



Ontario Centre of Excellence
for Child & Youth Mental Health

Centre d'excellence de l'Ontario en santé
mentale des enfants et des adolescents

Impact report 2021



Adjusting the sails: Charting the course in challenging times

Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health



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Adjusting the sails

According to nautical wisdom, “we cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails.” Since the pandemic began in early 2020, the winds of change have been mighty. Forces outside of our control have brought much uncertainty and many challenges to us as individuals, families, organizations, communities and nations. We’ve all had to adjust our sails, modify our approaches and shift directions on a dime. It’s been difficult, but the story of 2020 isn’t just a story of loss. It’s also a record of strength, resilience and adaptability.

At the Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health (the Centre), we’re proud of the course we’ve charted over the past year and the unexpected opportunities we’ve embraced. We’re pleased to share highlights from that journey in this report.





Special acknowledgements

As a Centre family, we send our heartfelt gratitude to first responders, healthcare professionals and other essential workers of all stripes. Even without first-hand experience with the virus, this has been a chaotic, confusing and lonely time, both personally and professionally. We can't imagine what this has been like for you and your families. We're humbled by your sacrifices, strength and endurance, and we thank you for all that you've done to support the physical and mental health of Ontario's children, young people and families.

We owe a particular debt of gratitude to the young people and families who serve on our various advisory councils and committees. Your continued engagement provides us with important insights and guidance that ensures that our work is relevant and responsive. You are wonderful examples of the resilience and adaptability we've witnessed throughout the pandemic and we thank you!

We acknowledge the dedicated service providers, agencies and decision makers in our sector and beyond who've worked so diligently to adjust your own sails on the fly. We know "challenging" doesn't begin to describe how difficult this strange time has been. We admire your tireless efforts and we're grateful to be rowing alongside you to ensure that no child, young person or family in Ontario is left adrift.



From the helm

To paraphrase an ancient Latin writer, anyone can steer the ship when the sea is calm. As we've learned through the pandemic, though, it's vital to have people at the helm who truly know the ropes when facing battering wind and waves. Here are some thoughts from the formidable leaders keeping us even keeled.

Message from the Centre's leaders

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we've often heard that "we're all in the same boat." This is simply not true. We're all in the same storm, but some of us are on giant, seaworthy vessels and some of us are in dinghies. Some of us aren't in a boat at all.

This challenging time is significantly more challenging for some than for others. There are many who find themselves in need of support they've never needed before and many others with pre-existing mental health challenges who've been pushed to new depths by social isolation and other losses. Research here in Ontario, and throughout Canada and the world,

shows that the demand for mental health support has surged over the past year. We need to be particularly mindful in the coming months of the well-being of exhausted service providers and over-extended agency leaders.

It's important to celebrate the incredible resilience and agility our sector has demonstrated through profound difficulty. COVID-19 went from a far-away threat to a global pandemic so swiftly, there wasn't time to truly prepare before we were in the thick of things. Community-based child and youth mental health agencies have had to adjust their sails — and quickly — to stay safe and to continue tossing lifesaving lines to those who need it most.

At the Centre, adjusting our sails has meant being able to stay the course on several of our key projects, while also embarking in new directions to support our sector through these big transitions. While some projects have required course corrections to align with current realities and capacities, we've continued to forge ahead with our [strategic priorities](#) and add new dimensions to our work.

We cannot abandon the ship of child and youth mental health, especially now. Far too many children and young people are still in deep water. We all continue to face big challenges, but our sector has come a long way in getting our sea legs over the past many months. We can — and each of us must — continue adjusting our sails.



Purnima Sundar
Executive Director

Cathy Curry
Chair, Strategic
Advisory Council

Message from CHEO's Vice-President of Mental Health and Addictions

As hospitals and community-based mental health agencies across the province continue to report significant spikes in demand for services, it's tempting to think back to the proverbial "calm before the storm" with rose-coloured glasses. At CHEO, we've seen mental health referrals swell between 20 and 30 per cent, along with increasing acuity and complexity. Disrupted routines and lack of face-to-face time with peers have deeply affected our children and young people. As the pandemic wears on, more and more of them need mental health help. Many need more intensive treatment, and too many need it urgently.

