



Mental Health  
Commission  
of Canada

Commission de  
la santé mentale  
du Canada

**HEADSTRONG**



**BE BRAVE  
REACH OUT  
SPEAK UP**

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# Interim Report

**March 31, 2015**

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## INTRODUCTION

### About MHCC HEADSTRONG

MHCC HEADSTRONG is the youth anti-stigma initiative of the Mental Health Commission of Canada's (MHCC) anti-stigma program (Opening Minds). HEADSTRONG's goal is to help reduce the painful stigma experienced by young Canadians with mental health problems and illnesses and their families.

The initiative, much like MHCC itself, acts as a catalyst; it provides the spark needed to accelerate positive changes. MHCC HEADSTRONG is prompting these changes by working with community organizations, schools and youth aged 14–18 in every region of the country. It also provides these groups and individuals the tools, skills, and knowledge necessary to confront the problem of stigma head-on.

At its official launch in November 2014, MHCC HEADSTRONG brought together students from across Canada for the National Youth Anti-stigma Summit, a critically important kick-starter event for a collaborative effort on stigma reduction. From now until the end of June 2015, MHCC HEADSTRONG and our partners will continue to work with youth champions and provide financial support and resources to community organizations. In doing so, we are helping them to bring anti-stigma education and activities to their own communities, including regional youth anti-stigma summits and subsequent school-based activities. We are confident that this will keep the momentum going and spread the anti-stigma message across Canada.

MHCC HEADSTRONG is governed by a steering committee, which includes MHCC senior management and subject matter experts, and an advisory committee comprised of external advisors who have interest and expertise in youth anti-stigma initiatives. The MHCC's Youth Council also provides valuable input to HEADSTRONG's project team and acts as a sounding board for ideas, proposed actions, and solutions.

Through its work, MHCC HEADSTRONG is turning up the volume on the national dialogue surrounding a critically important issue for all young people in Canada. Increasing awareness around mental wellness and mental health stigma is key to combatting the harmful negativity and discrimination experienced by too many youth today.

By reducing stigma, MHCC HEADSTRONG and our partners are helping to ensure youth feel safe enough to seek help if they are experiencing a mental health problem or illness. Given the alarming statistics around youth suicide and mental distress, we believe reducing youth stigma truly is a matter of life and death.

## The Need to Reduce Stigma among Youth

Stigma entails both negative attitudes and discriminatory behaviours. The Mental Health Commission of Canada describes stigma as a “complex social process involving many parts, all of which work together to marginalize and disenfranchise people with a mental illness and their family members.”<sup>1</sup> It has also been described as an “impenetrable brick wall” that too often stands between youth and treatments, supports and services. It prevents them from seeking help because they are too afraid of being judged, dismissed or ridiculed. It can also prevent those who love them from aiding them in getting treatment – stigma is keeping parents silent, too.

“Young people feel the impacts of stigma more than any other group in Canada.”<sup>2</sup>

Given that 70 per cent of adults with a mental illness say their symptoms started before they were 18 years old, early intervention is critical. It can make a dramatic difference in the quality of one’s life and help ensure our young people have the healthiest possible adulthoods.

We owe it to Canada’s youth and their families to break down that menacing wall. And we cannot afford to fail.

### STIGMA IS STOPPING YOUTH FROM SEEKING HELP

The stigma associated with mental health problems keeps people from seeking the help they need when they need it most. Youth are no exception.

Only one in six children diagnosed with a mental health problem or illness will get treatment.

Stigma is a big reason for this. 40 per cent of parents say they would not admit to anyone, not even their doctor, that they had a child with a mental health problem or illness.

60 per cent of youth diagnosed with a mental illness in the last year say they have experienced stigma.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2013). *Opening Minds Interim Report*.

<sup>2</sup> Stuart, H., Patten, S.B., Koller, M., Modgill, G., & Liinamaa, T. (2014). *Stigma in Canada: Results from a Rapid Response Survey*. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 59 (10 Suppl 1), 27-33.



## THE MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION OF CANADA’S APPROACH TO REDUCING STIGMA IN CANADA

### Forging Partnerships and Developing Evidence-Based Research

Opening Minds’ mandate to help reduce stigma is an exciting opportunity but also a challenging one. Just how do you confront such a vast and complex problem? Where do you begin?

After careful consultation with a number of national and international experts, Opening Minds moved forward on several fronts. First, it partnered with grassroots organizations across the country that believed they were reducing stigma. Few existing anti-stigma programs had ever been measured to see if they were truly effective. Opening Minds tapped leading researchers to conduct further studies into the most promising practices for stigma reduction, and determine which of these programs, or elements of programs, worked best and why. Its plan was to replicate the most successful of these in communities across the country.

Opening Minds understood early on that reducing stigma would require “buy-in” from a variety of stakeholders. Regardless of how much work the initiative itself could do, making an actual impact would require Canadians in every demographic and in every corner of the country to take up the message and join the fight. On this next front, Opening Minds set about creating and maintaining partnerships with groups and individuals who had a vested interest in reducing stigma and with whom it could work to put the results of its evaluation research to real use. These partnerships have since expanded and news ones have been created under the MHCC HEADSTRONG initiative.

