



Mental Health
Commission
of Canada

Commission de
la santé mentale
du Canada



ROOTS OF HOPE

A Community Suicide
Prevention Model



Roots of Hope:

Reflections from Provincial Expansions of the Model

INTRODUCTION

Since 2018, communities across Canada have successfully used the Roots of Hope model to reduce the impact of suicide in their local contexts. Following its success at the community level, the Roots of Hope model has evolved to inform provinces and territories across Canada as they develop suicide prevention and life promotion strategies.

What is Roots of Hope?

[Roots of Hope](#) is a made-in-Canada, community-led suicide prevention and life promotion model that leverages community strengths and local expertise to design and implement life promotion and suicide prevention initiatives using a collaborative, multi-sectoral approach. The goal of the model is to reduce the impact of suicide in communities.

The Roots of Hope model was developed by the [Mental Health Commission of Canada](#) (MHCC) together with experts and community partners from across Canada and globally. The five pillars of action and 13 guiding principles of Roots of Hope provide communities with an approach that can be adapted to their unique needs.

Over the past seven years, Roots of Hope has grown from an initial eight trailblazer communities to more than 20 communities, regions, and provinces across the country.

In 2024, Roots of Hope was included in Canada's [National Suicide Prevention Action Plan \(2024 to 2027\)](#), which recognized the importance of community-led actions for suicide prevention and life promotion.

A SNAPSHOT OF PROVINCIAL ROOTS OF HOPE INITIATIVES

This case study presents key lessons, insights, and common patterns gleaned from in-depth interviews with individuals who are supporting the use of the Roots of Hope model at the provincial level in four Canadian provinces: Manitoba, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador. Given the unique context of each province, the Roots of Hope model has been leveraged in different ways to inform the development and implementation of provincial suicide prevention and life promotion strategies. This demonstrates the versatility of the model and confirms that there are many effective pathways to effectively utilize the Roots of Hope model and its pillars at the provincial/territorial scale. The section below summarizes how Roots of Hope is being implemented by the four provinces included in this case study. It offers a glimpse of the different contexts of the provinces, demonstrates the various ways the model has been adapted to meet each province's specific goals and strategies, highlights various achievements, and presents insights and lessons that illustrate how Roots of Hope could be beneficial to other provinces/territories wanting to embrace a similar approach.





Newfoundland and Labrador
2021 Population: **510,550**

Saskatchewan
2021 Population: **1,132,505**

Manitoba
2021 Population: **1,342,153**

New Brunswick
2021 Population: **775,610**

Manitoba

Suicide Prevention Vision/Strategy

- Suicide prevention is a priority for the province
- The Roots of Hope model will be integrated into the province's suicide prevention strategy when it is launched in 2026
- Communities and Indigenous leaders are being engaged to determine provincial priorities

Roots of Hope and Suicide Prevention Implementation

- Roots of Hope has annualized funding as well as other province-wide and organization-specific investments
- A regional suicide prevention network existed before Roots of Hope was adopted, which included:
 - Strong programming and activities
 - Strong community focus and integration with the mental health system
 - A mix of staff and volunteer leadership
- The province is investing in greater regional coordination, and it supports shared learning across regions for a more coherent and coordinated approach

Impacts and Learnings

- The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC)'s support to provide a cross-Canada view and learnings has been valuable
- The Roots of Hope model offers a shared learning framework
- The regional network is being revitalized and better coordinated
- The Roots of Hope model allows the regional network to continue to be responsive to community priorities

Saskatchewan

Suicide Prevention Vision/Strategy

- Suicide prevention is a priority for the province
- The Roots of Hope model and its five pillars are the foundation of the province's [suicide prevention strategy](#)
- Saskatchewan is the only province that has enshrined the Roots of Hope model into legislation
- The model was endorsed provincially following the success of three local Roots of Hope pilot communities

Roots of Hope and Suicide Prevention Implementation

- The province provides annualized funding to hire staff and support implementation
- A provincial strategic oversight team ensures suicide prevention work is aligned across ministries, organizations, and communities
- The implementation support of the MHCC has been valuable
- Local coordinators are supported and their learnings are used to replicate effective community solutions quickly across the province

Impacts and Learnings

- Greater centralized accountability and financial investment strengthen local teams
- There has been stronger dissemination of suicide prevention learnings
- The province actively supports the scaling of successful local ideas and integrates systems-level solutions into policy
- Two additional Roots of Hope communities are now being added, which include several neighbouring First Nation communities



