

A Knowledge Series about Integrated Youth Services

# DAY 1 IMPACT STATEMENT

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In Canada we are very fortunate to have support for youth mental health and substance use system transformation across many jurisdictions, sectors, and funding bodies, including research funders, philanthropic organizations and governments at all levels. Moreover, as a result of strong national leadership and strong inter-provincial and territorial collaboration by youth, family members, service providers, researchers, donors and organizational and governmental decision-makers we have substantial consistency in the model of service delivery: youth services across two developmental stages (adolescent and young adult) and across sectors (health, mental health, substance use, community and social supports) integrated into a one-stop shop model of service delivery, offered in recognizable, accessible youth-friendly spaces and on youth-friendly platforms, and most critically, underpinned by strong commitment to values emphasizing engagement and equity. This is transformative and has led to Canada being among a handful of world leaders in the youth mental health and substance use space.

This work, of course, has not been without challenge. Transformation, by definition, is disruptive. The IYS movement is disrupting power structures in the existing systems and creating alarm in some bastions of conventional ways of working. This can lead to confusion and unfortunately, the onus is on us in IYS initiatives to reach into these spaces, to build collaboration and a shared vision. We need to demonstrate to others the value of “both and” instead of “either or”. Alternatively, the risk is that the enthusiasm and support for IYS and even youth mental health and substance use system transformation in general will be short-lived. Of course, to the extent that we can come together within IYS to adopt a shared model, learn from one another, and commit to alignment we will be more effective in convincing those who are reticent towards IYS.

The good news is we are part way there, but we still have a distance to go. What are our common key messages? What IYS components have met the threshold for evidence in favour of efficacy (broadly defined) and which have not? Which components are still in a stage of evidence-generation? What does the evidence, broadly defined, tell us about the best combination of core components needed to achieve improved youth outcomes (as defined by youth) and which components may not add significantly to the model? And in what context does the model work best? And for whom? And importantly, for whom do current IYS models not work? How do we ensure our commitment to equity is exemplified by actions, not statements? Lastly, we must tackle the question of what backbone structures are needed to support full implementation of IYS initially and then, over time, to continue to learn, enhance, and sustain the model, as well as update and improve the model as new evidence emerges. This is essential to drive innovation in optimal youth mental health and substance use services.

The path forward to achieving 'every youth in Canada knows where to go for support and can readily access meaningful and effective support' requires focus, commitment, generosity, and ultimately deep collaboration. We must think of ourselves collectively as intricately interconnected and challenges that pose a risk to the success of one initiative, ultimately will pose a risk to all of us. Collectively, we must establish a shared vision and workplan for ensuring youth mental health and substance use services achieve funding parity with other health services and funding commensurate with the cost of failing to act in the interests of youth. For this, of course, we need resources that we share as a collective. Given that the IYS model expects communities to implement integrated governance, it is incumbent on us as a collective to demonstrate the potential of integrated governance and to push for innovative funding models that evoke and reward collaboration across initiatives and jurisdictions, instead of conventional sole recipient funding models. Canada's youth deserve the best that we can achieve together.