### A Targeted Approach

Interestingly, Opening Minds chose not to launch large, expensive media campaigns, as anti-stigma initiatives in many other countries had done before. The costs to deliver anti-stigma messages across Canada would have been prohibitive and the research showed some disappointing results elsewhere. Often these campaigns try to reach the broadest audience possible and Opening Minds was encouraged to find another way to reduce stigma.

It ultimately chose to take a more targeted approach. It would evaluate anti-stigma initiatives aimed at specific audiences and then work with its partners to get the best of these programs into the workplaces, schools, and communities of more Canadians.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Seven million Canadians will experience a mental health problem or illness this year.

The first symptoms are usually experienced in the teenage years.

After careful consideration, and having received guidance from its Board of Directors, the MHCC chose four initial target groups for its anti-stigma work:

**Youth 12-18** - With most symptoms of mental illnesses beginning before adulthood, intervening as early as possible can help young people successfully manage their illness or set them on the road to recovery.

“...we have learned that it is relatively simple to destigmatize mental health with youth. I do not think the same is true of adults.”<sup>3</sup>

— **Dr. Simon Davidson, Chief of Psychiatry,  
Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario**

**Healthcare Providers** - People with mental health problems and illnesses often say the most hurtful stigma they experience comes from frontline healthcare providers.

**The Workforce** – One out of every four or five employees experiences a mental health problem every year, yet most choose not to seek treatment because they fear their employers will think poorly of them.

**The Media** - The media is a powerful source of information about mental health and mental illness and can further entrench negative stereotypes.

## WHAT’S IN A NAME?

Once created, Opening Minds’ new youth anti-stigma program needed a name.

It wanted something that would empower youth and also encourage them to take action.

In consultation with the MHCC’s Youth Council and others, the program was named HEADSTRONG.

It’s a bold name that’s about developing mental strength and sympathy through understanding, taking a position on mental health and standing your ground.

The tag line “Be Brave, Reach Out, Speak Up” reinforces these messages as well as further encourages action.

<sup>3</sup> Parliament of Canada. (2005, May 6). Proceedings of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology. Retrieved February 15, 2015, from [http://www.parl.gc.ca/Content/SEN/Committee/381/soci/14eve.htm?Language=E&Parl=38&Ses=1&comm\\_id=47](http://www.parl.gc.ca/Content/SEN/Committee/381/soci/14eve.htm?Language=E&Parl=38&Ses=1&comm_id=47)

## HEADSTRONG INITIATIVE DEVELOPMENT

### Putting it All Together

Opening Minds created MHCC HEADSTRONG based on the most promising practices it learned for stigma reduction among youth. The initiative was developed to follow an evidence-informed approach that includes:

**Contact-based education** - giving youth opportunities to interact with trained speakers who have lived experience of mental health problems and illnesses and who are either in a strong place of recovery or are successfully managing their illness.

**Regional summits** - creating a call to action among students representing many schools, who hear stories from speakers, explore how stigma hurts, and strategize together how to take an anti-stigma message back to their schools.

**School-based activities** - conceptualizing and completing creative student-lead anti-stigma projects, with their teachers' support, to inform their peers about the negative impacts of stigma.

**A whole-school approach** - encouraging entire schools to create greater awareness and more supportive environments.

MHCC HEADSTRONG will partner with community organizations and fund regional coordinators until June 30, 2015. It brought these coordinators to a training workshop in Ottawa, overlapping a week-long National Summit for students from across Canada, and it provided both groups with support to create their own regional summits and school-based activities.

In keeping with Opening Minds' recognition of the importance of evaluation, the effectiveness of national and regional summits, as well as some select school-based activities, will be evaluated using a survey developed by researchers to determine stigma reduction.

### TALKING ABOUT TAMI

HEADSTRONG would like to acknowledge the years of dedication and work conducted by the Durham Talking About Mental Illness (TAMI) Coalition, made up of more than a dozen organizations ([tamidurham.ca](http://tamidurham.ca)).

The model they have created for a youth anti-stigma summit has been evaluated and recognized by the MHCC and the Opening Minds youth anti-stigma research team as a promising practice. This model and the Coalition's experience and insight have been invaluable in the creation of the HEADSTRONG summit toolkit.

Their extensive work has also formed the basis for the speaker's training and school-based activity toolkits, which are both important aspects of the MHCC HEADSTRONG program.



## Forging New Partnerships and Community Relationships

In its early youth anti-stigma work, Opening Minds created a number of partnerships with organizations including branches of the Canadian Mental Health Association, the Mood Disorders Association of Ontario, the Schizophrenia Society's Partnership Programs and other individual non-profit organizations which have expertise or interest in stigma reduction. In order to have the greatest reach possible, Opening Minds went looking for additional partners that could deliver MHCC HEADSTRONG's unique approach to significant numbers of youth and in diverse parts of the country.