Newfoundland and Labrador

Suicide Prevention Vision/Strategy

- The province's suicide prevention plan — [Our Path of Resilience](#) — launched in 2022 with the goal of fostering understanding and action across the health, education, justice, and social service systems
- Consultations to create the plan helped identify provincial resources, gaps, and opportunities
- The plan was informed by findings from a successful local Roots of Hope pilot community

Roots of Hope and Suicide Prevention Implementation

- Suicide prevention initiatives initially grew organically, with local champions driving diverse initiatives
- \$2.5 million was allocated in 2022 and \$4.5 million was committed annually for the next four years to support implementation
- The province provides staff, including regional coordinators, to support the implementation of suicide prevention initiatives

Impacts and Learnings

- The provincial government has solidified community-driven initiatives under a shared strategy and goals
- The Roots of Hope model has been adapted to reflect regional priorities and community input to create a more expansive and community-centred strategy

Key insights and learnings

Each of the four provinces included in this study have leveraged the Roots of Hope model in the development and implementation of their province's suicide prevention strategy and adapted it to their unique context. Despite the differences among the provinces, some common themes were identified, and valuable insights were shared about each province's approach. This case study specifically highlights:

New Brunswick

Suicide Prevention Vision/Strategy

- The province doesn't have an official provincial suicide prevention strategy, but the Roots of Hope model is used in all seven health zones and coordinated through a province-wide work plan
- The model was expanded provincially following the success of a local Roots of Hope pilot community

Roots of Hope and Suicide Prevention Implementation

- The province provides funding for prevention coordinators in every health zone that adapts the Roots of Hope model to address local priorities
- The province provides funding for a provincial consultant who supports the coordinators and ensures alignment across all health zones and with the Roots of Hope model
- The coordinators meet monthly as a provincial community of practice, which supports knowledge exchange

Impacts and Learnings

- The flexibility of the Roots of Hope model and its adaptability to local needs is an asset
- Implementing Roots of Hope across two health systems and seven local zones is complex

- the conditions of readiness that set the stage for the creation of a provincial suicide prevention and life promotion strategy, including how the Roots of Hope model contributed
- common features of the provincial strategies, and the benefits of aligning these strategies with the Roots of Hope model
- challenges and variations in the adoption of Roots of Hope at a provincial level

PROVINCIAL READINESS TO DEVELOP A SUICIDE PREVENTION AND LIFE PROMOTION STRATEGY

The interviewees from the provinces in this case study identified several conditions that contributed to their readiness to create a provincial suicide prevention and life promotion strategy. Despite variations in their rationale, approach, and current realities, the interviewees from each province highlighted that the existence of the Roots of Hope model as an evidence-informed, Canadian resource was an asset. They all agreed that having access to such a comprehensive model was extremely useful in the development and implementation of their own provincial strategy. The common themes that emerged from the interviews — and insights into how the Roots of Hope model was helpful in shaping provincial suicide prevention and life promotion strategies — are outlined below.

A provincial commitment to suicide prevention had been identified

In each province, the decision to develop a provincial suicide prevention and life promotion strategy was driven by a recognition that suicide was an issue of growing concern, to the point that it had become a priority for action at the provincial level. In some provinces, data showing an increase in suicide attempts highlighted the urgent need for province-wide action. As provinces began to explore the content and process of a provincial suicide prevention and life promotion strategy, Roots of Hope provided a credible, Canadian, evidence-informed model, examples of its impact, and a wealth of resources that were all useful in the development of a provincial strategy.

A commitment to broad engagement and consultation

Most of the provinces undertook a province-wide engagement process as part of the development of their suicide prevention and life promotion strategy. This created opportunities to listen to people with lived and living experience, identify existing assets and strengths, and prioritize community needs to ensure that interventions were relevant and impactful. These consultations also confirmed the need for and the importance of a provincial approach that could be tailored and responsive to a variety of local factors including geography, community dynamics, cultural needs such as those of First Nation communities, and other specific challenges. These provincial engagement efforts facilitated greater connections between and across suicide prevention and life promotion champions, which contributed to shared learning, built trust in the province's strategy, and enhanced the credibility of the process.

“The nice thing about having a provincial strategy is that funding for the coordinators and their operations is annualized. It allows them to focus on what the local community priorities are and getting them done as opposed to worrying about whether they've got funding next year.”



