

A Better Future for Youth

Saskatchewan's Plan for Child & Youth Mental Health Services





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Imagine a classroom where three or four students suffer from a serious illness that makes it difficult for them to learn effectively. Imagine a recreational activity where one in six children or youth is unable to participate to the best of his or her ability due to illness. Now imagine that for every child with such a serious health issue, there is another young person at risk of developing a similar health concern.

Sadly, this scenario isn't imaginary. It is the real picture of mental illness among children and youth. As with any illness, mental health disorders affect not just the child, but also family members, caregivers and the broader community. Solutions will only be found through the combined efforts of parents and mental healthcare professionals working in partnership with other service providers to identify children and youth in need of assistance, and increase access to well-designed, effective mental health services.

“Teachers need more education in mental health, so something can be done earlier and it’s not a response to a crisis.”

- comment from education sector consultation

In the past decade and a half, Saskatchewan has significantly increased resources for children's mental health services. Saskatchewan Health will continue to address this important issue by providing more funding to health regions to enhance services over the next two years.

Saskatchewan's Plan for Child & Youth Mental Health Services aims to improve the overall mental health and well-being of our young people, and builds on the province's many initiatives that are helping our children achieve a bright future.

A Snapshot of Children's Mental Health Disorders

At any given time, it is estimated that up to 15% of Canadian children and youth experience mental health disorders requiring treatment or intervention. Similar numbers of children are considered at risk to develop a mental illness. The six most commonly occurring disorders are:

Anxiety disorders

Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Conduct Disorder

Depressive disorders

Substance abuse

Pervasive developmental disorders

Other less prevalent but significant disorders include Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, eating disorders, Tourette's Syndrome, Schizophrenia, and Bipolar Disorder.

Although these illnesses cause considerable distress and impair the ability of young people to function at home, at school and in the community, fewer than one in four receives specialized treatment services. As a result, poor mental health is often carried into adulthood with significant individual and societal costs.

(Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, March 2005)

“If mental health conditions exist in children and youth, they need the earliest, most effective interventions to produce the best outcomes.”

- comment from consultation with Child Psychiatry sector





The Call to Action

The 2004 Saskatchewan Children's Advocate report *It's Time for a Plan for Children's Mental Health* was prepared in response to a small number of complaints of a "compelling nature." The report raised concerns about the quantity, quality and accessibility of children's mental health services in Saskatchewan.

For children, youth and families across Saskatchewan to access adequate and appropriate mental health services and supports in a timely and effective manner, the Children's Advocate recommended that:

Saskatchewan Health, in consultation with stakeholders, develop and implement a comprehensive plan to ensure that mental health services are provided to Saskatchewan children, youth and families in a manner that is consistent with what is known about best practices.

We need a clear direction and vision for children's mental health services: a direction that reflects what is known about best practices and which includes data collection, analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of the services.

*Saskatchewan's Children's Advocate
It's Time for a Plan for Children's Mental Health, 2004*



"Accessing mental health services is as difficult or more difficult than dealing with our child's mental disorder."

- comment from a parent at stakeholder consultation

Concern about children's mental health services is not unique to this province. A senate committee examining mental health issues in 2005 concluded that children's mental health services are the "most neglected piece" of the Canadian health care system. The committee found that the stigma attached to mental disorders, especially in children, means that the shortage of community-based services and mental healthcare professionals does not attract the same attention as diseases such as cancer, heart disease, and diabetes, or issues such as wait times and doctor shortages.



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Plan for Child & Youth Mental Health Services

Saskatchewan Health conducted extensive, in-depth consultations with a broad range of children's mental health stakeholders to develop a plan that will build capacity to provide more evidence-based services, support families and service providers, and strengthen effective partnerships within and across sectors.

Consultations confirmed that the gaps in children's mental health services in Saskatchewan include accessibility to specialized consultation and treatment, family supports, prevention programs, professional and paraprofessional training in evidence-based best practices, and monitoring and evaluation of outcomes.

Since the early 1990s, the resources Saskatchewan Health devotes to child and youth mental health services in

Regional Health Authorities have increased by more than 50 percent to \$12 million annually. The 2006 – 2007 Saskatchewan budget provides an additional \$1 million for expanded and enhanced services beginning in October 2006, increasing to \$2 million the following year, for a total expenditure of \$14 million in 2007-2008.

Children's mental health services are not exclusively provided through regional health authorities, but together with other government and community partners. Saskatchewan's Plan for Child & Youth Mental Health Services targets resources to the highest priority needs, and focuses on building capacity within a coordinated system, thereby multiplying the benefit of specific initiatives.

Key Initiatives

Saskatchewan's Plan for Child & Youth Mental Health Services increases support for young people, families and communities.