These new relationships were formed with different types of partners. A few large school boards were engaged to help reach greater student populations. A French-speaking community group in Québec was brought on board so students in different parts of that province would receive the initiative. Another group in Newfoundland ensured students in this province were reached and in Nova Scotia an active provincial student association was brought into the mix. In British Columbia, a program associated with a health region was included because of the large number of youth it was already reaching. Other regional partners include service clubs and the private sector. These are just some examples of the variety of partnerships needed to ensure MHCC HEADSTRONG can be broadly delivered.

Together, MHCC HEADSTRONG'S partners across Canada now bring a wealth of experience working with youth and families across all sectors, including education, mental health, addictions, youth justice and specialized services. Professionals involved in this work understand the impact that stigma has on preventing youth from seeking help, and they are committed to participating in the HEADSTRONG project, as they know from the research that it will make a difference.

MHCC HEADSTRONG's partners now number nearly two dozen community organizations that have hired coordinators, through financial support from the MHCC, to work directly with youth and their schools to deliver this initiative and make one of the biggest coordinated efforts in Canadian history to reduce mental health stigma among youth.

MHCC HEADSTRONG is also providing these key community organizations with the training and support they need to embed contact-based, anti-stigma education within schools. When young people hear stories of recovery and hope directly from people with lived experience of mental illness, it breaks down barriers. When mental health and anti-stigma messages are part of all learning, change happens.



## The Importance of Partnering with Youth

MHCC HEADSTRONG'S most crucial partners are the same people it's trying to reach – Canadian teens and adolescents. Opening Minds learned from its valuable research that youth are a major influence among their peers and within their families, schools and communities. So it makes sense to help them champion the anti-stigma cause.

By providing them with the tools they need to recognize stigmatizing attitudes and behaviours, MHCC HEADSTRONG is empowering youth across the country to confront stigma. It gives them the opportunity to create positive change in the places where they study, work, play, and live.

MHCC HEADSTRONG changes the way young people think about and interact with people living with mental health problems and illnesses. And that change is building momentum, spreading the youth anti-stigma message throughout Canada.



## LAUNCHING HEADSTRONG

### The National Youth Anti-stigma Summit

November 17, 2014 was a historic day for youth anti-stigma in our country. In the nation's capital, in a room teeming with young people from every province and territory of Canada, the MHCC officially launched the HEADSTRONG initiative.

The more than 130 youth gathered were taking part in HEADSTRONG's first official event – the National Youth Anti-stigma Summit sponsored by the MHCC. It was hosted at Encounters with Canada, a youth-focused group operated by the Canadian Unity Council. The students were recruited through Opening Minds' and MHCC HEADSTRONG's partners, Boards of Education, community organizations, the Canadian Teacher's Federation, school boards, schools and teachers.

The week-long summit was at times intense and always inspiring. There were emotional presentations, exciting breakout sessions and plenty of other eye-opening activities, all with a focus on breaking down stigma and helping these youth become champions for change.

And this was only the beginning. The MHCC HEADSTRONG launch and the National Summit were always intended as a starting point. They were meant to spur the young people in attendance to bring the message and anti-stigma activities back to their own regions, communities and schools.

Helping them to do this now are the 19 regional coordinators partially funded by MHCC HEADSTRONG, who were brought to Ottawa for two days during the summit. The coordinators took part in their own workshops and other events, to help them work with the students to prepare and deliver regional summits and school-based activities back in their own communities.

### Summit Highlights

For students, coordinators, speakers and the MHCC, the summit had numerous highlights. Friendships were forged, knowledge was shared, ideas were sparked and plans were made. And most important, the lightbulb went on about stigma. Everyone came to understand the importance of making a commitment to confront stigma and realized just how much could be accomplished by working together.

"I have experienced the most amazing week of my entire life... I learned a lot about mental illness and stigma, and how to prevent stigma. I also learned how to spark changes in my community and spread more awareness... Learning and talking about acceptance has made me more accepting of others as well as myself. Thank you so much for providing this opportunity for me."

— A student from  
Saskatoon who participated in  
the National Summit



“The future has never been brighter. It’s yours to seize. But you have to be brave. You have to reach out. And, above all, you have to speak up.”

— Louise Bradley in a speech to the National Youth Anti-Stigma Summit

MHCC President Louise Bradley along with Algonquin Elder Annie Smith St. George motivated the audience with their opening remarks.

The coordinators’ dinner and workshop fuelled an energetic exchange of ideas and shared experiences and connecting youth to their regional coordinators brought a new level of excitement and determination. These youth will rely on a lot of help from regional coordinators to carry out their local anti-stigma activities.

#### Key Accomplishments of the Summit

The importance of having students attend from every province and territory in Canada cannot be understated. The need for diverse representation goes back to Opening Minds’ emphasis on taking a strategically targeted approach to stigma reduction. We knew that diminishing stigma in the remote North, for example, would have to involve students from that region leading the cause. The same is true for a small town on the prairies or communities in the Atlantic Canada.