Responsiveness to community priorities

The adaptability of the Roots of Hope model and its emphasis on community leadership and relationship building were consistently cited as reasons why it was chosen by those developing provincial strategies. At the same time, the Roots of Hope model was also valued as it provides an approach that can be used consistently across different contexts. The value of the Roots of Hope model at the provincial scale is its ability to demonstrate impact that can be replicated across regions through an approach that is not prescriptive but still provides a unified and coherent approach.

A desire to leverage existing programs

In each province included in this case study, several initiatives, groups, and organizations were already working on suicide prevention and life promotion. The process of creating a provincial strategy required that these existing assets be recognized, leveraged, and harnessed while uniting them under a consistent province-wide approach. The Roots of Hope model was seen as credible and reliable because it was evidence-informed and created in Canada and there were several documented examples of how the model had been successfully implemented in a variety of community contexts. The existence of a national network of Roots of Hope communities was also valuable in that it offered resources, insights, and connections to others already implementing the model across the country, making implementation simpler.

“Our connection with MHCC is very important. I know that our coordinators have really valued the support they received from MHCC and appreciate knowing that they can always reach out to the province or to MHCC when needed.”

BENEFITS OF A PROVINCIAL STRATEGY USING THE ROOTS OF HOPE MODEL

The interviewees highlighted several benefits of using the Roots of Hope model at the provincial level. Despite variations in the rationale, approach, and current realities of the provinces, they indicated that the Roots of Hope model's emphasis on community leadership and relationship building, its adaptability to local variations, and its consistent pillars contributed to the creation of unified yet flexible provincial strategies. The interviewees emphasized the following four specific benefits of the Roots of Hope model:

Strategic alignment with local flexibility

Roots of Hope is a flexible model that is responsive and adaptable to the needs of local communities, while still providing consistency that enables it to align with provincial goals. This enables the development of a suicide prevention and life promotion strategy that is unified, responsive, and scalable. The Roots of Hope approach also emphasizes an ongoing commitment to nurturing strong community relationships to drive long-term engagement and outcomes.

Provincial investment and leadership

The establishment of a provincial suicide prevention and life promotion strategy that aligns with the Roots of Hope model offers the benefit of centralized accountability and an annualized financial investment to support locally driven work. This ensures that regional and local suicide prevention and life promotion efforts have the necessary resources and staffing to ensure long-term sustainability. It also strengthens the overall impact of this work.

System-wide coordination and learning

The adoption of the Roots of Hope model at the provincial level establishes a broader infrastructure to facilitate the dissemination of success stories and the uptake of suicide prevention and life promotion initiatives across the province. It also facilitates capacity building and supports regular coordination, monitoring, mentoring, and learning across communities and regions. The regular interaction between regions and the province also improves coordination and awareness of emerging issues across the province.

Policy integration

The flexibility of the Roots of Hope model makes it easy to integrate into existing provincial initiatives and priorities. It also facilitates systemic changes, which make it easier to embed the work of suicide prevention and life promotion into policy and practice. For example, Saskatchewan has used the pillars of the Roots of Hope model as the foundation of its provincial suicide prevention legislation. This helps ensure a long-term commitment to this approach.

The adoption of a provincial suicide prevention and life promotion strategy based on the Roots of Hope model provides a proven, evidence-informed model at the provincial level that builds on local strengths, is responsive to local needs, fosters effective local-provincial collaboration, and aligns efforts at the community and provincial levels to create a unified and consistent approach to suicide prevention and life promotion.



CHALLENGES IN THE ADOPTION OF ROOTS OF HOPE AT THE PROVINCIAL LEVEL

The interviewees from all four provinces were overwhelmingly positive about the credibility and flexibility of the Roots of Hope model and the benefits it provided to their provincial suicide prevention and life promotion strategies. However, they also brought up some specific challenges. It should be noted that these challenges or limitations were less about the model itself and more related to the implementation of a suicide prevention and life promotion strategy at the provincial scale.

Political realities

The implementation of an effective provincial suicide prevention and life promotion strategy depends heavily on political priorities, which can change. This is particularly challenging in the work of suicide prevention and life promotion, which is relationship based and requires a long-term investment and commitment. Any disruption of this work will almost certainly affect momentum and impact.