However, it's important to remember that prior to the pandemic, it wasn't smooth sailing for far too many children, young people and families. Pervasive and persistent challenges like access and equity aren't new to the child and youth mental health and addictions system. What we're experiencing now is the immediate pressure of a pandemic overlaid on a system that was already struggling to keep pace with needs.



At the same time, we're seeing exponential growth in the delivery of virtual mental health care. What was at best a "nice to have" for most organizations has become, by necessity, a vital service option. In recent months there's been a veritable tidal wave of efforts to research, implement and evaluate virtual care offerings to ensure that this service option continues to benefit many of Ontario's children and young people long after the pandemic is over. The Centre has had an important role in this area, from conducting a provincial evaluation to developing webinars and resources to support the sector's transition, and even funding innovation initiatives and impact grants focusing on virtual care.

We're now at a crossroads as a sector. We have an opportunity to plan, act and invest to ensure that

children and young people aren't left high and dry in the coming recovery efforts. Even when the pandemic ends and the global community resumes some degree of normalcy, our communities and the families we serve will feel the lingering impacts of this challenging time for years to come. If we can get all the right people on board and rowing in the same direction now, we can right the ship, so to speak. We can figure out how to best structure the child and youth mental health and addictions system to be agile enough to respond to unique and emerging needs, resilient enough to weather future challenges and robust enough to better serve all children, young people and families.



Joanne Lowe

Vice-President of Mental Health and Addictions, CHEO
Executive Director, Youth Services Bureau



New directions

Since COVID-19 arrived in Ontario, uncertainty and change have been all our working realities. From the beginning, there were countless unknowns, but what we knew for sure was that we couldn't sit back and be simple observers. After all, you can't cross the sea just by standing and staring at the water. In this section, we discuss new work brought about by (or shaped in large part due to) the pandemic.

Generating resources relevant to the pandemic

Supporting our sector has always been a crucial part of our work at the Centre, but that took on a whole new dimension in 2020 as the pandemic forced a rapid transition to virtual care. Child and youth mental health agencies across the province have been unwavering in their efforts to continue to provide services in the face of unprecedented challenges, evolving needs and increasing demand. From the beginning we've sought to be there for them, responding to their emerging needs with topical [evidence summaries and webinars](#).

Evidence summaries

Since April 2020, we've produced 11 evidence summaries, which have been collectively viewed more than **11,400** times and downloaded more than **2,300** times.

- E-mental health services
- Evaluating and improving e-mental health services
- Internet-based cognitive behavioural therapy
- Potential impacts of COVID-19 on child and youth mental health
- Privacy considerations for delivering e-mental health services
- Resources to support bereaved families during COVID-19
- Return to school during COVID-19
- Supporting the well-being of mental health service providers during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Supporting virtual teams and remote clinical supervision
- Talking to children and youth about COVID-19
- Virtual group therapy

Webinars

Over **2,600** people participated in these webinars, and another **4,551** have watched the recordings.

- Back to school during COVID-19: What community-based child and youth mental health providers need to know
- Grade 12 to post-secondary: Transitions during COVID-19
- Managing high-risk situations in virtual care
- The impact of COVID-19 on early years mental health
- Virtual care 101 for child and youth mental health
- Virtual realities: Responding to complex child and youth mental health needs during a pandemic

“The session helped decrease my anxiety about conducting video sessions. The experience can be very daunting and unnatural for some of us who have worked in person for the last 30 years. The experts were very grounded and reaffirming about these sessions.”

