

## **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 5: Impact of Environments on Mental Health**

a. ***Exploring Perceptions and Identifying Solutions: A Policy Toolkit to Support Unstructured Child-led Play***

Christine Pentland

Objective: Funded by the Lawson Foundation and in partnership with Saskatchewan in motion and Ottawa Public Health, CPHA is developing a policy toolkit for school board and municipal decision-makers to increase access to unstructured child-led play. This play is not initiated in an organized, planned, or formal way. It may include thrilling and exciting forms of play that provide opportunities for challenge, and allows the child to determine their own limits. Methods: Literature reviews regarding parental perceptions of risky play, playground injuries, tort law and liability were completed. An online survey has been disseminated to gather parent perceptions. Additionally, 40 key informant interviews were conducted to understand decision-maker influences. Findings: Parents’ perceptions of neighbourhood safety, parental peer pressure, and influences of the media are barriers to children’s participation in unstructured child-led play. There are numerous challenges faced by municipal and school board decision-makers, including the fear of litigation and liability. Decision-makers must respond to a risk-averse society, comply with relevant Acts upholding a duty of care, and provide opportunities for play that contribute to healthy development. Summary: We have identified social and political drivers influencing play opportunities and have begun to identify options to address the challenges affecting policy and risk-management decisions.

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

Outdoor play is crucial to children’s mental and emotional health and it may reduce depression, anxiety, aggression, and sleep problems. As stated by ASI, raising healthy children is a responsibility of all Canadians. Despite being critical to healthy child development, children have become less active, play less freely, and have more limits placed on them.

***What will others learn from your project?***

We highlight the important link between outdoor play to mental health and wellbeing among children and youth. We identify barriers in the community and at school limiting this kind of play, like recess policies, by-laws, lack of funding, and the fear of litigation. We explore options to strengthen policies and collaboration across decision-makers to increase access to play, thereby benefiting healthy child development.

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

Some of the key findings from this project reflect the qualitative evidence from key informant interviews of 40 decision-makers across Canada who strongly influence play opportunities. Findings reveal various barriers to making decisions that allow for rich play opportunities, but also options to mitigate concerns, enhance collaboration, develop policies, and where to focus future research. These options were identified as needs from those working in play-related sectors themselves.

**Presenter**

Christine Pentland  
Project Officer, Canadian Public Health Association

Christine is a Master of Public Health graduate from Queen's University. She is currently a Project Officer at the Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA). Working with the Director of Policy, Christine's primary efforts have been focused on the development of a risk mitigation policy framework designed to increase access to unstructured child-led play in the community and at school.

b. ***The intergenerational effects of Indian Residential Schools: Psychological distress among Indigenous youth based on age of onset of symptoms***

Alex Thomas

It was of interest to assess whether a pattern of cumulative intergenerational risk exists due to familial Indian Residential School attendance measured by self-reported levels of depressed mood, suicide ideation and suicide attempts. It was of particular interest to determine whether this relationship differs based on the age of onset for symptoms of depression by comparing youth aged 12—14 to those aged 15—17. Using data collected by the Regional Health Survey, regression analysis was used to determine the relationships among variables. Based on the results, it was confirmed there is evidence of a cumulative effect of intergenerational trauma across generations among First Nations youth living on reserve in Canada. Levels of psychological distress were positively correlated with residential school family history. It also became clear that this relationship becomes more pronounced for youth aged 12—14, and statistically insignificant for youth aged 15—17. These findings are consistent with the suggestion that early onset and late onset depression present themselves differently. These findings suggest that mental health and healing initiatives in regards to intergenerational trauma due to IRS family history should focus on improving the well-being of younger Indigenous youth and those showing signs of early-onset mental health disorders.

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

My project is directly in line with the theme, “Promoting Child and Youth Mental Health: Moving Evidence to Action,” as methods were selected from “The Health and Well-Being of First Nations Youth” section of the 2008-2010 Regional Health Survey. In the current study, analyses of the First Nation Regional Health Survey explored the age of onset of depressive symptoms among First Nations youth.

***What will others learn from your project?***

Others will learn there is clear evidence of a cumulative effect of intergenerational trauma across generations among Indigenous youth living on reserve in Canada. Among all three indicators of mental health that were considered (depressed mood, suicide ideation, and suicide attempts), the same positive trend between the number of previous generations who attended residential school and increased levels of psychological distress were observed.

***How does your project demonstrate scale up of a tested innovation that promotes child and youth mental health in Atlantic Canada?***

There have been a number of studies among the general population that show social environment components, such as involvement in extracurricular activities, lead to lower levels of depression. This suggests that one potential treatment would be to focus on increasing involvement in extracurricular activities among Indigenous youth. Further longitudinal analyses must be carried out to determine what strategies are and aren't working based on whether or not the well-being of Indigenous youth is improving.

