Stigma and COVID-19

Stigma and discrimination often occur out of fear and uncertainty. As COVID-19 is new and there are many unknowns about this virus, it can lead to misconceptions. According to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, it can appear in various ways, including:

- Referring to COVID-19 as the “foreign virus,” or Asian or Chinese flu
- Blaming a person or group of people who may have the virus for “being careless, not following the recommendations and spreading the illness”
- Avoiding places associated with myths about the virus, such as Asian restaurants or grocers
- Verbal or physical attacks on certain ethnic groups
- Refusing service or enforcing different policies for health care professionals or other essential services under the assumption they pose a greater risk of spreading the virus

**Impacts of stigma and discrimination can…**

- Make people with the virus feel guilty or bad about themselves
- Lead people to become socially isolated to avoid discrimination
- Increase anxiety for those with the virus as they deal with discrimination
- Cause people with the virus to go against self-isolation recommendations to hide their sickness and avoid discrimination
- Prevent people from getting tested or seeking treatment for the virus out of fear of discrimination

**Reducing stigma and discrimination**

- Be careful of the language used to describe the virus or someone who has the virus
- Stay informed with facts from credible sources, such as the Public Health Agency of Canada, COVID-19 in Ontario, or Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health
- Respect people’s privacy if you know someone with the virus
- Focus on positives, such as the steps being taken to contain the virus and the preventative steps that people can take to keep safe
- Support someone who is experiencing stigma or discrimination because of COVID-19
- Speak out against stigmatizing behaviours you see or read about
- Show support and encouragement for individuals performing essential services

Sources
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health – Stigma and prejudice
- World Health Organization - Social stigma associated with the coronavirus disease (COVID-19)