



Atlantic Summer  
Institute on  
Healthy and Safe  
Communities

l'Institut d'été  
sur les collectivités  
sûres et en santé au  
Canada atlantique

## ASI POLICY BRIEF

# UPSTREAM INVESTMENT

Placing infant, child and youth mental health promotion at the forefront.

## THE NEED

Raising healthy children is the responsibility of all Canadians. Supporting and promoting infant, child, and youth mental health is central to enabling them to become life-long, positive contributors to their communities and society. Strengthening policies and programs that support positive mental health for children and youth is vital to creating a sustainable and inclusive Atlantic Canada.

Mental health has been a topic of increasing concern throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. In the spring of 2021, one in four Canadian adults reported symptoms of anxiety, depression, or post traumatic stress disorder – up from one in five in the fall of 2020. Children in Atlantic Canada have been affected by school closures, public health restrictions, illness and death of family and community members, and second-hand stress from parents and caretakers.

**Our children and youth will continue to experience unique impacts of COVID-19 on their mental health that will in turn impact their future and the future of our region.** Moving forward, social connection and community support are essential, as is investing in upstream conditions that promote mental health.

Poor mental health and adverse experiences during childhood have a lasting effect, often resulting in health and social problems throughout the life course. Starting in the early years, and taking an 'upstream' approach, is necessary for a successful response to the mental health crisis.



*“When we think of mental health, we often think of emotional difficulties and mental health problems and how we can resolve a crisis once it has occurred. This thinking demands an investment after the fact or “downstream.” Thinking “upstream” means that we view mental health as a source for all that requires a whole-of- government and a whole-of-society approach.”*

- Margaret Barry

## KEY CONCEPTS

- **Mental health promotion**

Mental health promotion equitably improves the mental health of the entire population and reduces the likelihood of mental health deterioration throughout the life course by increasing protective factors, and reducing risk factors (WHO 2004).

- **Health in All Policies**

A policy framework that places people at the centre of government work and ensures policies consider impacts on physical and mental health and the ripples one action can create across an entire governance ecosystem (WHO 2014).

- **Intersectoral Action**

Actions undertaken by government sectors outside the health sector (e.g., early childhood, transportation, housing, food insecurity) – often in collaboration with the health sector – on outcomes that impact health and its determinants (WHO 2014).

## PRIORITY ACTION AREAS

**We propose transformative change, calling for action on four broad priorities, which if done in concert, can integrate efforts into a comprehensive approach that promotes and supports the mental health of children and youth, their families, and communities**

- A “whole of government approach” by implementing a **Mental Health in All Policies Framework**.
- A “whole of community approach” through **Investment in Community Action**.
- A “whole of society approach” through development of a **Multi-Stakeholder Platform** with representatives from diverse communities, Indigenous organizations, academia, governments, and the private sector.
- A **Sustainable and Integrated Funding Model** that supports these comprehensive approaches to invest in and maximize social capital in our communities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Transformative change will require leaders (including provincial, federal, municipal, community and Indigenous leaders) to undertake fundamental changes in the way we build public policy.

1. Atlantic provincial governments build on existing Atlantic linkages and structures, such as the Council of Atlantic Premiers to set an Atlantic Regional direction for Mental Health in All Policies.
2. Governments work to develop relationships and strengthen collaboration with Indigenous peoples in all settings, supporting Indigenous-led initiatives.
3. Governments support a regional Multistakeholder Platform.
4. Governments recognize and support the role of community-based organizations as a focal point for upstream investment in child and youth mental health.
5. Governments review investments and funding frameworks and align more closely with the proposed Sustainable and Integrated Funding model.
6. Governments work to build capacity for child and youth mental health promotion, working collaboratively across sectors.
7. Governments work with diverse groups and communities to ensure equitable investment in child and youth mental health promotion.
8. All stakeholders in Atlantic Canada apply a Mental Health in All Policies lens in development and implementation for organizational and municipal policies.

## OUTCOMES

Short-term outcomes of following these recommendations would include:

- Wider engagement of the public and leaders in support of upstream investment and resource allocation.
- Increased collaboration among interested parties in child and youth mental health from various sectors and communities.
- New policies progressing throughout communities and governments in Atlantic Canada.
- Initiating the development of a sustainable funding model.

For a more indepth look into the Atlantic Summer Institute Policy Brief, go to or click the link below:

[www.asi-iea.ca/en/asi-policy-brief](http://www.asi-iea.ca/en/asi-policy-brief)