“The Mental Health Commission of Canada has been a national leader in reducing stigma and, through the National Youth Anti-Stigma Summit, you are also becoming leaders in this fight.”

— The Hon. Rona Ambrose, Minister of Health, in a letter to summit participants

Since the summit was meant to spark additional regional activities in the weeks and months following, it was critical that the students ended their week in Ottawa feeling empowered and determined. The participants presented action plans using a variety of media, including video, spoken word, drama, graffiti art, cartooning, and social media. As they presented their plans, it became evident to us that each one of the students carries a passion for social action.

The Commission believes its job is to build on that energy so that more youth, teachers, schools and communities become engaged.

The MHCC HEADSTRONG team and its partners continue to be heartened and inspired by the incredible enthusiasm of these determined young Canadians.

**NATIONAL ANTI-STIGMA SUMMIT YOUTH ATTENDANCE**

**Minority**

Yes	14	10.61%
No	118	89.39%

**Aboriginal**

Yes	21	15.91%
No	111	84.09%

**Age**

14	12	9.09%
15	27	20.45%
16	56	42.42%
17	37	28.03%

**Gender**

Female	103	78.03%
Male	29	21.97%

**Language**

English	123	93.18%
French	9	6.82%

**Geographical Setting**

Rural	66	50.00%
Urban	65	49.24%

**By Province**

BC	11	8%
AB	16	12%
SK	10	8%
MB	11	8%
ON	14	11%
QC	8	6%
PE	8	6%
NB	12	9%
NS	7	5%
NL	6	5%
NT	9	7%
NU	10	8%
YT	10	8%

**Reaching Youth Online**

The Commission knew that in order for the MHCC HEADSTRONG launch to have the biggest reach among Canadian youth, it would have to be in a place where teenagers interact regularly – online, through Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. At least 69 per cent of youth in our country are using online social networks.<sup>4</sup> They’re connecting with friends on Facebook and networking with peers on Twitter. In fact, teens are texting and using social media the most to communicate every day.<sup>5</sup> MHCC HEADSTRONG understood the need to use those same channels in order to get such an important conversation going.

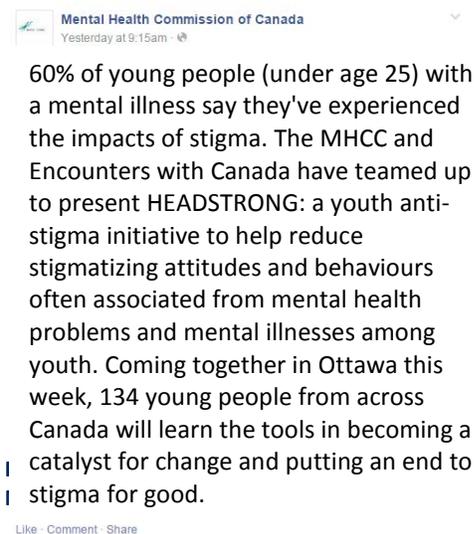
The initiative started with the MHCC’s website, where information about the MHCC HEADSTRONG initiative and the National Summit is presented. The page got hundreds of views in November 2014, becoming the month’s fifteenth most-viewed page out of the thousands on the website. The banner ad on the website also had the highest number of clicks for the entire month.

<sup>4</sup> Ipsos Reid. (2012). *The Ipsos Canadian interactive Reid Report 2012 Fact Guide*. Retrieved February 15, 2015, from [http://www.ipsos.ca/common/dl/pdf/Ipsos\\_InteractiveReidReport\\_FactGuide\\_2012.pdf](http://www.ipsos.ca/common/dl/pdf/Ipsos_InteractiveReidReport_FactGuide_2012.pdf)

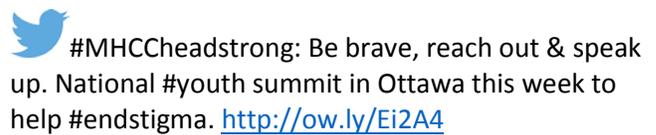
<sup>5</sup> Ipsos Reid. (2012). *The Ipsos Canadian interactive Reid Report 2012 Fact Guide*. Retrieved February 15, 2015, from [http://www.ipsos.ca/common/dl/pdf/Ipsos\\_InteractiveReidReport\\_FactGuide\\_2012.pdf](http://www.ipsos.ca/common/dl/pdf/Ipsos_InteractiveReidReport_FactGuide_2012.pdf)



On social media, the Commission was active on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, generating our top Facebook post (see Figure 1) and tweet (see Figure 2) for November. As the National Summit was underway, the students began sending out Instagram messages, comments on Facebook and blogs, and creating their own Twitter accounts to engage with each other and #MHCCHeadstrong was widely used. We also posted three dozen photos to Instagram during the National Summit, gaining many new followers.



**Figure 1: The MHCC's top Facebook post for November.**



**Figure 2: The MHCC's top tweet for November.**

The students at the National Summit sent out their own tweets and Facebook posts about the Ottawa event and are still using social networking sites to talk about stigma and mental illness.

