

## **CIHR funds \$1.5 million in research to link youth mental health services across Canada to improve care and outcomes for young people**

In Canada, youth mental health and substance use services are delivered by a vast tapestry of providers spanning different sectors, including hospitals, primary care and community organizations. Currently, there is minimal standard data collection or evaluation metrics across these sectors, communities or provinces. Because of this lack of common evaluation, researchers, clinicians, services and funders have no clear picture of the state of youth mental healthcare across Canada, nor which treatment approaches and services are effective for whom.

In the wake of COVID-19 and the surge in mental ill health that is anticipated to come, there is an even more pressing need for actionable data to further improve services and outcomes for youth with mental health and substance use difficulties.

“If the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it is the importance of meaningful data and information for making decisions regarding health services and systems,” says Dr. Jai Shah of the Department of Psychiatry at McGill University and the Douglas Research Centre. “These circumstances have also highlighted the need to have such data – at local, provincial and national levels – be readily available on demand.”

In January 2020, the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR) awarded a [Network Catalyst Grant](#) to address this challenge in the youth mental health sector, which is now compounded by the pandemic. This initiative is led by ACCESS Open Minds (AOM), with direction from Dr. Shah. To design and implement a common evaluation framework for youth mental health and substance use services, this grant will bring together:

- AOM, operating in multiple urban, rural and Indigenous communities across Canada
- Provincial initiatives such as Foundry (British Columbia), Youth Wellness Hubs (Ontario), Aire ouverte (Quebec), and a new Alberta Integrated Services Initiative
- Other local youth mental health community-based programs

The Network Catalyst Grant represents a collaboration between leading Canadian researchers in the field (from McGill University, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Lakehead University, Mathison Centre for Mental Health Research and Education at the University of Calgary, University of British Columbia and others) as well as clinicians, youth, families and decision-makers.

Reflecting the diversity of the Canadian youth mental health landscape — including Indigenous communities, experts and partners — the team will:

- generate a state-of-the-art evaluation framework and sustainable data infrastructure
- collect critical information on the status of Canadian youth mental health services, and explore opportunities to report this in real-time

- catalyze standard-setting on evidence-informed mental health care for youth across the country
- link with like-minded partners in Australia, Ireland, the United Kingdom, United States and others interested in understanding trends in youth mental health at the international level.

The network will initiate its work in mid-2020 and is funded for a period of 5 years.

The project is collaboratively led by:

- [Jai Shah](#), Douglas Research Centre, ACCESS Open Minds, and McGill University
- [Chris Mushquash](#), Lakehead University
- Clifford Ballantyne, Indigenous Council
- [Gina Dimitropoulos](#), Mathison Centre for Mental Health Research and Education, University of Calgary
- [Joanna Henderson](#), Margaret and Wallace McCain Centre for Child, Youth & Family Mental Health, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
- [Manuela Ferrari](#), Douglas Research Centre, ACCESS Open Minds, and McGill University
- [Ridha Joober](#), Douglas Research Centre, ACCESS Open Minds, and McGill University
- [Skye Barbic](#), Foundry BC and University of British Columbia
- [Srividya Iyer](#), Douglas Research Centre, ACCESS Open Minds, and McGill University
- Stacy Anderson, Youth Council
- Yvonne Pelling, Family Council

