

BACKGROUND

The Inquiring Mind Research Pilot

Student-related Mental Health in Canada

- 77% of college and university students indicated that they would consider seeking help in the future from a mental health professional for a personal problem in 2016.
- Mental illness is associated with student drop out, isolation, increased substance use, poor sleep quality, less exercise, poor eating habits, and self-harm.
- Young adults aged 15 to 24 are the most likely to experience mood disorders or substance abuse problems, and suicide is among the leading cause of death in 15 to 24-year-old Canadians.
- General trends indicate that the number of university students experiencing mental health problems as well as the severity and complexity of the cases being presented is increasing.
- Within the college population certain sub-groups have a higher prevalence of mental health problems (e.g., ethnic minorities, students of lower socio-economic status).
- Young adults between the ages of 18-24 years are at highest risk for mental illnesses and substance misuse, and the majority of university students fall in this age bracket.
- The overall stress of being a university student, juggling multiple demands in association with an academic schedule, social life, and extracurricular activities, puts students in a vulnerable position.
- Stigma is often cited as a barrier for university students who hesitate to seek help for mental health concerns.

About the Mental Health Commission of Canada and Opening Minds

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) is a catalyst for improving the mental health system and changing the attitudes and behaviours of Canadians around mental health issues. As a national consensus builder, the MHCC oversaw the creation of *Changing Directions, Changing Lives: The Mental Health Strategy for Canada*. Through partnerships with traditional and non-traditional stakeholders, the MHCC continues to influence policy and accelerate the uptake of the *Strategy*. Engaging people with lived experience and their families is key to the MHCC's ongoing work. The MHCC was created in 2007 and is funded by Health Canada.

Established by the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) in 2009, The Opening Minds initiative seeks to change Canadians' behaviours and attitudes toward people living with mental illness to ensure they are treated fairly and as full citizens with opportunities to contribute to society like anyone else. Opening Minds is the largest systematic effort in Canadian history focused on reducing stigma related to mental illness.

Opening Minds is addressing stigma within four main target groups: health care providers, youth, the workforce, and the media. As such, the initiative has multiple goals, ranging from improving health care providers' understanding of the needs of people with mental health problems to encouraging youth to talk openly and positively about mental illness.

Ultimately, the goal of Opening Minds is to cultivate an environment in which those living with mental illness feel comfortable seeking help, treatment, and support on their journey toward recovery.

The Inquiring Mind

The Inquiring Mind, one of the Opening Minds initiative programs, was adapted from existing evidence-based programs [The Working Mind](#) and [The Road to Mental Readiness](#) from the Mental Health Commission of Canada. The Working Mind is a training program to reduce stigma and increase resilience in employees and managers. The Road to Mental Readiness is a training program to reduce stigma and increase resilience in first responders.

The Inquiring Mind was created with the input of students as well as faculty and staff with mental health related expertise. It is delivered in a three-hour workshop format and covers three main components: stigma reduction, resiliency skills, and the Mental Health Continuum Model.

The Mental Health Continuum Model reconceptualises how one thinks and talks about mental health by categorizing signs and indicators of good to poor mental health under a four-colour continuum: green (healthy), yellow (reacting), orange (injured), and red (ill).



Beyond these main components, the program also teaches about creating a supportive campus and how to support others who may be experiencing poor mental health. The program is designed to be interactive with activities and group discussions, as well as a set of scenarios for participants to work through. The Inquiring Mind takes these very good basic skills and packages them in a way that is relevant to students. The curriculum includes custom videos featuring students, providing examples to which they can relate (e.g. mid-term stress, relationship challenges, being away from home/family supports).

The Inquiring Mind: Development

The Inquiring Mind was developed with the support of a small grant from the University of Calgary’s Student Enrolment Services. In the summer of 2015, a committee of students, faculty, and staff from the University of Calgary was convened to help develop the program. This group advised on adapting materials from The Working Mind to a university context. Based on their input, The Inquiring Mind was developed and accompanying videos were filmed featuring students with lived experience. In the fall of 2015, focus groups were conducted with student participants and their feedback used to revise the program. The program pilot was formally launched at the University of Calgary in January 2016 and in January 2017 at Mount Royal University. This fall, the pilot program is expanding to include the University of Lethbridge, MacEwan University, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Dalhousie University, the Nova Scotia Community College and Dalhousie Medical School.

The Inquiring Mind: Evaluation

The research project will evaluate the effectiveness and impact of The Inquiring Mind, including measuring mental illness stigma, resiliency skills and comfort in supporting others with mental illnesses. Participants complete an evaluation immediately prior to, and after, taking the program and again three

months after completing the training. The evaluation of The Inquiring Mind will continue into the spring of 2018 and could be extended should more campuses wish to participate.

The Inquiring Mind: The Future

The results of the evaluation will inform possible revisions of the program after which it will be made available to all Canadian universities and colleges. There are plans to develop versions of The Inquiring Mind for graduate and international students. The development of an adaptation for high school students is anticipated to begin in 2018.

Additional MHCC Initiatives on Mental Health in Youth

- [HEADSTRONG](#): A program aimed at giving Canadian youth the encouragement, knowledge, and tools they need to confront mental health stigma. This national youth anti-stigma campaign brings together youth who are committed to — and excited about — creating positive change.
- [Mental Health First Aid \(MHFA\) for Adults Interacting with Youth](#) is intended for an adult audience whose primary focus is youth (aged 14-25). The program provides individuals with the skills and confidence to support a person developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis. MHFA is given until appropriate support is found or until the crisis is resolved.

Past MHCC Initiatives on Mental Health in Youth

- Child and youth mental health advisory committee guided MHCC work (2007-2012).
- Youth mental health recommendations in the [Mental Health Strategy for Canada](#) focused on increasing the capacity of families, caregivers, schools, post-secondary institutions and community organizations to promote the mental health of infants, children and youth, the prevention of mental illness and suicide wherever possible, and early intervention when problems first emerge (2012).
- [Taking the Next Step Forward: Building a Responsive Mental Health and Addictions System for Emerging Adults](#) (2015)
- [The Mental Health Strategy for Canada: A Youth Perspective](#) (2016): Created by MHCC's Youth Council, this youth-written and designed version of the *Strategy* highlights the experiences and vision of young people working toward system change, ultimately making the *Strategy* more accessible to all.
- [Consensus Statement on the Mental Health of Emerging Adults](#) (2017)

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