Measuring success

Research and evaluation are critical components of the successful implementation of a provincial suicide prevention and life promotion strategy. Having dedicated expertise to track progress and capture and share learning outcomes helps to demonstrate effectiveness, builds credibility with community partners, and provides insights that enable the approach to be enhanced and refined. It is also necessary to clearly communicate results and insights at both the provincial and regional levels to ensure continued commitment to the implementation of the strategy.

Staff recruitment and retention

Dedicated, paid coordinators as well as committed volunteers are required for the successful implementation of a provincial suicide prevention and life promotion strategy. These individuals build trusted relationships with communities, inform and support implementation of local strategies, and contribute to ensuring a consistent approach to this work throughout the province. In some northern and rural communities, the ability to recruit and retain staff for key roles makes it difficult to provide communities with the consistent support needed to maintain momentum.

Enabling effective cross-sectoral collaboration

The department responsible for the implementation of suicide prevention and life promotion strategies varied among the provinces. However, interviewees from all of the provinces included in this case study recognized that because the issue of suicide is interconnected with the work of many different sectors and involves contributions from many province-wide organizations, mechanisms and practices to promote collaboration both with other provincial departments and with other sector leaders are important to ensure that initiatives are well aligned and that synergies are leveraged.

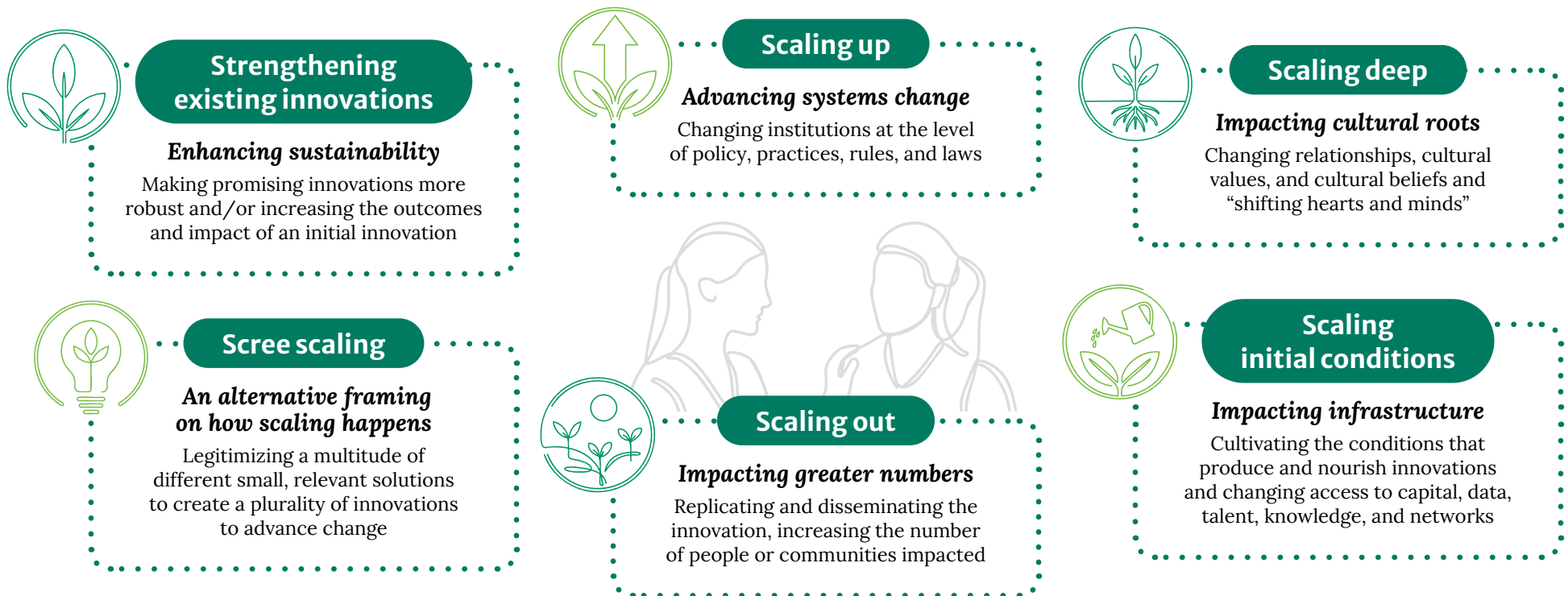
“In our province, suicide prevention is housed within the department of mental health and housing, but we also have to interact with the health department and the justice department. There are all of these pockets of suicide prevention opportunities in different places which need to be coordinated.”

