

Concurrent Sessions – August 22

Exploring the Evidence - Presentations and Conversation

Five concurrent workshops will be offered in thematic areas to engage discussion on the growing body of evidence about the importance of promoting mental health for children and youth. Each session will feature three presenters, who will present their findings and implications for policy and/or practice. The presentations will be followed by general discussion on the question: *What are the implications for “upstream” policies and programs?*

Responses to the discussion questions will be submitted to the Writing Room and contribute to the Call to Action that will conclude the program of ASI 2017.

Session 3: Exploring the Context for Substance Use and Youth Mental Health

a. *Addressing Substance Use on Canadian Campuses*

Anna McKiernan, Katie Fleming

Substance use among post-secondary students remains an issue across Canada. Many Canadian academic institutions are developing a framework to address mental health and alcohol use among students but addressing other substance use (e.g., cannabis) is also warranted as mental health and substance use are related. This study aimed to further increase understanding of perceptions of substance use and prevention strategies on campuses and inform the development of a framework to help reduce substance use and improve student mental health. Focus groups were conducted from summer 2016 to winter 2017 at Canadian universities and colleges in NS, ON, YK and BC. Participants included 56 students and 67 staff (e.g., health counselling services, security, resident advisers and student mentors). Findings were analyzed to inform recommendations for addressing substance use on campus.

How does your project make a connection with the theme Promoting Child and Youth Mental Health: Moving Evidence to Action?

Results from this study suggest student mental health may be contributing to substance use among Canadian students. Participants reported numerous barriers to accessing health and support services on campus, which may be contributing to poor health outcomes. By understanding why youth use substances we can ensure they are provided with appropriate supports including developing healthy coping mechanisms for stress and anxiety.

What will others learn from your project?

A main reason for student substance use include managing stress and anxiety of a demanding university lifestyle. Participants felt students are not equipped with coping skills and rely on substances to manage anxiety and stress. Barriers to addressing substance use on campus included limited availability in health services and lack of substance use policies and programs. Suggestions for a substance use framework

include providing life skills courses to improve coping mechanisms among students and bolstering health services.

How does your project demonstrate evidence of promising collaborative practices, policies, research?

These findings illustrate that approaches aimed at reducing substance use harms on campuses may be well received across Canada. Increasing health services and improving life skills among students may better address harms related to substance use and mental health on campuses. Future efforts should aim to ensure consistent programming and services across post-secondary campuses.

Main Presenter

Anna McKiernan

Research and Policy Analyst, Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction

Anna McKiernan is a Research and Policy Analyst at the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, a national organization with a legislated mandate to reduce alcohol- and other drug-related harms. In this role, Anna is responsible for initiating and facilitating national research in the substance abuse field including areas such as sport and substance use, cannabis use, drug-impaired driving and treatment of problematic substance use within the criminal justice system. Anna earned a MA in Sociology from the University Of Toronto and has been working in the road safety field for five years.

Co-Presenter

Katie Fleming

b. ***Setting the PEI context for action on child and youth mental health:
Changing patterns of substance use***

Dr. Jo-Ann MacDonald

Since 2008, the Canadian Student Tobacco Alcohol and Drugs Survey (CSTADS) has been used to collect biennial tobacco, alcohol, and drug use data from PEI students in grades 6-12, as part of the School Health Action Planning Evaluation System – Prince Edward Island (SHAPES-PEI). In 2014-15, 2 256 students from 53 Island schools were surveyed. In 2014, tobacco use rates among students (i.e., current smoking, ‘ever tried’, and past 30 day use of cigarettes, e-cigarettes, menthol, little cigars/cigarillos, and any tobacco product) were all significantly higher than comparable national rates. In addition, use within PEI increased significantly from 2012 on three indicators. Finally, in 2014, alcohol, binge drinking, and cannabis use rates among PEI students were all statistically significantly higher than national rates. Substance use among PEI students mirrored Canadian trends until 2012. Since then, there has been an alarming change in behaviour patterns among PEI students that does not align with youth risk behaviour patterns in other provinces. We believe this is an important piece of the story for PEI youth. Prevalence of substance use and other risk behaviours must be seen as important contextual considerations when moving forward with any mental health policy planning for children and youth.

