essence of the Hippocratic Oath, to work for life, not death. Not that you need a doctor to know in your bones how right it is to help the vulnerable.

This shows the better angels of our nature. For this we can always be ready.

A suicide prevention message on a bus shelter in Berlin reads "Silence costs lives." It's an image to slow you down, writes Thomas Froese. Give words to your sorrow is its message, one that resonates in any language.

THOMAS FROESE

There is the dying with dignity argument, especially for exceptional suffering. But globally about 160,000 people die daily, most from natural aging, and all with the inherent human dignity we're born with, MAID, as if some home service coming in to fluff your pillows before doing you in, is a global anomaly. There's far more dignity in protecting the voiceless.

You or I can choose to believe otherwise, but we may later find that when we're in need, nobody is left to speak for us.

If you or anyone you know is struggling with a mental health crisis, call Canada's Suicide Helpline at 988. Charitable donations to the Suicide Prevention Community Council of Hamilton can be made at spch.org.

FIND THOMAS FROESE AT THOMASFROESE.COM AND THOMASFROESE.SUBSTACK.COM.

# Communities have a responsibility to be a part of the solution

## WOMAN ABUSE WORKING GROUP

Sexual Violence Prevention Month is an important opportunity to raise awareness, honour survivors and strengthen our collective commitment to prevention and action.

As part of this commitment, the Woman Abuse Working Group (WAWG) annually releases its snapshot infographic highlighting key trends and emerging concerns related to gender-based violence and sexual violence in Hamilton.

Behind every statistic are women, girls and gender-diverse individuals navigating impossible choices between safety, housing and stability.

One of the most pressing realities impacting survivors is the ongoing housing crisis. Gender-based violence and housing insecurity are deeply interconnected. Many individuals accessing services are forced to choose between remaining housed in dangerous and abusive situations, or facing homelessness and living in precarious conditions.

Shelters and transitional housing programs across Hamilton continue to operate over capacity, limiting options for those seeking safety and stability.

Service providers are also seeing increasing numbers of individuals accessing support with complex and diverse needs, including women with precarious immigration status.

As the cost of living continues to rise while social assistance rates remain stagnant, many survivors and their families are struggling to make ends meet, particularly while staying in shelter.

Individuals experiencing homelessness are also facing high rates of sexual exploitation and sexual violence on our streets.

## HAMILTON SNAPSHOT

Gender-Based Violence, Intimate Partner Violence & Sexual Violence

SAFETY & SUPPORTS		CRISIS & SUPPORT LINES	
IPV/SV reports to OSV agencies	3,984	VAW Shelter crisis/support line contacts	3,136
Women and children in shelter	1,808	Call to VAW agencies for assistance	5,410
Self-identified Indigenous women in shelter or receiving support	158	Sexual violence crisis/support line calls	940
Women who accessed legal advocacy or family court support	508	<b>HOUSING SUPPORT</b>	
Women who accessed VAW/SV counselling	3,046	Women accessing homeless/specialized housing support	1,131
Individuals receiving Anti-Human Trafficking support	244	Women experiencing homelessness accessing transitional/drop-in support	1,671
Women supported by rural programming	575	Women and gender-diverse individuals served by a transitional and Housing Support Worker	1,387
<b>NEEDS &amp; GAPS</b>		Number of visits to drop-in/low barrier spaces	57,714
32.8% women with intersecting experiences of IPV, SV, and homelessness. Significant gaps remain for marginalized women facing IPV and homelessness.		<b>POLICING &amp; JUSTICE</b>	
9.27% requests for WAWG member's shelter turned down due to shortage of beds.		IPV related calls to Police*	6,985
Approx 9 month waitlist for counselling from the sexual assault centre.		IPV reports/investigations to Police	6,295
2,264 rural service interactions at 18 safe sites		IPV occurrences reported to Police	697
88% referrals made by OSV agencies		IPV charges laid	4,318
279 individuals receiving support through rural Safety and Support Hub		People charged with IPV related offences	1,528
<b>WAWG MEMBERSHIP</b>		DV Offenders that completed Partner Assault Programming	408
		Individuals that had contact with the Partner Assault Response Program	831
		<b>FEMICIDES</b>	1

\* Includes the number of charges laid by the police which do not include the OSV. \* Includes the total number of individuals who have been charged with IPV specific crimes. © December 2024 WAWG | Sexual Violence IPV, Intimate Partner Violence, IPV, Violence Against Women

The Woman Abuse Working Group 2025 snapshot highlights key trends and emerging concerns related to gender-based violence and sexual violence in Hamilton. Behind every statistic are women, girls and gender-diverse individuals navigating impossible choices.

WOMAN ABUSE WORKING GROUP

Additionally, violence is increasingly occurring in digital spaces. WAWG member agencies are seeing a rise in online exploitation, technology-facilitated violence, and digital harm.

Many survivors do not report these experiences due to stigma, fear, systemic barriers and concerns that they will not receive the support they need and deserve.

Preventing sexual violence requires community-wide education, collaboration and action, as well as commitment from all levels of government and community partners. It must include meaningful engagement with men and boys to prevent

rape culture, consent, healthy relationships, and accountability.

It must also make space for restorative approaches available to both survivors and individuals using violence.

Approaches that act as alternatives to the justice system and better centre survivors' voices and experiences, while addressing root causes of male violence.

This month, SACHA's fourth annual Sexual Violence Prevention Month Community Conference brought community members together to explore the intersectional realities of sexual violence and share practical tools for prevention

and response. This month, WAWG is also offering training aimed at strengthening collective responses to sexual violence and sex trafficking through evidence-based strategies and skill-building across sectors.

At shelters and transitional homes across our community, we continue to see the impacts of gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, human trafficking, and homelessness, particularly for Indigenous women, girls and LGBTQ+ relatives.

Black, Indigenous, newcomer and gender-diverse individuals experience disproportionately higher rates of violence and exploitation. These realities are rooted in ongoing colonial violence, systemic inequities and intergenerational trauma.

Community agencies identify urgent needs for safe and affordable long-term housing, culturally grounded and trauma-informed supports led by Indigenous organizations, prevention programming rooted in community and culture, and sustainable funding for front-line services.

Sexual Violence Prevention Month reminds us that violence is preventable and that communities have a responsibility to be part of the solution. Meaningful prevention requires sustained investment in services, co-ordinated community responses, and a commitment to addressing the root causes of violence and inequality.

To anyone experiencing violence, please know you are not alone. Services across Hamilton are available to support you whenever you are ready to reach out. WAWG's survivor advisory group, Women Against Violence Empowering Survivors (WAVES), also hosts monthly supportive workshops for women in Hamilton. More information can be found on our social media.

We believe survivors, and we remain committed to working collectively toward safer communities for all.

Resources and information can be found at WAWG.ca. SUBMITTED BY CO-ORDINATOR THEA SYMONDS ON BEHALF OF WOMAN ABUSE WORKING GROUP.