## EARLY RESULTS OF THE NATIONAL SUMMIT

### Feedback from Students and the MHCC

The feedback from students who attended the National Youth Anti-stigma Summit has been nothing short of incredible. In dozens and dozens of handwritten letters, they've told us how grateful they are to have had the "opportunity of a lifetime" to gather with like-minded youth in Ottawa and learn how to tackle the terrible problem that stigma poses to the well-being of their peers.

They told us that they were "impressed with the quality and magnitude" of every summit activity and that the stories they heard of recovery amazed them. Some of the student participants have lived experience of a mental illness and realized for the first time at the summit they are not alone.

*"I came to Ottawa not knowing very much about mental illness but I am happy to say I am walking away with not only the knowledge but a good game plan for my community."*

— Student, Whitehorse, YT

They also told us again and again that they are ready to get to down to work, that they're eager and excited to bring everything they've learned in Ottawa back to their regions, communities, schools, and families, where they "hope to make a difference."

Comments from teacher monitors and Encounters with Canada staff reveal that the fourth day of the summit was most impactful as the participants spent the entire day working on anti-stigma messaging and plans to take back to their communities.

Executives from the MHCC were also enthusiastic about the summit, including President Louise Bradley. "Something magical happened that week in Ottawa," says Bradley. "The quality of the programming, the excitement of the students, the courage and candidness of the speakers with lived experience... all of it was truly remarkable and I saw it spark an appetite for real change."

Ed Mantler, MHCC Vice President of Programs and Priorities, says the value of those seven days in Ottawa will be seen all over the country for years to come. "The National Summit exceeded all of our expectations in terms of the momentum it created," he says. "There's no stopping these students now and Canadians everywhere are going to benefit from what those young people learned and from what they'll do as they go back to their communities and host regional summits."

## Initiative Evaluation

Letters and other anecdotal evidence aside, the Commission wanted to model MHCC HEADSTRONG after the research and ensure contact-based education was a central component. MHCC HEADSTRONG's National Summit included several contact-based anti-stigma interventions, featuring speakers who had their own personal stories of living with a mental health problem or illness, as well as family members who also spoke. The students were asked to fill out the Opening Minds pre- and post-test survey questionnaires before and after an intervention. A total of 127 student participants completed the surveys.

The same survey was used for both tests. It was comprised of 22 items (statements) that were scored on a five-point agreement scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Half of the items measured stereotyped attributions, such as a person's potential for recovery or potential for violence. The remaining half measured expressions of social distance, or tolerance.

Prior to the intervention, 56 per cent of students gave a non-stigmatizing response to 9 of the 11 social distance items, reflecting 80 per cent correct. At post-test this had increased to 64 per cent.

A handful of items measuring social distance showed significant changes in attitudes in the post-test surveys. For example, before the intervention 81 per cent of students agreed/strongly agreed with the item "I would volunteer my time to work in a program for people with a mental illness." After the contact-based event, that figure rose to 92 per cent.

Prior to the intervention, 60.63 per cent of students gave a non-stigmatizing response to at least 9 of the 11 stereotype items reflecting 80 per cent correct. At post-test this had increased to 80.31 per cent.

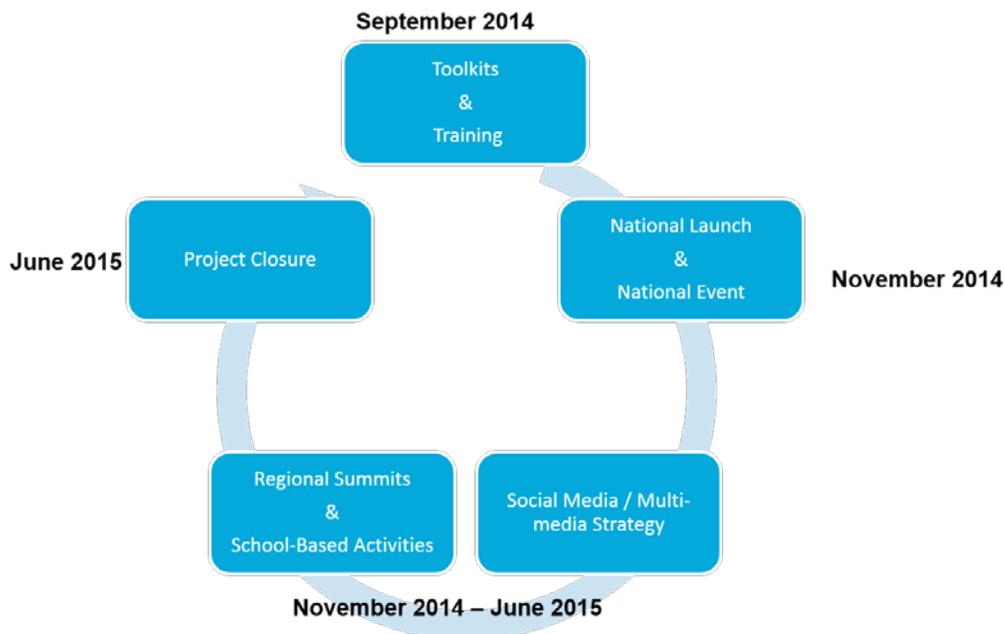
Several of the items measuring stereotyped attributions showed significant improvements in attitude after the contact-based intervention. For example, in the pre-test survey nearly 47 per cent of students indicated they disagreed/strongly disagreed with the item "You can never know what someone with a mental illness is going to do." In the post-test survey, it was 72 per cent. In another example, the item "People with a mental illness often become violent if not treated" saw an increase of 17 percentage points in the proportion of students who chose disagree/strongly disagree after the intervention.

