



Mental Health  
Commission  
of Canada

Commission de  
la santé mentale  
du Canada

## BACKGROUND #338CONVERSATIONS

### What is #338conversations?

To engage parliamentarians on the crucial topic of youth mental health, the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) is building on the success of #308conversations, a suicide prevention initiative launched in May 2014. That awareness raising campaign (with a hashtag integral to the branding for social media uptake) got Members of Parliament talking about suicide prevention in their ridings through the provision of an MHCC-designed “event in a box.” The toolkit was comprised of ready to use materials/templates that participants could modify as needed. The campaign was very well received, and there were conversations held in all regions of Canada, by Parliamentarians of all political stripes.

This fall, the MHCC is relaunching the initiative under the hashtag #338conversations, to reflect the new composition of the House of Commons. The focus is youth mental health and the MHCC’s HEADSTRONG program - participants are encouraged to engage their communities by helping to organize a HEADSTRONG youth summit, hosting an information session about the program, or otherwise promoting the resources available.

### Why is it important to talk about youth mental health?

Mental health problems and mental illness in school-aged youth can be devastating, impacting not only the individual but family and friends. There are significant economic impacts if these problems don’t receive timely support, including costs for crisis health services, and parents or caregivers missing days at work to take their child to medical appointments, and to deal with their own stress.

### What is HEADSTRONG?

HEADSTRONG is a proactive initiative that engages communities to support youth in becoming leaders and champions for mental wellness. HEADSTRONG is evidence-based, showing consistent results in reducing stigma, raising awareness, and inspiring youth to return to their schools and communities and share the message of hope. The program has two elements, a one-day summit where select groups of youth aged 12 and up gather to hear lived experience stories from trained individuals in recovery, and participate in activities that challenge stereotypes and encourage positive action. The second part of the program involves those young people planning and delivering anti-stigma and awareness-raising events throughout the year in their own schools, based on the ideas that come from the summit. HEADSTRONG gives youth the tools and confidence they need to open up the conversation about mental wellness and mental illness, encouraging help-seeking and help-giving within a tried and tested structure.

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