



**Knowledge Institute**  
on Child and Youth Mental Health and Addictions

# **Building with intention**

## **Impact Report 2026**

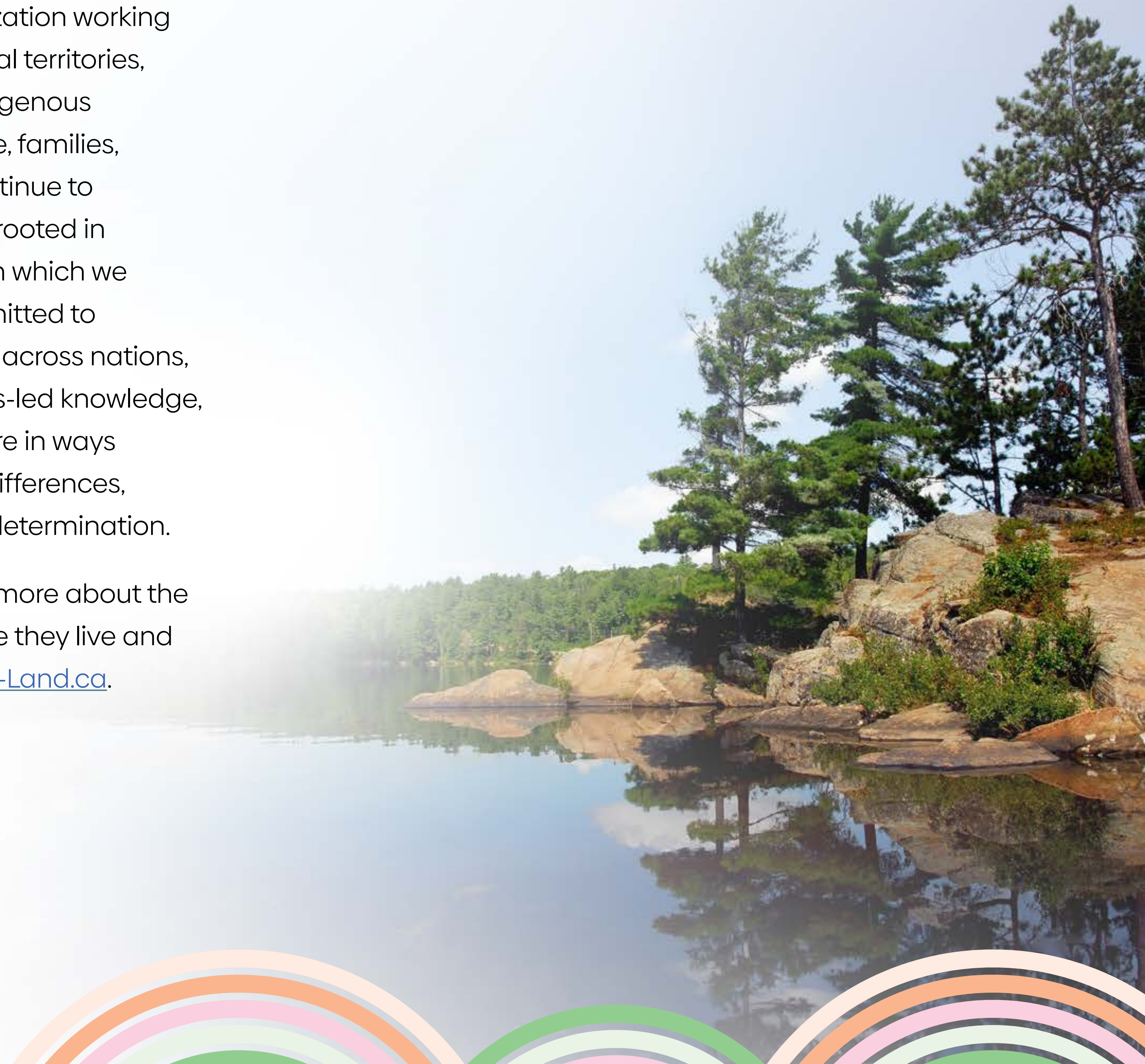


The Knowledge Institute recognizes the enduring presence, strength, and leadership of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples across what is now known as Ontario. This province is covered by 46 treaties and other agreements, reflecting diverse nations, histories, and responsibilities that continue today.