Participant

Virtual care 101 webinar



Evaluating virtual care

As agencies began making the rapid shift to virtual services, we partnered with Children's Mental Health Ontario to learn about the process of implementing virtual care and impacts on clients and service providers. Our goal was to understand what worked well and what could be improved, to help more agencies add or improve virtual care options during and after the pandemic. We also hosted two [webinars](#) on this topic:

- Evaluation of virtual care in response to COVID-19
- Three approaches to ongoing monitoring and evaluation

We then took it a step further and looked to our agency partners to help advance recommendations from the evaluation report, [Transition to virtual care](#), through our latest round of Innovation Initiatives funding.

150+ people participated
in these webinars

194+ people have watched
the recordings



Studying the pandemic’s impacts on children and young people

As measures to slow the spread of COVID-19 significantly altered everyone’s daily lives, we set out with the CHEO Research Institute to better understand just how the pandemic was impacting children, young people and families in Ontario, and how our sector could better support them during and after the crisis.

We later published an [overview of the study findings](#) and a [snapshot of young people’s mental health needs](#), which have collectively been viewed more than 300 times, and referenced in various media, including the [Toronto Star](#).

In February 2021 we launched a second round of the study to check in on how young people were doing, one year into the pandemic. We also wanted to gather information on what mental health services and supports had been accessed and how young people and their caregivers thought services could be improved. We look forward to sharing the findings.

Data highlights	
Young people	Parents and caregivers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,341 respondents • Nearly ⅔ said their mental health got worse during pandemic • ⅓ were getting help for their mental health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 725 respondents • About ⅓ had already sought or were planning to seek mental health support for their child • ¼ are unsure how to find help



Bringing together service providers and academics

In 2020, we forged a new partnership with Mental Health Research Canada. To help bridge the gap between child and youth mental health agencies and researchers from the world of academia, we offered impact grants asking people from both settings to work together on an innovative, applied research project with strong potential to improve service quality and access.

The first round was announced pre-pandemic — conveniently, we already had our sights set on e-mental health and asked applicants to explore the use of technology to enhance child and youth mental health. By the time we launched the second round in September, we were getting a clearer picture of the impacts of COVID-19 on Ontario's children, young people and families, so we asked applicants to explore solutions focusing on families from vulnerable groups who experience challenges in accessing and receiving high-quality mental health care.



“ We very much appreciate and enjoy the opportunity to partner with the Centre — mostly due to the highly capable and dynamic team members who are passionate, action-oriented and values-driven. Both organizations share an authentic commitment to collaboration, and a deep desire to ensure the research that we support is valued by people with lived experience and is poised for impact.”

Akela Peoples

Chief Executive Officer, Mental Health Research Canada



Visit our [Innovation page](#) to learn more about the projects funded to date.



Course corrections

According to maritime proverb, a smooth sea never made a skilled sailor. We've certainly encountered challenges, but none of our projects have run aground. In fact, with course corrections, we've moved other work forward and found unexpected opportunities. In this section, we share aspects of our work where we've had to adjust.

Taking a new approach to Innovation Initiatives

Since 2017, our Innovation Initiatives funding has helped child and youth mental health agencies turn big ideas into potential solutions to improve service quality and access. In late 2020 we announced a new round of funding, with a more specific ask of applicants than ever before: propose a project addressing one or more of the recommendations from our evaluation report, [Transition to virtual care](#). In addition to helping move ideas into practice, this is a great opportunity to help agencies to add to or improve their virtual service offerings. Visit our [Innovation page](#) to learn more about the projects.

“ Helping anyone who works with or cares for young people to understand trauma and its impacts is one of our community’s highest priorities. With the Innovation Initiatives grant, we’ve been able to offer trauma-informed training to community partners and caregivers and expand it into an online course to increase access and allow families to partner more closely with their clinicians.”