CONCLUSION

The development and successful prototyping of the Roots of Hope model across a diverse network of local communities demonstrated the effectiveness and versatility of this evidence-informed, Canadian model of suicide prevention and life promotion. It also sowed the seeds for the scaling of this proven model. Scaling is the term used to describe the work of intentionally helping small, promising experiments to be more widely adopted so that they can have a transformative impact.

The visual below shows that there are many ways to scale a promising innovation. Reflecting on the successful growth and expansion of Roots of Hope since its debut in 2018 reveals that many, if not all, of these pathways have been leveraged.

Six types of scaling



SOURCES

Riddell, D., & Moore, M.-L. *Scaling out, scaling up, scaling deep: Advancing systemic social innovation and the learning processes to support it.* The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation. https://mcconnellfoundation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/ScalingOut_Nov27A_AV_BrandedBleed.pdf

Tulloch, G. *Problematizing scale in the social sector (1): Expanding conceptions.* InWithForward. <https://www.inwithforward.com/2018/01/expanding-conceptions-scale-within-social-sector/>

The MHCC's foundation-building work and ongoing support has enabled the development and implementation of a consistent approach to suicide prevention and life promotion that is unanimously recognized as a tremendous asset in the successful implementation of Roots of Hope.

The strength and flexibility of the Roots of Hope model is highly valued; these characteristics enable the model to be adapted and responsive to the diverse realities and priorities of local communities, regions, provinces, and territories across Canada. The early implementation of Roots of Hope in a small number of diverse local communities embraced a form of scree scaling that cultivated a “rich buffet” of examples that highlighted the model's effectiveness across a variety of diverse communities and further enabled the continued growth and scaling of the model. The success of the Roots of Hope model in various communities also highlights the impact of the MHCC's commitment to and leadership in the successful implementation of Roots of Hope and shows how national oversight is imperative to successful pan-Canadian adoption of the model.



Inspired by the success of local Roots of Hope projects across the country, several provinces and territories are scaling up the Roots of Hope model's use in their jurisdictions. This has enabled the approach to be implemented across multiple regions, with multi-year commitments of staffing and financial resources. The embrace of the model at the provincial/territorial level has also enabled the creation of an infrastructure with opportunities for greater coordination with other provincial/territorial departments, related sectors, and province- and territory-wide organizations. In addition, it has facilitated greater alignment, consistency, and coherence in how suicide prevention and life promotion work is being done across each province/territory.

An important benefit of scaling out the Roots of Hope model across communities, provinces, and territories is that it makes it easier to successfully implement the approach. Jurisdictions that are considering using the Roots of Hope model can leverage the wisdom, knowledge, and experience of the many people across Canada who are already using it.

Recognition of the Roots of Hope model within [Canada's National Suicide Prevention Action Plan](#) signals a tremendous opportunity to further scale up this proven, evidence-informed approach across the country. Doing so would enhance alignment and coordination in suicide prevention and life promotion, driving greater investment and resource development. It would build momentum and amplify impact across Canada.



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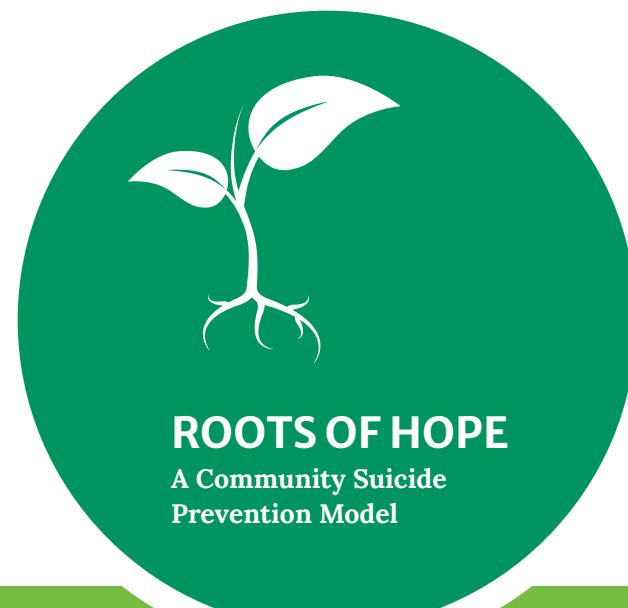
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