Because the research team surveyed participants attending a national event with a focus on mental health stigma reduction, the survey sample is not a typical population; the respondents had a higher understanding of the issues than most and arrived with lower levels of stigma. That said, the results show that the initiative succeeded in improving the ratio of students who got 80 per cent of the answers correct (in other words, scored an A when it came to being non-stigmatizing).

## TAKING HEADSTRONG TO COMMUNITIES ACROSS CANADA

### Regional Summits

The National Youth Anti-stigma Summit was always intended to be the beginning of the change movement that MHCC HEADSTRONG is orchestrating. It was meant to identify, prepare, and equip students and the regional coordinators from community organizations to take action to reduce stigma in the places where they live. One of the most important ways they will do this is by planning and delivering regional summits across Canada before the end of this school term.



Similar to the National Summit, the goal of a regional HEADSTRONG summit is to educate, empower and mobilize youth to return to their schools and communities with clear ideas and action plans as to how they will engage their peers in school-based HEADSTRONG activities. In many regions, youth leaders are included on the planning committee for the regional summits, and the coordinators are connected with the students who attended the National Summit who can help design, deliver, and participate in the regional summit.

To date, seventeen coordinators representing their community organizations have submitted proposals for a total of 28 regional summits. Plans are well underway to host 5,720 students from more than 190 high schools. Eleven of the summits will take place before April 1, 2015, with the remainder to occur before the end of the school term. The heaviest work will take place in the coming months, but we know it's also the best opportunity to make the biggest impact.



To help ensure their success over the next few months, MHCC HEADSTRONG’s national coordinator is consulting with these regional resources and helping them to tailor their own summits and other activities to the needs of their particular audience. The national coordinator is also assisting them with the delivery of speaker training to see the greatest possible success of the crucial contact-based education component of their summits and activities. We know that the coordinators stand to learn a lot of from each other, so in addition to maintaining contact with each other via the MHCC Collaborative Space, MHCC HEADSTRONG is hosting monthly teleconferences for coordinators to facilitate information sharing and networking.

Evaluations of each of the summits will be completed in the fall 2015.

### Taking MHCC HEADSTRONG from Regional Summits into Regional Schools

Students and school staff who attend a regional summit will receive the information and motivation they need to carry out activities and raise awareness in their schools around mental wellness, mental illness and stigma.

They will carry the message to fellow students, encouraging them to take care of their mental health in the same way they take care of their physical health. They will spread the message that stigma is never OK; that they should speak up if they are experiencing a mental health problem or illness, and that they can be a source of help to others.

To help create a detailed plan to deliver those messages, students and school staff who attended the regional summits will create a school HEADSTRONG committee and encourage other students to become involved in raising awareness. Bulletin boards, stigma walls, video contests, parents’ nights, coffee clubs, music nights and assemblies have all been successfully implemented in many schools already and are discussed in the Post-Summit Activities Toolkit.

### MHCC HEADSTRONG Toolkits

To help maximize the success of regional summits and school-based activities, MHCC HEADSTRONG has created a series of toolkits in both French and English for regional coordinators and summit speakers: Planning a Summit, Speaker Training, Sharing Your Personal Story, School-Based Activities.

“Mental health is a growing concern for our youth and we are seeing it a lot in our schools. The problem is no one is talking about it. I returned from Ottawa ready to make changes on how we as a school community, both teachers and students, deal with mental health.”

— National Summit participant  
from St. Stephen, NB

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Reducing stigma among youth is going to take time. The negative attitudes and discriminatory behaviours have become deeply entrenched in Canada. But our young people are realizing how important it is to break down the stigma barrier and are now actively helping us to do that.

MHCC HEADSTRONG has developed the tools needed to create change and is partnering with youth and community groups eager to put them to use. The anti-stigma movement is growing, it is gathering momentum, and with continued support we believe it will soon be unstoppable.

*“We can and must defeat the stigma that has blighted people’s attitudes for far too long and has fed the discrimination that so many have endured.”*

*— Mental Health Strategy for Canada*

We have identified additional opportunities to make our work even more impactful. As targeted as our approach is, given additional time and resources, we plan to provide new models to deliver our initiative to specific demographics, such as ethnically diverse groups, remote communities, First Nations, and Inuit populations.

