



# INNOVATION INITIATIVES 2021–22

## Project summaries



### **Delivery of mental health services for Ontario youth using CBT in virtual reality**

Project lead: Pathstone Mental Health (Niagara)

#### *What's the issue?*

The prevalence of anxiety disorders among children and young people has increased in recent years. Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) is an effective treatment for young people with anxiety, but treatment completion rates may be affected by distance delivery — the primary mode of therapy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### *What's the innovation?*

Pathstone Mental Health, in partnership with Brock University and XpertVR, will offer CBT using a virtual reality mode of delivery to children and young people with anxiety. Unlike typical modes of distance delivery, virtual reality facilitates the important social connection between therapists and clients. While virtual reality has been used to deliver CBT, it has never been used on children, young people or in Ontario.

#### *What impact is anticipated?*

It is expected that children and young people will find virtual space comfortable and safe, making them more likely to complete treatment. This innovation has the potential to improve the effectiveness of CBT for this age group, particularly among those who live in rural areas.



### **Asynchronous virtual DBT for young people**

Project lead: London Family Court Clinic (Middlesex)

#### *What's the issue?*

Dialectical behavioural therapy (DBT) can improve self-regulation, reduce distress and help high-risk and marginalized young people form stable interpersonal relationships. While DBT can be offered virtually, distraction, poor engagement and individual learning needs among diverse groups can reduce effectiveness.

### *What's the innovation?*

London Family Court Clinic will modify the current virtual DBT programming to incorporate an asynchronous learning approach. The use of pre-recorded videos discussing the skills in each module will allow young people to learn at their own pace and provide more time for meaningful discussions, examples and questions during virtual group time. Additionally, modules teaching the skill of validation to parents and caregivers will be developed.

### *What impact is anticipated?*

An asynchronous approach is expected to reduce distractions and improve participation in virtual group meetings. Teaching validation skills to parents may improve young people's engagement and help support them during moments of distress. Due to the virtual nature of this group, the intervention can be replicated and used within other communities.



## **Using evidence to connect children, young people and families to effective in-person, virtual or blended care**

Project lead: Crossroads Children's Mental Health Centre (Ottawa)

### *What's the issue?*

Following the pandemic, virtual care will continue to be offered due to the effectiveness, cost-efficiency and ability to reach rural populations. However, there is little guidance regarding which service modality — in-person, virtual or blended — will be most effective for different populations and under different conditions. Virtual care for individuals has been proven effective, but virtual group care is understudied.

### *What's the innovation?*

In partnership with the Kids Come First network, Crossroads Children's Mental Health Centre will develop, implement and test practice guidelines that will connect children and young people to the most appropriate group modality (in-person, virtual or blended care). These guidelines will consider client preference, demographics, complexity of mental health concerns, treatment efficacy, privacy concerns and access issues.

### *What impact is anticipated?*

The development of these guidelines will help child and youth mental health agencies make effective care recommendations to children, young people and families.



## **Improving access to child and youth mental health services: Does virtual care make a difference?**

Project lead: EveryMind Mental Health Services (Peel)

### *What's the issue?*

Access to virtual mental health care services has rapidly expanded following the COVID-19 pandemic. While virtual services have the potential to reduce barriers to care, there are also challenges — including internet access, data costs and privacy concerns — that may disproportionately affect marginalized children and young people.

### *What's the innovation?*

EveryMind Mental Health Services, along with the Institute for Better Health, will compare the rates of mental health service use by young people in-person (i.e. before the pandemic) and virtually (i.e. within the past year). They will then investigate whether usage rates differ across subgroups of young people to understand if marginalized young people were able to access care that was delivered virtually. Stakeholders — including clients and families, healthcare providers and researchers — will work together to generate ideas that remove barriers to care.

### *What impact is anticipated?*

The findings will improve access to care for children, young people and families from marginalized communities. Given the diversity of Peel, findings can be generalized to identify and eliminate barriers to mental health care across Ontario.



## **Virtual psychoeducation group for young people with substance use and mental health challenges**

Project lead: Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services (Ottawa)

### *What's the issue?*

Adolescents and young adults (i.e. under the age of 25) are the age group with the highest incidence of both mental health challenges and substance use disorders. Most young people who misuse substances also experience mental health challenges. Despite the high incidence in this age group, there are insufficient substance use services that address their age-specific needs.

*What's the innovation?*

Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services, along with key community agency partners, will adapt the Choices and Change harm reduction psychoeducation program, to be suitable for young people and virtual delivery. Youth advisors and young people with lived experience will contribute to the naming, programming and promotion of the virtual group.

*What impact is anticipated?*

This program is expected to reduce substance use in participants. Content developed for the group can also be shared and adapted for young people across the province.