Jen Posteraro

Clinician, Compass Boussole Akii-Izhinoogan
(lead agency for Sudbury and Manitoulin)



Refocusing our collective efforts on provincial priorities

We have a long history of collaborating with Ontario's lead agencies through the Child and Youth Mental Health Lead Agency Consortium and the community of practice, to identify and advance work on key provincial priorities:

- improving access and reducing wait times
- implementing a common perception of care tool to evaluate client service experiences province-wide
- adopting a standardized assessment tool to monitor and evaluate outcomes of children and youth across Ontario
- strengthening live-in treatment services across Ontario

The latest provincial priorities report highlights work completed to date, future directions and how the pandemic has amplified our existing priorities. We've helped advance these efforts by collaborating with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health to implement the Ontario Perception of Care for Mental Health and Addictions tool to assess client satisfaction across two core services (intensive services; counselling and therapy) in all 33 service areas. As co-leads of the access working group, we've been looking at how brief services are currently being defined and how wait times are being measured. We'll use this information to co-develop a consistent set of principles for assessing wait times with lead agencies.

Weathering challenges and creating new opportunities for care pathways

Primary care pathways

Our [primary care pathways](#) project supports demonstration sites to create, implement and evaluate care pathways in their communities. Implementation and overall data collection slowed in 2020, but the addition of a new site and preliminary data pre-pandemic are encouraging. Notably, follow-up surveys show that families largely believe they were referred to the appropriate service to meet their needs, and were satisfied with both the wait times and ease of access to mental health services.

Early years

With so many people from so many different sectors working together, the inability to convene in-person has stalled key aspects of our [early childhood pathways](#) development work. However, communities remain committed to creating efficient

pathways for mental health services for children under the age of six. A notable highlight: we've pivoted to support our partners at Infant and Early Mental Health Promotion to provide planned training in an online format, with the unexpected outcome of being able to train significantly more people than originally would have been possible in the in-person sessions.