### MAKING A COMMITMENT

CMHA Lethbridge has designed both short- and long-term sustainability plans for HEADSTRONG.

The organization is excited to hold a summit and has made inroads in its community and school boards to support ongoing HEADSTRONG activities after its event.

We will work with regional coordinators to create social media plans to fully engage youth prior to regional summits. We could also discover ways to be flexible about MHCC HEADSTRONG components to capitalize on the work of other groups around youth anti-stigma. For example, Nova Scotia’s Secondary School Students Association has its own conferences and will add components of our summit initiative to its agenda this spring.

There are also opportunities to expand beyond the standard summit model to leverage large-scale community events as a means of providing exposure for

the key messages associated with stigma reduction. A recent rally in Vancouver is a great example of this. It included that city’s NHL team and 1,500 students and, while not a summit as defined by the MHCC HEADSTRONG toolkit, the event was successful in getting the word out and recruiting more students to the anti-stigma initiative. The British Columbia coordinator is also being strategic in the delivery of HEADSTRONG to schools in each region.



The Commission remains committed to making the most of the time remaining while also looking for ways to further accelerate the momentum that we and our partners have created. We are reminded every day how important it is that we confront stigma — children and families all over the country are depending on us to defeat it. We believe that there has never been a greater, more promising opportunity than right now to succeed.

## HEADSTRONG GETS RESULTS

### Our Cascading Approach to Reach Students is Working

MHCC HEADSTRONG is proving to be successful at reaching out exponentially to youth across Canada. We started with 132 students attending the National Summit. These youth have actively participated with regional coordinators to organize 28 regional summits. Over 5,000 student champions from across the country are attending these regional summits. Only three or four students from each local high school are invited to attend the regional summits to allow for the inclusion of as many schools as possible. These student champions, along with their supporting teachers, will take HEADSTRONG anti-stigma messages and activities back to their individual school populations. Conservatively, we estimate the cascading number of youth who will receive the HEADSTRONG message to be 100,000. The actual numbers are being tracked and will be shared at the end of the school year.



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## APPENDIX A

### Engaging MHCC HEADSTRONG Coordinators

The MHCC HEADSTRONG team is funding regional coordinators across Canada. The coordinators, who have been chosen by community mental health organizations, are tasked with the planning and delivery of school-based activities and at least one regional HEADSTRONG summit between now and the end of June 2015. The regional coordinators representing 19 organizations have different strengths and are serving different demographics, as each region of Canada has its own unique needs.

MHCC HEADSTRONG Community Organizations	City	Province
Association Québécoise pour la réadaptation psychosociale	Quebec City/Montreal	QC
BC Mental Health and Substance Use Services	Vancouver	BC
Boys and Girls Clubs of Hamilton in association with NGen Youth Centre, St. Joseph's Health Centre & City of Hamilton - Public Health	Hamilton	ON
Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario	Ottawa	ON
Choices for Youth	St. John's	NL
CMHA - Calgary	Calgary	AB
CMHA - Champlain East	Cornwall	ON
CMHA - Edmonton	Edmonton	AB
CMHA - Lethbridge	Lethbridge	AB
CMHA - Sudbury/Manitoulin	Sudbury	ON
CMHA - Winnipeg	Winnipeg	MB
Laing House in association with Nova Scotia Secondary School Students' Association	Halifax	NS
Mood Disorders Association of Ontario	Toronto	ON
Northern Health Region (formerly NOR-MAN/Northern Regional Health Authority)	Thompson	MB
Parkland School Division	Stony Plain	AB
Peel District School Board	Brampton	ON
Prairie Mountain Health - Brandon & Area Suicide Prevention Implementation Network	Brandon	MB
Yellowknife Catholic Schools in association with Government of NW Territories - Ministry of Education, Culture and Employment	Yellowknife	NWT
York TAMI - York District Catholic School Board & York Regional Police	Aurora	ON

