



Mental Health  
Commission  
of Canada

Commission de  
la santé mentale  
du Canada

THE MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION OF CANADA

# Supporting Child and Youth Mental Health





## Summary

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) recognizes that the mental health of children and youth in Canada is an important priority for life-long well-being and is working to promote mental health among young people. This document provides more information on this crucial work and identifies opportunities for sponsorship and partnership.

# Supporting Child and Youth Mental Health within the Mental Health Commission of Canada

## What are the issues?

**ESTABLISHING THE FOUNDATION FOR HEALTHY** emotional and social development is vital to ensuring the mental well-being of Canadians as they progress from childhood to adulthood. Evidence suggests that positive mental health is associated with a higher likelihood of completing school, enjoying positive social relations and having higher self-confidence, higher income potential, and increased resilience. Yet, in 2011, an estimated 1.04 million young people aged 9-19 were living with a mental illness in Canada, which represents 23.4 per cent or nearly one in four youth.<sup>i</sup> Less than 20 per cent of these young Canadians received appropriate treatment.<sup>ii</sup>

The mental health of emerging adults (EA)<sup>1</sup> and youth transitioning into adult mental health and addiction services are significant areas of policy concern in Canada because current policies, programs, and research that support the needs of EA are scarce. Youth who are engaged in child and youth mental health services are often not well supported as they prepare to enter the adult mental health system. EA who are engaged in child and adolescent mental health services must transition into adult services at a prescribed age, but are not adequately supported during this transition, despite evidence that interventions at this stage will positively impact their lifetime trajectory of mental health.

Although no longitudinal studies have been carried out in Canada, findings from the United States and the United Kingdom indicate that both treatment retention and successful engagement levels across the child to adult transition are concerning.<sup>iii</sup> Untreated mental health issues in early adulthood may indicate increased risk of developing severe and enduring mental health problems and at least 75 per cent of mental health problems or illnesses have an onset in childhood, adolescence, or young adulthood. Issues such as leaving school early, youth unemployment, youth justice involvement, bullying, and traumatic release from care are amplified for young adults living with mental health problems or illnesses. Unaddressed mental health and substance use issues lead to underemployment and lack of workforce participation and they increase the human and economic burdens of mental health problems and illnesses. Most alarmingly, suicide is the second leading cause of death for Canadian youth and one in five of all deaths among young adults age 15-24 are due to suicide.<sup>iii</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The term “emerging adult” is used in the mental health field to describe youth and young adults, between the approximate ages of 16-25, who are going through significant intellectual, social, psychological, and neurological growth and development. Using the term “emerging” acknowledges this phase as a dynamic process, rather than a prescribed span of time driven by chronological age. In some literature, emerging adulthood includes youth up to the age of 29.

## What have we done so far?

**THE MHCC HAS A DEMONSTRATED COMMITMENT** to research and policy advancement for child and youth mental health. Below are some examples of programs and initiatives that highlight our child and youth-focused work.



### Children and Youth in *The Mental Health Strategy for Canada*

*Changing Directions, Changing Lives: The Mental Health Strategy for Canada* highlights four key recommendations to improve child and youth mental health in Canada:

- 1 Increasing comprehensive school and post-secondary initiatives that promote mental health for all students and include targeted prevention efforts for those at risk (Strategic Direction 1).
- 2 Removing barriers to full participation of people living with mental health problems or illnesses in workplaces and schools (including post-secondary institutions) (Strategic Direction 2).
- 3 Removing financial barriers for children and youth and their families to access psychotherapies and clinical counselling (Strategic Direction 3).
- 4 Removing barriers to successful transitions between child, youth, adult, and seniors mental health services (Strategic Direction 3).<sup>i</sup>



## Support for the *Strategy*

“I feel that if children can become comfortable expressing their emotions in the early years, this can be seen as natural and desirable and provide a greater sense of security knowing their concerns are heard and that they can get help as necessary.”

– Contributing parent

“So many kids have real issues of depression, anxiety, bipolar... they need real help... it’s not growing blues or being uncool and unhappy... they deserve the treatment and the help.”

– Contributing youth

<sup>i</sup> Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2012) *Changing Directions, Changing Lives: The Mental Health Strategy for Canada*. Calgary, AB: Mental Health Commission of Canada; 2012.

