



Well-Beings: the Nova Scotia School Mental Health Framework

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BACKGROUND

Why Focus on Child and Youth Mental Health?

Child and youth mental health is becoming increasingly recognized as an important health concern in Canada. Nationally approximately 15-20% of young people suffer from some form of mental disorder, but only a minority of those requiring professional care actually receive it (Waddell & Shepherd, 2002). Unrecognized and untreated mental disorders lead to substantive morbidity and early mortality, and increase the risk for poor economic outcomes, social and civic society problems. Effective interventions are currently available but pathways to care are complex and often do not meet the needs of young people or their families. More appropriate strategies are needed.

In order to help address the mental health care needs of children and youth in Canada, the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) has recently developed a national child and youth mental health framework, entitled “Evergreen”, led by Dr. Stan Kutcher (Kutcher & McLuckie, 2010). This national mental health framework aims to raise public awareness about child and youth mental health, provide support to provinces and territories as they create their own child and youth mental health policies and plans, and serve as a resource for all those interested in child and youth mental health.

Why Are Schools Important to Address Child and Youth Mental Health?

In the Evergreen Framework (noted above), schools have been identified as a key venue to nationally address child and youth mental health. Good mental health is a learning enabler that enhances educational, social and civic outcomes. Schools are a convenient place to reach most children and youth, as well as a place where mental health can be connected to other aspects of health, such as physical and sexual health to help support the development and wellbeing of students. A School’s role in addressing mental health can include the promotion of mental health, the early identification of young people with mental disorders, participation in mental health care delivery and partnership in social, academic and civic reintegration as part of holistic treatment of mental disorders.

How Has This Framework Been Developed?

Informed by the Evergreen Framework, and initiated by the Nova Scotia Department of Education and the Sun Life Financial Chair in Adolescent Mental Health (at the IWK Health Centre and Dalhousie University) brought together representatives from five provincial departments (Education; Health; Health Promotion; Justice; Community Services), school boards, regional health authorities, youth, RCMP regional offices, African and First Nations communities, and other related stakeholders in December 2009 for a provincial school mental health summit. This summit addressed the many complexities of child and youth mental health and options for schools in addressing these issues. There was unanimous agreement that Nova Scotia should develop a provincial school mental health framework. This was reinforced by the Deputy Minister of Health Promotion who represented the Deputy Ministers of all Provincial Departments and accepted the conclusion of the meeting to move forward and develop such a strategy for the Province.



Meeting participants formed a working group and an advisory group to develop province-wide mental health directions for children and youth in Nova Scotia. Based on the knowledge and competencies of group members, ongoing discussions within and between the working and advisory groups, and wider consultation with members in the community, the “Well-Beings: the Nova Scotia School Mental Health Framework” was finalized in May 2011.

Who Should Use the Framework? How?

The Nova Scotia School Mental Health Framework was developed for use by those who are dedicated to improving child and youth mental health in Nova Scotia. It provides educators, school administrators and other interested parties with approaches and directions to help effectively address mental health in schools. It identifies methods of collaboration and communication across departments, institutions and agencies and can be used as a guide for the development of partnerships. It may also help inform policy makers as they design and develop policies and plans, and determine where funding should be allocated to improve child and youth mental health effectively and efficiently.

Mental health is a fundamental component of student health and well-being. The Nova Scotia School Mental Health Framework is, to our knowledge, the first of its kind to address a unified provincial approach to school mental health in Canada. By using this framework within and across relevant provincial government departments, with health and education providers and other stakeholders we can improve mental health literacy, reduce stigma toward mental illness, enhance learning success and improve access to mental health care for young people in Nova Scotia.



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VISION

Working together for healthy minds today, healthy lives tomorrow

GOALS

Enhancing mental wellbeing of Nova Scotian children and youth through collaboration among educators, schools, health providers, provincial government departments, community organizations and the civil society

Wellbeing denotes health, security and the ability to successfully adapt to life challenges. With the play on words, *'Well Beings'* depicts the goal of supporting mental wellness and access to appropriate care for mental disorders for children and youth in Nova Scotia so that they become *'Well Beings'*. Through collaboration, we strive to create an environment that enables optimal development of both brain and body for children and youth in Nova Scotia.