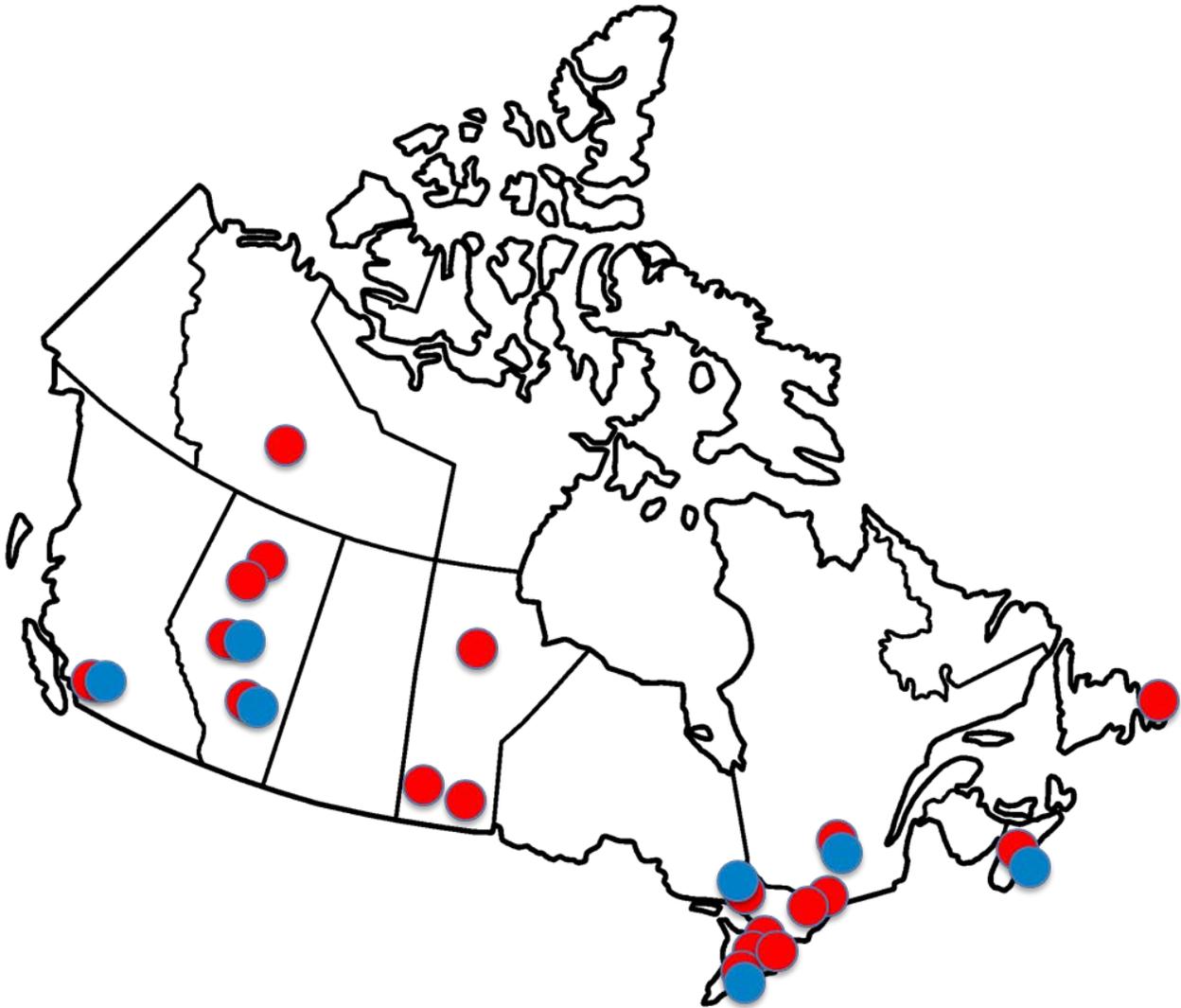


Figure 1: MHCC HEADSTRONG Organizations and community partnerships across Canada.



## APPENDIX B

MHCC HEADSTRONG resources include toolkits, a brochure for parents and teachers, webinars, webcasts and videos.

### Toolkits

**Summit Toolkit** - This toolkit provides coordinators with a practical guide to plan and deliver a regional youth anti-stigma summit. It includes information on their own roles, as well as those of speakers, students, and community organizations. When followed closely, the toolkit will see students come away from the summit ready to implement anti-stigma action plans in their schools and communities.

**Speaker Training Toolkit** - Contact-based education is a priority component of the regional events. This toolkit gives regional coordinators information on how to find and train people, caregivers, or family members with lived experience of a mental health problem or illness, to share their personal stories of hope and recovery.

**Speaker Toolkit** - This toolkit gives speakers the skills to share their stories in an impactful way.

**School-Based Activity Toolkit** - After the summits, important activities must take place in schools and this toolkit provides ideas and information on what students and teachers can do to expand the MHCC HEADSTRONG anti-stigma message.

### Other resources

**Parent & Teacher Guidelines** - These guidelines provide an overview of MHCC HEADSTRONG, define “regional summit”, “contact-based education”, and “whole-school approach,” and provide information on why anti-stigma efforts are vitally important for the health and well-being of Canadian youth.

**Webinars and Webcasts** – Live webinars on speaker training and how to run a summit have been recorded for later viewing.

**Videos** - To supplement the summit and school activities, MHCC HEADSTRONG is producing videos of anti-stigma stories and spread the message.

All toolkits and material are available to the public in English and French on MHCC HEADSTRONG’s Collaborative Space, which can be accessed using: <http://www.mhcheadstrong.ca>.



**Calgary Office:**

Mental Health Commission of Canada  
Suite 320, 110 Quarry Park Blvd SE  
Calgary, AB T2C 3G3

T 403.255.5808  
F 403.385.4044

**Ottawa Office:**

Mental Health Commission of Canada  
Suite 600, 100 Sparks Street  
Ottawa, ON K1P 5B7

T 613.683.3755  
F 613.798.2989

[info@mentalhealthcommission.ca](mailto:info@mentalhealthcommission.ca)  
[www.mentalhealthcommission.ca](http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca)

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