Our office is located in Ottawa on the traditional, unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe Nation, with deep ties to the Algonquins of Pikwàkanagàn First Nation. For thousands of years, this land has been cared for and traveled along the Kichi Sibi (Ottawa River) – a historic meeting place and trade route. The word “Ottawa” comes from the Algonquin word adawe, meaning “to trade,” reflecting a long history of connection, exchange, and relationships.

As a provincial organization working across many traditional territories, we recognize that Indigenous children, young people, families, and communities continue to experience inequities rooted in the colonial systems in which we operate. We are committed to engaging respectfully across nations, supporting Indigenous-led knowledge, and strengthening care in ways that respect cultural differences, community, and self-determination.

We invite you to learn more about the traditional lands where they live and work by visiting [Native-Land.ca](https://www.native-land.ca).



# Introduction

Better care doesn't happen by chance. It's built intentionally, from a strong foundation and shared commitment.

Across Ontario's child and youth mental health, substance use health and addictions sector, agencies, providers, young people and families are working every day to strengthen care. The Knowledge Institute is proud to support that work by aligning partners, developing quality standards, and helping mobilize evidence into practical action.

Over the past year, we continued building the foundations that support clearer pathways and more consistent, needs-based care. From the release of the Levels of Care quality standard to our ongoing leadership within the Ontario Intensive

Treatment Pathway, our teams have worked closely with partners across the province to reduce fragmentation and strengthen coordination across systems.

At the heart of this work are the voices of young people, families, and service providers. Their lived experience and expertise help ensure that improvements reflect not only what research tells us, but what care should feel like in practice. And when we weave evidence and experience together, meaningful change becomes possible.

As you read this report, you will see how collaboration, steady progress, and shared leadership are continuing to strengthen Ontario's child and youth mental health, substance use health and addictions sector.



# Leaders Message

## **Nicholas**

The days are slow, but the years are fast. When you're in the middle of system change the progress can feel incremental, but when you step back you realize how much has changed.

Over the past several years, as a sector, we've been building a stronger foundation through partnerships and pathways. And that work is starting to show up in how the system feels for the people moving through it. Just as importantly, it's being shaped, in real time, by the voices of young people and families with lived experience, helping guide how we design and improve it.

Kids don't live in one single sector. They live in communities, and building something that truly works for them means working together across those communities. I'm proud of the way the Knowledge Institute supports communities and helps move system change forward.

## **Amy**

It's been a fulfilling year seeing how our work supports system transformation and drives high-quality care for infants, children, young people and families. We continue to be sought out for our expertise in child and youth mental health and substance use health, as well as research, knowledge mobilization, implementation, engagement, communications and QI.

We've also continued to strengthen our role as a connector within the system, fostering strategic partnerships and collaboration across sectors and communities to advance shared solutions to inform system transformation. These connections create real change for communities across the province.

## **Melissa**

For over a decade, I've been a leader at the Knowledge Institute and am so proud of how we have grown alongside our partners in the



sector who are always striving to build better systems and services.

While our work has evolved over the years to meet the shifting needs of the sector, we have remained steadfast in our purpose, to work with our partners to ensure infants, children, young people and families in Ontario experience the best possible mental health.

The world around us is becoming ever more complex and so are the lives of children, young people and families. Here at the Knowledge Institute, we are prepared to meet the challenge and to continue to evolve our services to meet people and agencies where they are at.



## Financials

Salaries and benefits	\$5,704,614
Office supplies and expenses	\$146,088
Office equipment	\$21,497
Staff development	\$62,102
Staff travel	\$138,861
Meeting expenses	\$187,465
Communications and sponsorships	\$55,873
Professional fees	\$96,280
Distributed funds	\$773,179
Rent @ 695 Industrial Ave.	\$92,512
CHEO Administration Fee	\$800,850
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$8,079,324</b>

# Shared foundations for high-quality care

This year, the Knowledge Institute strengthened its quality standards program to support more consistent, needs-based care across Ontario's child and youth mental health, substance use health and addictions sector.