Quest

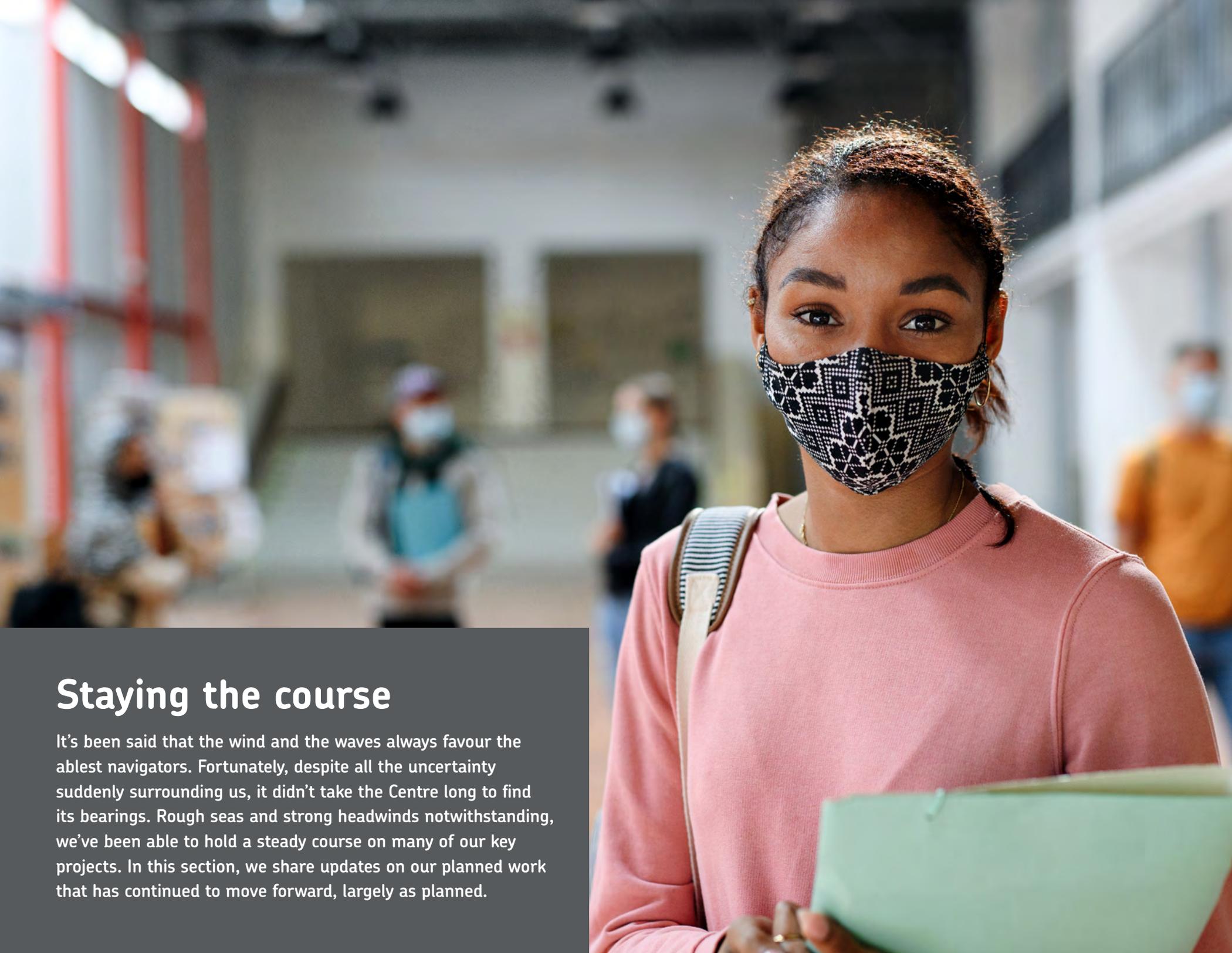
The work of our first [Quest](#) cohort was just getting underway as the pandemic took hold, bringing up urgent competing priorities for agency participants and requiring important changes to plans for the quality improvement program's delivery. Some projects experienced delays and some moved forward quicker than anticipated, but we extended the timeline for all teams. In early 2021, we opened the call for applications for a second cohort, also focusing on care pathways. To best meet agency needs, we've added a short-track option (6 months) in addition to the 12-month track. New participants will be announced this summer.

Learn more about current [projects](#).



300+

local service providers across our early years pilot sites have completed or are completing virtual training.



Staying the course

It's been said that the wind and the waves always favour the ablest navigators. Fortunately, despite all the uncertainty suddenly surrounding us, it didn't take the Centre long to find its bearings. Rough seas and strong headwinds notwithstanding, we've been able to hold a steady course on many of our key projects. In this section, we share updates on our planned work that has continued to move forward, largely as planned.



Developing a virtual walk-in guideline

We anticipated a growing need for e-mental health services when we made that one of our strategic focus areas in 2019. Little did we know then just how urgently virtual mental health care options would need to be adopted (and adapted)! Our advisory group recommended prioritizing a virtual walk-in guideline, which aligns with current needs. We look forward to launching the guideline later this summer.

Rooted in an implementation science framework, the guideline draws upon current practices, available evidence and guidance from an advisory group of experts with experience studying and offering virtual care. It will provide timely direction for implementing and delivering high-quality virtual walk-in services in community-based child and youth mental health organizations. In the coming months, we will endeavour to align our ongoing work in this area with like-minded provincial efforts.

We also had the opportunity to host a workshop to preview the guideline at CAMH's 10th annual e-mental health conference in March.

70+

people helped shape this guideline, between the advisory group, consulted stakeholders and Centre staff

Advancing quality youth and family engagement

Quality standards for youth and family engagement

In 2020, we opened our coaching program to support those implementing the quality standards in their organizations and communities. We've since collaborated with 19 agencies and service areas, offering tailored supports from helping to conduct and interpret measurement surveys to get a snapshot of current state of engagement, to assisting with action planning to reach their ideal state. We've also pursued many virtual opportunities to share knowledge, including conferences, workshops and podcasts.