The Nova Scotia School Mental Health Strategy:

- Recognizes the school as a site in which the “whole person” needs of children and youth can be addressed
- Commits to the healthy development of children and youth: both brain and body
- Advocates for universal use of programs that have been appropriately demonstrated to effectively, safely and efficiently enhance mental health and mental health care of children and youth
- Supports best evidence-based programs addressing promotion, prevention/early identification and intervention
- Addresses stigma reduction towards those living with mental illness, their friends and families
- Is informed by best evidence-driven data
- Is articulated by best evidence-supported policies/plans
- Promotes best evidence-based programs/interventions
- Avoids programs/interventions not supported by appropriate evidence
- Promotes equity in access and outcomes in all areas of the province
- Addresses specific needs of unique populations, particularly those with present and historical vulnerabilities
- Adopts a longitudinal child and youth development approach
- Supports outcomes-based investments and ongoing quality assurance through rigorous evaluation
- Engages youth and educators in program development, delivery and evaluation
- Recognizes the need for cross agency/organization collaboration in support of the best mental health outcomes for children, youth and their families



VEHICLE

To help manage, oversee and advance this Framework, a Nova Scotia School Mental Health Framework Team (referred to as Framework Team), comprised of decision makers representing key stakeholders and led by the Sun Life Financial Chair in Adolescent Mental Health Team, shall be developed with an appropriate mandate and support, and report to the Deputy Ministers of Education and Health and Wellness.

THEMES

Through extensive consultation with representatives from five government departments, school boards, community agencies, and other stakeholders the Nova Scotia School Mental Health Framework working and advisory groups have identified five key areas through which to address child and youth mental health. They are: 1. Mental Health Literacy, 2. Resources, 3. Collaboration and Communication, 4. Care Access, and 5. Strategies for Development, Dissemination and Application.

Theme 1: Mental Health Literacy

Definition/statement

- Mental health literacy refers to knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders which aid their recognition, management or prevention. It encompasses skills to recognize mental disorders, understand causes, seek help from services, and remove stigma around mental illness. Mental health literacy is the foundation for mental health promotion, prevention and intervention (Jorm, 1997).
- The Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (2007) defines mental health literacy as the range of cognitive and social skills and capacities that support mental health promotion. This includes the capacity to act on social as well as individual determinants of mental health and mental illness.

Goals

- Within the next five years, Nova Scotian students, their families, stakeholders in education and health, and the wider community will achieve and maintain a contextually appropriate level of mental health literacy.
- Within the next five years, Nova Scotian students, their families, stakeholders in education and health, and the wider community will be provided with effective and appropriately contextualized ongoing mental health education and resources.

Strategies/tactics/resources

- The Framework Team will use existing and where possible new resources to conduct a baseline province-wide mental health literacy survey of students, educators, parents/guardians, school support staff and others as identified.



- The Framework Team will use existing and where possible new resources to review or create contextually appropriate mental health literacy educational materials and help deliver them in the classroom and other appropriate venues.
- The Framework Team and other identified mental health experts will use existing and where possible new resources to create mental health literacy training and support for students, educators, school support staff, and others as appropriate.
- The Framework Team and other identified mental health experts will use existing and where possible new resources to create a compendium of best evidence-based practices for mental health literacy for students, educators, school support staff and others as appropriate.
- The Framework Team will use existing and where possible new resources to provide a compendium of expert vetted and best evidence-based resources for students, educators, school support staff and others as appropriate.

(Note: Experts include mental health experts, such as psychiatrists and psychologists for content validity; researchers for program evidence; and educators for program appropriateness to fit into the local context.)

Evaluation

- To measure mental health knowledge in students, educators and health care providers (including primary care practitioners) prior to receiving mental health education
- To measure mental health knowledge in students, educators, and health care providers, (including primary care practitioners) after receiving mental health education

Theme 2: Resources

Definition/statement

- Resources refer to time, human skills and knowledge, technology, data, money, and other assets in general. Mental health resources include evidence-based programs and materials, well-trained educators, accessible mental health care, adequate funding and support for mental health activities.
- For a successful Nova Scotia School Mental Health Framework it is imperative to provide the resources necessary to ensure equitable and necessary support for all students, their families, stakeholders in education, health, and the wider community in Nova Scotia.

Goals

- To help create and disseminate the resources needed to assist students, their families, stakeholders in education, health, and the wider community in obtaining the information and tools useful for achieving and maintaining mental wellness.
- To provide the school system with instructional mental health curriculum that can be incorporated into the existing curriculum.
- To create additions to the curriculum that addresses the issue of stigma pertaining to mental disorders in the school population.



- To provide best evidence-based province-wide mental health training appropriately contextualized to meet the professional needs of educators, school support staff, primary health care providers and others as appropriate.
- To help support a website dedicated to mental health which provides educators with up-to-date best evidence-based information on mental health programs pertaining to the school setting.

Strategies/tactics/resources

- In collaboration with the Framework Team, the Departments of Education and Health and Wellness will support an evidence-based mental health identification and care navigation model that enhances the capacity to address mental health in schools by providing necessary and professionally contextualized training opportunities. This will include educator gatekeepers as well as public health nurses and youth health center staff. (Gatekeepers may refer to guidance councillors, school psychologists, and “go-to” teachers whom students trust and usually ask help.)
- All stakeholders will support an integrated mental health engagement approach which helps community, government and other organizations to meet the mental health resource needs of students, educators and school support staff.
- The Framework Team will develop, deliver and evaluate appropriate and contextualized child and youth mental health training for primary care providers, using resources currently available within Nova Scotia.
- The Framework Team will help update and provide resource lists of reliable and evidence-based programs, materials, and websites that can support classroom teaching regarding mental health, as this information becomes available.