This came to life with the release of the [Levels of care \(LoC\) quality standard](#) and the continued development of the [Live-in treatment \(LIT\) quality standard](#), which is now drafted. Together, these standards help agencies clarify pathways, guide their decision-making, and respond as needs change and evolve.

From the outset, the LoC standard was shaped through co-development with young people, caregivers, and service providers.

Early uptake of the LoC standard has been promising. The [launch webinar](#) in September 2025 brought together 88 participants. Two Community of Practice sessions with 57 total registered participants focused on applying the standard to local contexts.

Development of the LIT standard is building on this momentum. The LIT QSAC includes 50 members, with growing participation from young people and caregivers.



“Being at the table ensures the standard reflects not only clinical best practice, but what safe, timely, and responsive care actually feels like for young people and families.”

**Sophia Chail-Teves**

LoC Quality Standards  
Advisory Committee member (QSAC)

This year, we coordinated two QSAC meetings and shared early insights from this work at key sector events, including the Ontario Intensive Treatment Pathway (OITP) symposium, which is helping to build awareness and alignment across the system. As well, we completed the drafting phase for the LIT quality standard and collected public feedback. This critical step has allowed us to gather more input from a broader range of voices in the sector, including those who we may not otherwise reach.

The LIT quality standard is a key component of our work with OITP. To ensure alignment across initiatives,

a member from each OITP working group is also a member of the QSAC. Our Knowledge Institute team plays an active role in many OITP committees, and our executive director, Nicholas Watters, serves on its steering committee. This level of involvement allows us to stay connected to system developments and ensure the work reflects the needs and priorities of the sector.

Together, our quality standards are setting the stage for meaningful improvements and better mental health and substance use health outcomes for children, young people and families in Ontario.



“When you’ve experienced the system with your child, you see and live through the gaps. Being part of the QSAC means I can help build a standard that addresses those gaps before they become a problem for another family.”

**Kelly-Lynn Musico**  
LIT QSAC Co-Chair



# Weaving lived expertise into systems change

When youth and family voices are at the heart of our work, we can build lived expertise into every level of the sector – leading to services that are more accessible, equitable, and inclusive.

Our engagement grants came back for a second year to give agencies across Ontario an extra boost to support their meaningful engagement work. This year, we funded eight agencies with the grant, hosted an in-person knowledge mobilization event, and extended our reach with a Community of Practice – all helping to build our sector’s capacity to support meaningful engagement at organizational and system levels across Ontario.



This year, our [Youth Advisory Council](#) (YAC) co-created a zine that centers youth voices and experiences. “[Listen up!](#)” shows readers how young people are shaping the sector, what they want adults to know about their mental health and well-being, and their hopes for the future. The zine was shared widely at conferences and is available on our website.



# Why does it matter for family members to have an active role in decision-making at the organizational and system levels?

This is what our [Family Advisory Council](#) members had to say:



**Cheshmak**



**Different voices reveal spaces and places in systems where there could be blind spots.**



**Kim**



**Sometimes things on paper aren't realities.**



**Deb**



**Families don't just need updates, they need communication and transparency.**



**Moscene**



**There are siloes - different services aren't always communicated but families can be that point of connection.**



**Daniel**



**We are like drops coming together to form a mighty wave.**



# Shaping a path that reflects every voice

Every child and young person experiences care differently. We spoke with leaders, providers, and advisory councils from across Ontario to understand the differences, recognize barriers, and identify priority areas where care could be stronger. These conversations— together with a review of existing equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism (EDIA-R) resources— shaped our [priority-setting report](#),

which will help guide leaders and organizations in providing care that is more welcoming, inclusive, and responsive. Within the Knowledge Institute, our EDIA-R working group brings these lessons to life. Here, staff learn together, share ideas, and suggest practical changes to ensure inclusion is reflected in how we work and in the support we provide across the sector.