Prevention & Education

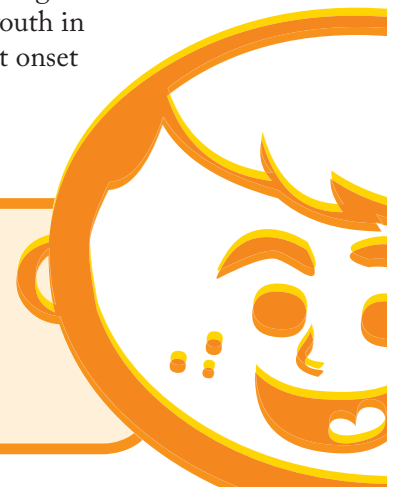
- Print and on-line information on mental disorders in children and youth will assist families/caregivers of affected, vulnerable and resilient young people.
- A new booklet, *Depression and Suicide: What You Need to Know*, has been distributed through schools, doctors' offices, hospitals, community organizations, tribal councils and band offices.
- Resources will be increased for existing early identification and intervention programs such as the Parent Mentoring Program operating at 15 sites across the province, and the Early Skills Development Program in Saskatoon and North Battleford which provides intensive intervention for kindergarten and grade one students exhibiting significant behaviour challenges.

Treatment & Intervention

- Three additional Master of Social Work/Psychology professionals based in Moose Jaw, Prince Albert and the Battlefords will be hired to enhance therapeutic (family-based) residential services to meet the needs of youth with mental disorders who are unable to live at home.
- Additional funding will be provided to regional health authorities to expand flexible outreach services in homes, schools and communities, and implement flexible respite services in rural, remote and urban areas.
- Community mental health services for children will be expanded in the Nipawin-Melfort-Tisdale region with the addition of one Bachelor of Social Work professional.
- Autism intervention services in Regina will be expanded to reduce the wait list.
- An Early Psychosis Intervention Program will be implemented in Regina to serve youth in southern Saskatchewan at the first onset of psychosis.

“Children in therapeutic foster care need timely mental health consultation so the placement does not break down, resulting in multiple moves.”

– comment from child welfare sector consultation





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**Plan for Child & Youth Mental Health Services
increases support for service providers.**

Building Expertise & Partnerships

- Face-to-face and distance specialist consultation capacity will be increased to support professional and paraprofessional mental health service providers in urban, rural and remote areas of the province. Specialist consultation capacity will be increased by one senior social worker, one child psychiatrist and three PhD psychologist positions based in Prince Albert, Saskatoon and Regina.
- On-going training in evidence-based best practices will be promoted and provided to professional and paraprofessional children's mental health services providers across the province.

- Youth will be invited to participate in ongoing planning to improve child and youth mental health services.
- Saskatchewan Health will continue to work with its partners across regional health authorities, other government departments, aboriginal and other organizations to build capacity to meet the mental health needs of Saskatchewan children and youth.

Monitoring & Evaluation

- Standard monitoring and evaluation tools will be researched and implemented to measure the outcomes of mental health services and determine the most effective use of resources.



Who We Consulted

- youth
- parents/caregivers of children and youth with mental disorders
- child psychiatrists and other mental health professionals in health regions
- primary health care and family physicians
- youth court judges
- public health nurses and nurse practitioners
- community based organizations delivering children's mental health services
- tribal councils
- the aboriginal community
- early childhood professionals
- service delivery partners including Saskatchewan Learning, Saskatchewan Corrections and Public Safety, Saskatchewan Community Resources, and Saskatchewan Justice

“I have to deal with the same complex cases that the specialists deal with in the big cities, so I need additional training, and someone to consult with.”

- comment from children's mental health sector consultation



Saskatchewan's Plan for Child & Youth Mental Health Services aims to build a better life for families today and a better future for our youth, and is based on the following vision and beliefs:

Vision

All our children develop and participate in healthy families and communities. Every effort is made to achieve the optimal growth and development of our children by ensuring they are valued, healthy, safe, secure, culturally connected, socially responsible, knowledgeable and skilled.

Saskatchewan has accessible, effective and efficient mental health services and supports. These assist our children, youth and families to achieve, restore and maintain their mental health and well-being as an essential foundation for their healthy growth and development.

Beliefs

- We must dedicate sufficient resources to ensure the optimal mental health functioning and well-being of our children and youth.
- Our children and youth have unique and specific biological, emotional, developmental and social needs.
- A portion of our children and youth is seriously impaired by mental health disorders and problems.
- The impairment associated with mental disorders in our children and youth can be significantly reduced through effective prevention, early identification, intervention and treatment, thereby reducing personal and societal costs.
- Our children and youth with mental disorders should have timely, effective and culturally competent treatment and supports.
- Communities and governments must support families to strengthen their capacity to care for and nurture our children and youth.



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