***How does your project make a connection with the theme Promoting Child and Youth Mental Health:
Moving Evidence to Action?***

SHAPES-PEI provides long-term monitoring and surveillance of youth health behaviours. This consistent surveillance provides timely and local student health data that is essential for providing schools with the

evidence they need to take informed action. In addition to monitoring substance use and other risk behaviours, SHAPES-PEI also includes a mental fitness module that monitors students reported feelings of well-being and connectedness; positive and negative emotions; help-seeking behaviour; and experiences of bullying.

What will others learn from your project?

Our hope is to add to this important conversation around evidence-informed action by shedding light on some local evidence that highlights the complexity of factors influencing adolescent mental health outcomes. In addition, we will argue that – while it is the important to have access to timely youth health data – resources are also required for schools, communities, and governments to move that evidence into action by way of robust and holistic health policies and programs.

How does your project demonstrate evidence of promising collaborative practices, policies, research?

SHAPES-PEI is a research initiative that owes much of its continued success to strong local partnerships with school communities, school boards, and policy makers. Communication and engagement have been critical to building these relationships and sustaining the collaboration over time, which has, in turn, secured the continued buy-in of the research participants (schools and students). SHAPES-PEI provides a powerful platform from which to engage in youth health evidence-based action planning.

Presenter

Dr. Jo-Ann MacDonald

Associate Professor, School of Nursing, University of Prince Edward Island

Dr. Jo-Ann M. MacDonald is an Associate Professor at the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI). She is the Co-Principal Investigator for the Comprehensive School Health Research team at UPEI and lead PEI investigator for the School Health Action, Planning and Evaluation System– Prince Edward Island (SHAPES-PEI), a provincial monitoring and surveillance system that collects data from ~8,500 students in grades 5 to 12 on physical activity, healthy eating, and mental fitness. Jo-Ann’s additional research areas of interest include evidence-informed decision-making in public health, prevention of HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C, and other sexually transmitted infections.

c. ***Legalization and Regulation of Cannabis***

Dr. David Sabapathy

PEI's Chief Public Health Office (CPHO) examined the health effects of cannabis use, national health statements on cannabis use, cannabis regulations in other jurisdictions, current cannabis use in PEI and potential health impacts of legalization including the impact on child and youth mental health. This literature review was completed in early 2017 through the CPHO's Population Health Assessment and Surveillance Division in preparation for federal legalization of cannabis for recreational use by the summer of 2018. The information from this project will inform a public health policy approach to cannabis legalization and regulation in PEI.

How does your project make a connection with the theme Promoting Child and Youth Mental Health: Moving Evidence to Action?

Cannabis use is associated with both short and long-term health harms for children and youth, particularly in the areas of mental health and neurocognition, resulting in poor social and educational outcomes. Establishing an evidence-based public health approach to cannabis legalization will be essential to protecting and promoting child and youth mental health.

What will others learn from your project?

Audience will learn about cannabis epidemiology and health effects, examine public health implications of legalized cannabis and understand key public policy decision points to protect and promote child and youth mental health

How does your project demonstrate evidence of promising collaborative practices, policies, research?

Canada will be among the first countries in the world to consider cannabis a legal substance. The information from this project will can be used to immediately inform provincial and municipal policies as well begin to outline surveillance and research initiatives regarding cannabis usage.

Presenter

Dr. David Sabapathy

Deputy Chief Public Health Officer, PEI Chief Public Health Office, PEI Department of Health and Wellness

Dr. David Sabapathy was appointed as Deputy Chief Public Health Officer for the province of Prince Edward Island in 2014. Dr. Sabapathy is a physician and fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. He completed his MD and specialist training in Public Health and Preventive Medicine at the University of Calgary and holds a Master of Business Administration in health care administration, a Master of Science in health services research, and a Clinical Research Fellowship in applied public health research.