## Did you know?

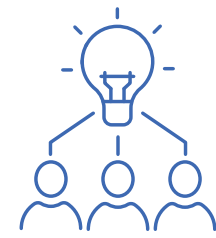
This year, for the sixth cohort of our [Innovation Initiatives program](#), we awarded six agencies across Ontario with up to \$75,000 each to develop, deliver and evaluate culturally relevant programs.

## Explore more EDIA-R resources:

- [Mental health care for children with and seeking refugee protection](#)
- [Intersectionality and well-being](#)
- [Supporting student well-being through contemplative practices](#)

# Bringing people and knowledge together

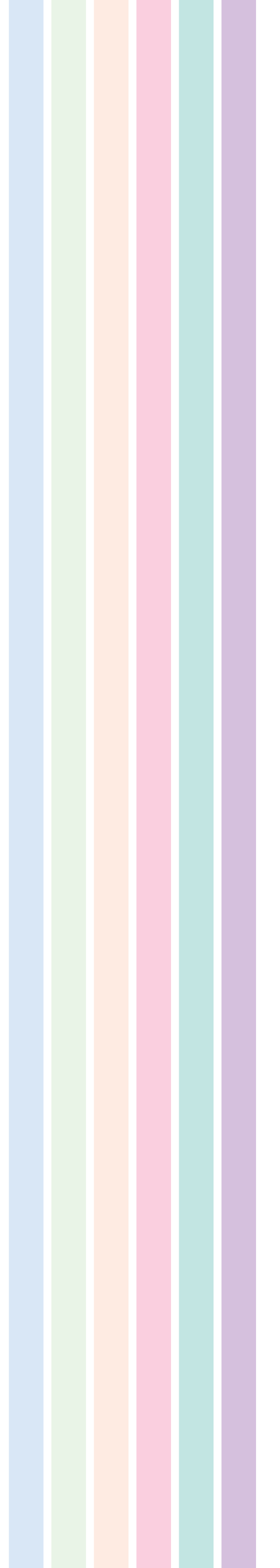
By showing up on the ground and engaging directly with people shaping the sector, we supported the mobilization of evidence into practice and progress toward system-level change.



Working alongside Kids Come First, we're enhancing collaboration across sectors to map infant and early childhood mental health services and care pathways in five service areas.



Our [quality improvement programming](#) has supported 73 agencies across the province through either direct coaching support or sector capacity-building events and trainings. Our QI work has evolved and is now helping strengthen system-wide capacity, leadership, and alignment across the child and youth mental health, substance use health and addictions sector, driving a coordinated approach that is transforming how organizations learn, improve, and deliver care across the province.

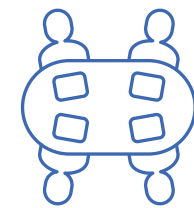




100% of respondents who participated in the [Quest QI program](#) agreed they felt better prepared to support future improvement initiatives because of what they learned.



Nicholas spoke at the eMental Health International Collaborative (eMHIC) conference about [ways to strengthen digital resilience in young people](#) so they can better navigate an increasingly complex online world.



The [Right time right care](#) network sessions brought together more than 80 participants from all lead agencies throughout the sector for an opportunity to connect, share insights and challenges, and learn from one another.



We partnered with Infant and Early Mental Health Promotion at SickKids to co-host three regional symposia to help service providers translate infant and early mental health science into practice.



Our research team trained 293 service providers on the [HEADS-ED and/or HEADS-ED Under 6 screening tools](#) helping to build relationships between service providers in different sectors and connecting more care pathways.

The chance to come together and connect is everything: a reminder of the important mission we strive for, a moment to ground the work in the expertise of our staff and partners, and a way to keep our focus on the future we are all helping to build.



Funded by: **Ontario** 

The views expressed herein are those of the Knowledge Institute and do not necessarily reflect those of the Province.