<sup>ii</sup> Mental Health Commission of Canada (2013) *Making the Case for Investing in Mental Health in Canada*. Calgary, AB: Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2013

<sup>iii</sup> Mental Health Commission of Canada (2015) *Executive Summary – Taking the Next Step Forward: Building a Responsive Mental Health and Addictions System for Emerging Adults*. Calgary, AB: Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2015





## Informing the Future: Mental Health Indicators for Canada

In 2015, the MHCC researched and released *Informing the Future: Mental Health Indicators for Canada*, a set of national mental health and mental illness indicators. They help identify gaps in service, allow stakeholders to gauge progress, and strengthen efforts to address the recommendations outlined in the *Mental Health Strategy for Canada*.

There are eleven indicators specific to child and youth mental health, including rates of anxiety and mood disorders, suicidal thoughts and deaths, and school-based mental health promotion.



## Highlights from Informing The Future

7%

of Canadians aged 12 to 19 years reported that they have an anxiety disorder and/or mood disorder which has been diagnosed by a health care professional

77.2%

of Canadians aged 12 to 19 years reported their mental health as very good or excellent

6.4%

of Canadians aged 15 to 19 years reported having seriously thought about suicide or taking their own life in the last 12 months





## Consensus Conference Themes

The conference will address four themes:

- 1 **Defining the “emerging adult”**
- 2 **Bridging the gap between child and youth and adult mental health services**
- 3 **Understanding concurrent system transitions (education, employment, justice, healthcare, and social services)**
- 4 **Identifying mental health system support (system capacities and competencies in caring for EA)**

## Where are we going?

**THERE ARE CURRENTLY TWO AREAS** in which the MHCC invites support through sponsorship and partnership opportunities: our upcoming *Consensus Conference on the Mental Health of Emerging Adults* and our HEADSTRONG youth anti-stigma initiative. Both of these initiatives will ensure that we continue making meaningful contributions to the area of child and youth mental health research, policy, and program development.

### Consensus Conference on the Mental Health of Emerging Adults



From November 2-4, 2015, in Ottawa, Ontario, the MHCC will host a conference to address policy and research issues in youth transitioning to adult mental health services – the *Consensus Conference on the Mental Health of Emerging Adults: Making Transitions a Priority in Canada*. This event brings together policy makers, researchers, mental health organizations, clinicians, and youth and their families from across Canada in discussing how best to support “emerging adults” (EA).

The conference will generate recommendations on how policy and practice can improve the experiences and outcomes of youth transitioning from child and youth to adult mental health services and develop a more refined vision for service. It will explore factors that affect EA mental health and discuss how healthcare and social systems can work together to better support their overall mental well-being. The ways in which the social determinants of health influence mental health across the lifespan and how they may present a variety of challenges for EA coming from various backgrounds will be analyzed.

The conference will also more broadly explore other important themes in child and youth mental health: mental health of First Nations, Inuit, Métis, LGBTQ youth, and rural and remote community residents; and prevention and promotion.

**We invite you to become a partner in advancing better mental health services for emerging adults by sponsoring this event. All sponsorships can be negotiated to meet the specific needs of your organization.**

**Please see the attached sponsorship package for more details on how you can support this important initiative.**

## HEADSTRONG



In November 2014, the MHCC formally launched the HEADSTRONG youth anti-stigma initiative at a national summit, mobilizing more than 130 young people between the ages of 14-17 and community organizations from every province and territory in Canada to become catalysts for change – confronting stigma head on. Similar summits organized regionally reached thousands of students in hundreds of high schools across the country. More HEADSTRONG summits and activities will be rolled out this fall.



The success of HEADSTRONG and its cascading effect is evident. It encourages help-seeking and creates a supportive environment in schools. Existing partners, who bring a wealth of experience, are eager to sustain and grow HEADSTRONG in their communities in the years to come and new partnerships can be cultivated to spread HEADSTRONG more extensively throughout Canada.

To take the HEADSTRONG initiative forward, it needs new funding. This is a perfect fit for individuals and organizations with a passion for helping young people. We've done the legwork. We've created an initiative that is evidence-based, tried, and tested. Through its successful rollout this year, we have shown that HEADSTRONG can mobilize one of the most powerful forces in Canada – our youth.

**You have the opportunity to be a premier sponsor and have your name attached to an initiative that works. Imagine the enormous benefits for Canada, when more and more youth join forces to change how we see mental health problems and illnesses. With your support, we can accelerate change.**



## Support for HEADSTRONG

“The youth perspective enriches the work of the MHCC and other mental health groups. Because there are gaps in service provision and promotion, there needs to be more youth leadership, coordination, evidence-informed strategies, and participation in these services. Youth with lived experience need to be encouraged to speak out more on various issues to inspire and give direction for better change.”

– Don M.



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