In February 2021, we convened a new engagement community of practice with 26 agency representatives to further support those implementing the quality standards. Most recently, we

released updated versions of the [quality standard for youth engagement](#) and the [quality standard for family engagement](#), which now incorporate practical examples for each principle, to link best practices to concrete steps or tangible jumping-off points.

Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario

As an integral member of the Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario (YWHO) backbone team, we're leading engagement efforts during the demonstration project. We've also begun to embed the quality standards for youth and family engagement in operations and local supports. We continue to coordinate and lead the provincial youth and family advisory councils as well as monthly meetings with engagement leads in a community of practice. We've now wrapped up the third year of evaluation, with assessment priorities focused on the transition to virtual engagement, youth co-creation and how family engagement has evolved in a youth-driven model.



“As a knowledge mobilization organization, we heavily vet the resources we use. We wholeheartedly believe in the quality standards for youth and family engagement. I see them as a bit of a protective and empowerment factor for folks who are being engaged, as they provide tangible ways to support people with lived expertise that I haven't seen anywhere else.”

Micaela Harley

Senior Engagement and Knowledge Equity Lead, Frayme

Expanding youth and family voice in our work

Youth advisory council

From guiding internal strategy and operations to consulting on projects to co-developing resources, our [youth advisory council](#) members have been part of more of our work than ever over the past year. They're also meeting more than ever, with the switch to a virtual format enabling monthly meetings, resulting in a greater sense of engagement and continuity between meetings.

We replaced several inaugural council members, whose terms ended, and

“I've had many opportunities to engage with the Centre in the past and it's always been a smooth process — the team is well-prepared, and they offer tools to make things easy. But, now, having a family advisory council really helps elevate family voice. It gives a more consistent approach to how family perspectives are heard, and I appreciate that I'm not alone, not the only family member at the table.”

Vicki Cochrane

Member, Centre's family advisory council

expanded the council to 15 diverse young people. We're also in the process of developing a larger youth network for broader consultations.

Family advisory council

The newest of our advisory councils, the [family advisory council](#), met for the first time in June 2020 and has been connecting monthly (virtually) since then. This diverse group of advisors consults on our work and co-develops products, all to ensure that family voice is embedded across our various activities. The group has also developed engagement considerations for our project planning processes and is currently assessing the Centre's family engagement through the quality standard for family engagement measurement survey.



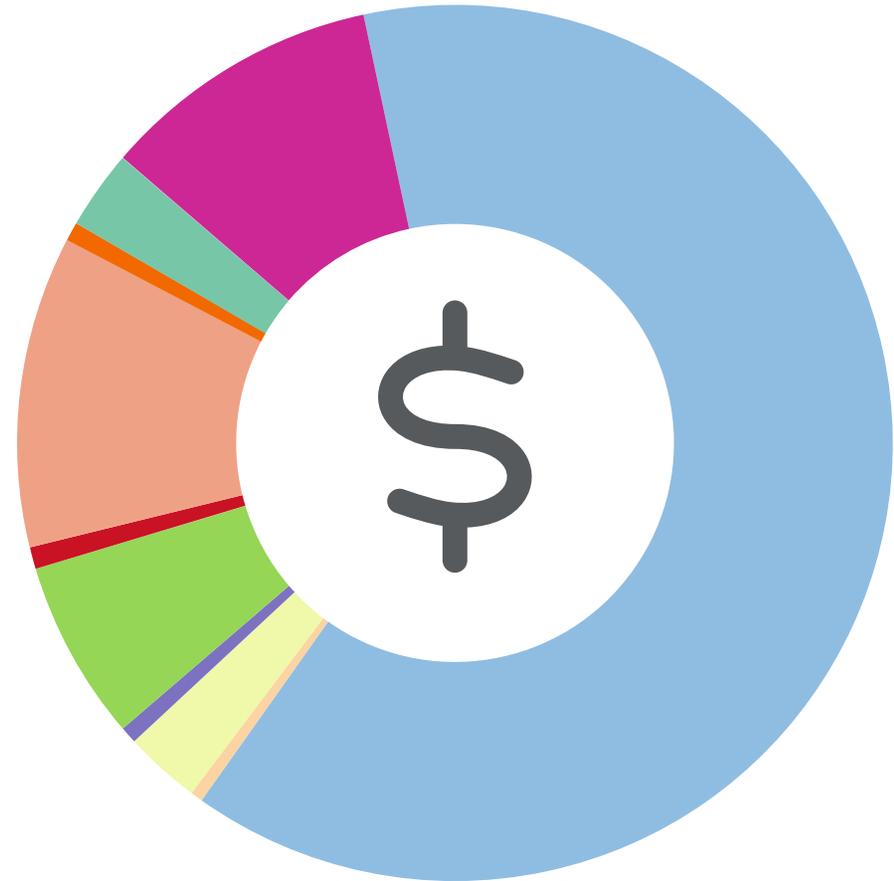
Take a look!