## **Presenter**

Alex Thomas

Summer student, Public Health Agency of Canada

Alex recently graduated from Acadia University with a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics and Statistics and will be starting medical school this fall at McMaster University. Alex's previous experience in Indigenous health involved doing research with Amy Bombay of Dalhousie University, where he explored the link between the cumulative effects of Indian Residential School attendance among Indigenous youth in relation to psychological distress and how this relationship differed depending on the age of onset of symptoms.

### c. ***Overcoming Barriers to Employment for Immigrant Youth***

Abby David

Current research into employability of new immigrant and refugee youth (18-30) indicates that they face many barriers to employment (about self, careers, labour market, employability, specific job skills, etc.), are not engaged in education/training or employment, and are vulnerable to further disengagement, marginalization and risk. An environmental scan was conducted to identify how many youth fall into this priority group in the three proposed sites in New Brunswick. The findings include: • Approximately 320 youth are between the ages of 18-30 and have not obtained a valid Canadian high school diploma • 54% of whom are women, sometimes facing cultural barriers in accessing the labour market • Using a sample of eligible participants from Fredericton and Saint John, 19% or 74 potential participants would require child care assistance while attending the program.

At the same time the labour force is shrinking and employers will need workers for a changing labour market and a more knowledge-based economy. As a result, the Employability Program for Immigrant Youth began in April 2017. The project is designed to assist new immigrant and refugee youth participants (age 18-30) to identify their barriers to employment and provide pre-employment and employment interventions to assist them in participating more fully in the current and future labour market. Many stakeholders and funders are contributing to this move of evidence into action and include: Service Canada (participant's allowance), PETL (Workplace Essential Skills, 24 weeks participants wages), NBCC (Sectors Orientation), EECD – Child care subsidies, Social Development - Housing subsidies & SD services, Employers, Settlement Agencies.

The youth participating in the program are provided with interventions (needs and assets identification/assessment, employability skills, safety training, wellness activities, community projects, workplace experience, and provided with timely financial incentive and support – coaching, child care, disability supports, housing subsidy) the expected outcome is that they will be more job ready, increase their current and future employability results (employed, self-employed or return to school) and contribute to meeting the needs of the labour market.

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

The project is demonstrating that there are specific challenges and needs of newcomers, which contribute to their mental health, self-awareness, confidence and community engagement and at the same time exposing them to the variety of services and opportunities that are unseen or not accessible to them.

*“We have one individual in our cohort who suffers from mental health challenges. Prior to this program he was attending English classes at MAGMA and living with his aunt. Because his aunt is working he does not qualify for Social Assistance and he has been unable to keep a steady job. This program is giving him training to hopefully set him up for a successful work experience, a network of peers to help support him, and some financial independence.”*

*“We are not only learning about the Canadian workplace, we are doing team building exercises, having guest speakers come in and talk about their own experience as Canadians, we are discussing issues like Work-Life Balance, stress and the differences between Mental health and Mental illness.*

*This generates discussion and I can see the class growing closer together and helping each other out more as the days go on.”*

*“This Project clearly has a link to the mental health of the participants. From my observations, the hope for a brighter future and a possible inspiring career gives them peace of mind and a huge sense of belonging. And also, from the wellness workshop and activities they realized how an improved mental health through exercises can help them be better people for themselves and their immediate loved ones.”*

***What will others learn from your project?***

Others will learn about the barriers to employability for immigrant and refugee youth; how partners can be mobilized to create a program that will address a community need; how best practice in addressing the barriers can develop by through rigorous evaluation and quality improvement, and how supportive environments can make a difference in confidence, self-esteem and community inclusion, which have been identified as key indicators of mental health.

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

The program is being evaluated in each Phase through results monitoring once a month on: progress on objectives, milestones and activities of each phase, financial reporting, partnerships effectiveness and challenges, and reporting on student attendance on a weekly basis and progress in each phase. This project will run for 3 years in 3 New Brunswick cities. Results will contribute to development best practice for the next cohort, and measures of success will impact the decision to offer offering the program again. Already, instructors are seeing positive results and are confident that the summative evaluation will support continuing the program.

**Presenter**

Abby David  
Skills Launch Project Manager, New Brunswick Multicultural Council

Abby David is passionate about connecting newcomers with opportunities and bridging gaps between newcomers and the business community. She is a motivated leader with a desire to make an impact and help local and global communities to come together and create a positive change towards a diverse community, for the economic growth in Atlantic Canada. As a newcomer who landed in Saint John 4 years ago with her family, and over 15 years’ management experience in the Telecommunication sector, working in a global, diverse multicultural environment throughout her career, she strives for a successful integration and pursuing of mutual opportunities in our region. Before joining NBMC, she was leading the Employment Services team at the YMCA of Greater Saint John and is one of the Supervisors at the Y Newcomer Connections center. Abby joined NBMC to project manage the new Immigrant Youth Employability project. Alongside with her volunteering with multicultural associations across New Brunswick, she travels to represent and advocate on summits and committees for more openness for hiring newcomers, recognition of foreign credentials and more. Abby is driven by empowering newcomers to find a way to use their skills and to follow their dreams while choosing NB to be their home, and also to make it a safe and welcoming place by the local communities.