

Children & Youth are a Priority

Investment in quality community and school-based supports and services directly affect children's ability to build resilience and thrive while living with mental health concerns. These early interventions are proven to be most cost-effective and provide youth with the early skills to support their mental health.



Issue Summary

Youth ages 12 to 24 are among the most underserved population in regard to mental health and addictions in Alberta.¹⁴



Solution

The development of promotion, prevention and early intervention for children and families in communities across Alberta provides a long-term solution to improving community mental health.

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Research

“There is strong evidence that promotion, prevention and early intervention targeted at children and families can produce significant net cost benefits.”

–Making the Case for Investing in Mental Health, Mental Health Commission of Canada,⁷ 2016



Alberta Examples

Youth Hubs Alberta are prevention-focused environments that offer peer support, social services and primary health care to youth and young adults.⁸ This evidence-based, people-centred initiative is designed to be tailorable to the unique social, cultural and health needs of each community. The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Alberta Division, with support from the Government of Alberta and Policy Wise for Children & Families, supports Youth Hubs as an integrated part of Alberta’s communities in schools and safe spaces.

CMHA Calgary’s YouthSMART (Youth Supporting Mental Health and Resiliency Together) integrates collaborative, youth-initiated mental health learning opportunities in local junior and senior high schools. YouthSMART knows that students are incredibly influential amongst their peers, within their schools, families and communities. As such, YouthSMART approaches youth as valuable peer contributors actively involved in the programming and opportunities that directly impact their wellness, and works with youth leaders to transform the culture of their school surrounding mental health.

Other children and youth initiatives in Alberta include the Alberta Health Services (AHS) school-based Mental Health Capacity Builders program, which provides support to students within their learning environments. Additionally, the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative provides resources and science exploring early brain development and its connection to lifelong physical and mental health, including addiction.

⁷ Mental Health Commission of Canada (2016). *Making the case for investing in mental health in Canada*. Retrieved from https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/2016-06/Investing_in_Mental_Health_FINAL_Version_ENG.pdf

⁸ Integrated Youth Hubs (n.d.). *Canadian Mental Health Association*. Retrieved from <https://alberta.cmha.ca/integrated-youth-hubs/>

⁹ Salt, V., Parker, N., Ramage, K., Scott, C. (2017). *Community-based Mental Health Services Hubs for Youth Environmental Scan*. PolicyWise for Children & Families. Retrieved from <https://policywise.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/2018-01JAN-04-Integrated-Hubs-EScan.pdf>