Evaluation

- To investigate the availability of mental health resources needed through surveys and interviews with related stakeholders.
- To identify and close the gap for child and youth mental health resources needed.

Theme 3: Collaboration and Communication

Definition/statement

- Collaboration and communication refer to consistent and effective interactions amongst all participating government departments, school boards, schools, health providers, families, and community agencies.
- It is important for the Nova Scotia School Mental Health Framework to link and work with the other provincial child and youth health strategies (such as Schools Plus and Health Promoting Schools) based on the conviction that the work cannot be done without effective communication and collaboration.

Goals

- To build on the existing provincial collaborative structures to include school mental health.



- To help provide consistency across the province around membership and processes of the Health Promoting Schools and other appropriate structures.
- To help facilitate communications that support access to information that assists in early identification and intervention and students transitions to mental health care.
- To help optimize opportunities for effective communication and collaboration by promoting the work of the Framework within the Provincial Child and Youth Strategy.

Strategies/tactics/resources

- The Framework Team will help identify the key collaborating structures such as Health Promoting Schools, School Plus, and Youth Health Centres.
- The Framework Team will work with all key stakeholders to address barriers to communication in a collaborative yet timely manner.
- The Framework Team will work with key stakeholders to clarify and establish sustainable communication channels and review effectiveness annually.

Evaluation

- To investigate strengths and weaknesses of both established and new partnerships between stakeholders through focus group interviews and surveys.
- To make recommendations to enhance collaboration and communications based on evaluation results.

Theme 4: Care Access

Definition/statement

- Care Access depicts the identification, navigation and access of mental health care/services for all students.

Goals

- To help students attend schools which are safe and offer supportive environments, where optimal learning can occur.
- To help students with mental health challenges/disorders be better and more quickly identified within the school setting. Students with mental health challenges/disorders, their families and educators will also be able to identify the most appropriate service(s) for the student.
- To help students with mental health challenges/disorders, their families and educators to access appropriate school and mental health care in a timely fashion.
- To help schools and mental health service /care providers have a clear understanding of the mental health care needs of students, how to best access needed mental health services/care and how to best create and sustain appropriate collaboration.
- To help school and mental health service/care providers have a common understanding of education and health organizational structures and use common mental health language when supporting students and families.
- To help mental health services/care that meets the needs of students be made seamlessly available between education and health sectors.



Strategies/tactics/resources

- The Framework Team will work with key stakeholders to help produce and provide information to improve student access to mental health care.
- The Framework Team will work with schools and mental health service/care providers to enhance the use of electronic platforms such as web-based video/audio technology to improve access to health education/programs, mental health care consultation and treatment.
- The Framework Team will work with Departments of Education and Health and Wellness to help support the development and province wide application of evidence-based programs that meet mental health needs of students.

Evaluation

- To conduct a process evaluation with regards to students referrals from the education to health system
- To evaluate the effectiveness of collaboration between education and health system through focus group interviews and identify areas for improvement

Theme 5: Strategies for Development, Distribution, and Application

Definition/statement

- The Nova Scotia School Mental Health Framework team and other identified mental health experts will work to provide a comprehensive description and a library of best evidence-based school mental health programs that will be made available to individuals who work with youth in Nova Scotia.
- Key stakeholders will facilitate the development and dissemination of needs-driven school mental health programs.

Goals

- To ensure that all appropriate stakeholders in Nova Scotia have access to appropriate and contextualized school mental health programs.
- To encourage the identification and use of best evidence-based school mental health programs by the Government of Nova Scotia.
- To include youth and educators in program development, evaluation and dissemination.

Strategies/tactics/resources

- The Framework team will help establish a Provincial Mental Health Framework Champions Team that can develop, refine, apply, evaluate and modify strategies and tactics designed to advance and promote evidence-based school mental health programs.
- Key stakeholders will support their Mental Health champion to engage key members within their organization.



- The Framework Team will assist in the dissemination of information pertaining to school mental health to key stakeholder group decision makers on an ongoing basis.
- The Framework Team will encourage independent researchers/program evaluators to critically evaluate school-based mental health programs and other interventions prior to their introduction into schools.
- The Framework Team will help develop a comprehensive media strategy beginning with disseminating information pertaining to the Nova Scotia School Mental Health Framework and continuing as successes and challenges occur over time.

Evaluation

- To evaluate the availability of evidence-based programs in schools through validated surveys.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of new programs using rigorous research methods.

ACTION

This framework is presented to all provincial departments whose overlapping jurisdictions involve the need to address child and youth mental health. It is expected that the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Wellness will be the Government of Nova Scotia lead on the implementation of this Framework initiative.



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