Youth advisory council members were instrumental in creating the [youth engagement traffic light](#), a visual aide to better understand the continuum of youth engagement.

Logbooks

Investments

Salaries and benefits	\$ 3,730,164
Office supplies and expenses	\$ 166,237
Office equipment	\$ 26,573
Staff training and development	\$ 36,567
Communication promotion, materials and translation	\$ 47,469
Staff travel and accommodation	\$ 4,352 (+)
Meeting expenses	\$ 41,096
Purchased services consultants	\$ 393,211
Distributed funds	\$ 679,246
Rent	\$ 172,184
Administration fee	\$ 611,605
Total	\$ 5,900,000



While we were able to redistribute most of the funds that had been secured pre-pandemic for staff travel and accommodation, we closed the fiscal year with a slight surplus in this category.

Performance measurement and online engagement

271 virtual coaching, consultation
or program sessions with
1,200+ participants from
agencies across Ontario

89% of participants satisfied
or very satisfied with
our webinars

273,000
times our COVID-19 resources and
relevant research have been seen
on social media



14,000+

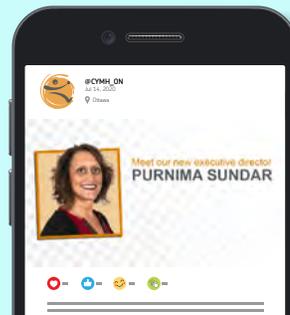
times our followers have interacted with our
social media content (liked, commented, shared)

50,300+
website visits

111,200+
page views

10,500+
resource downloads

Our post with the most likes and comments comes
from July 2020, when we announced that our former
director of knowledge mobilization, Dr. Purnima Sundar
had moved into the executive director role



Forging ahead

Circumstances still require us to watch for, navigate and respond to needs surfacing due to the ongoing crisis, but we're determined to not leave any slack in the important work we've undertaken through our focus areas. Improving care pathways within and between care systems, for example, along with our work to support virtual care have only become more urgent priorities throughout the pandemic.

We're also keeping a sharp look out for medium- and longer-term priorities. Notably, we're putting more emphasis on the intersections that create complex, multi-faceted mental health needs. Evidence (including figures from our own primary care pathways project) shows that children and young people who seek mental health help rarely have just one challenge that needs addressing. That's why we're moving more deliberately and in collaboration with sector partners to increase our focus on substance use and addictions in children and young people. We're also beginning to explore the intersection between autism spectrum disorder and mental health, and we're committed to supporting our sector's work around diversity and inclusion, to ensure more equitable services for all.

There are brighter days on the horizon. We look forward to feeling the sunshine on our faces, breathing deeply and hugging the people we've missed this past year. In the meantime, we'll continue to be there for agencies and service providers, so that they can be there for our children, young people and families.



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