



Knowledge Institute
on Child and Youth Mental Health and Addictions



Together, we go further

Impact report 2024

We recognize the history, strengths, and diversity of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities.

This land, known as Ontario, is covered by 46 treaties and other agreements. As a provincial organization, the Knowledge Institute operates throughout the many traditional territories relevant to these agreements. Our office is located on the traditional unceded territory of the Anishinaabe Algonquin nation.

We are committed to engaging respectfully with Indigenous children, young people, and families within and across nations.



Leaders' messages

As I reflect on the Knowledge Institute's remarkable journey over the past two decades, one truth emerges: collaboration has been a cornerstone of our success. Together with agencies, provincial partners, and government leaders from across ministries, we have developed a vision that will strengthen service delivery and ensure the needs of families are met for years to come. I'm filled with pride for my team and everyone who helped us get this far – our dedicated staff, councils, and partners. Your work this past year will continue to carry us forward.

For far too long, families have struggled to navigate a fragmented system. This past year, we have made strides towards a solution: integrated care pathways. Our collective contributions to this work, along with so many others we share with partners, demonstrate our commitment to accelerating system

change, building capacity in our sector, and ensuring that families receive appropriate support for their children, no matter which door they go through. And behind that door, all partners across the system are equipped with the right tools and prepared to provide high-quality support in a timely way.

We will soon have a new leader ready to step in at the Knowledge Institute and drive the implementation of our new strategy. I'm optimistic about the future of our sector and look forward to cheering all of you on as you continue to drive meaningful change for Ontario's infants, children, young people, and families.

I'm pleased to be able to share highlights of our work in this impact report.



Purnima Sundar
Executive Director

Leaders' messages

This past year has been one of remarkable achievements for the Knowledge Institute. Chairing the Strategic Advisory Council, I've seen the Knowledge Institute staff's commitment to excellence firsthand - an observation that is shared by many across the sector.

Our new strategic plan, informed by the insights of nearly 250 individuals, sets a clear course for the next 3 to 5 years. I am incredibly grateful for everyone's contributions to this work. This plan ensures the Knowledge Institute will continue to increase its impact, building upon the strong foundation it has already established.

Some notable highlights in our new strategy include a focus on accelerating system change at the forefront and branching out further into equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism. Expanding work in those areas will help the Knowledge Institute remain attuned to the needs of families across sectors for years to come.

This report is a testament to the exceptional work the team at the Knowledge Institute has accomplished under Purnima's leadership. Finally, I want to express my sincerest gratitude to Purnima for her work over the years and wish her the best of luck as she embarks on her next adventure.

Louis Doyle
Chair, Strategic Advisory Council

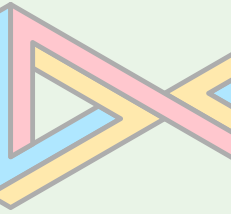


I'd like to express my gratitude to the Knowledge Institute team for all their hard work this past year.

Over the past few months, I've had the privilege of seeing the impact of the Knowledge Institute at both the agency and system levels. Their commitment to strengthening care for infants, children, young people and families is evident through their work in standard development, substance use and addictions health, integrated care pathways, driving meaningful engagement and so much more.

Achieving this 20-year milestone is a testament to their responsiveness to the sector's ever-changing needs. Their ability to foster partnerships in and across sectors is remarkable and will continue to serve them for the next 20 years.

Joanne Bezzubetz
Vice-President, Integrated Mental Health and Addictions Care at CHEO and Youth Services Bureau



Youth advisory council

We're extremely grateful for the lived expertise and voice that our advisory councils bring to ensure that our work is responsive to the evolving needs of young Ontarians and their families.

Over the past year, youth advisory council members have co-developed a youth-friendly substance use and addictions resource, collaborated with sector partners in our Good2Talk evaluation working group and provided vital input for our new strategic plan. Here's what they told us they learned, gained or experienced from their involvement with the Knowledge Institute:

Collaborative

Community

Eye-opening

System-level **Impactful** **Change** **Power**

Perspective **Connected** **Unity**

Engaging **Informative** **Knowledge** **Unity**

Care **Confidence**

Expertise **Empowerment**

Family advisory council

I can see youth and family engagement embedded more in various organizations and places where it wasn't before (e.g. schools, hospitals). Families are being seen as experts instead of solely service recipients.

In 20 years, I would like to see families thriving in their own communities, with natural support networks that support their health and well-being and centres of care that the whole family can access when needed, for whatever their health concerns are. I would like to see more services and sectors collaborating and no more games of tennis with families as the ball, bounced around until their need for care is in crisis and emergency services feels like the only available answer.

Being involved in the family advisory council offers the opportunity to see the work that is happening behind the scenes. It may be slow at times given how systems can be, but it's happening. It gives me hope in a brighter future for infants, children, young people and families.



Vicki Cochrane
Family Advisory Council member



Driving change together

After two decades working hand in hand with partners across the province, we've seen the power of collaboration countless times. Cultivating and maintaining strong, strategic partnerships is essential to driving efficient, meaningful, and lasting change in a complex system.

That's why collaboration is a recurring theme throughout [our new strategic plan](#), which features a new, third goal: to accelerate system change. While this may be newly articulated as a goal, it certainly isn't new to us. We've worked on system transformation projects for years, and bringing people and knowledge together to create meaningful change has always been at the heart of our work.

To that end, we continue to contribute to several system-level initiatives led by the Ministry of Health. We also provide ongoing evidence, implementation, and

evaluation supports for the Child and Youth Mental Health Lead Agency Consortium (LAC). This includes participating in the steering committees for the Provincial Training Initiative and [One Stop Talk](#), co-chairing the working group on substance use and addictions, and collaborating with provincial partners to implement the Right Time, Right Care vision across school boards and service areas throughout the province.

Our shared priorities and collective knowledge, skills, and resources have helped us make significant achievements on the road to better mental health and well-being for all infants, children, young people, and families. And we're delighted to be able to share some milestones in this report.



Here are just a few highlights demonstrating collaboration in action this past year.

With Infant and Early Years Mental Health Promotion and Public Health Ontario, co-created a registry of provincial datasets to better understand and explore mental health needs and access to services for children under the age of 6, including racialized and other vulnerable children.


Produced the preliminary results of our CIHR-funded project with the Kids Come First Health Team using 1Call1Click data to inform tailored service delivery.

Led the process to reach consensus on a harmonized intake process with a common application and cross-communication about waitlists with Ontario's secure treatment providers – and had our [systematic review published in the International Journal of Mental Health Systems](#).

Co-developed [PARticipating in your mental health care](#) and [PARticipating in mental health care as a caregiver](#) toolkits with young people, caregivers, researchers, and mindyourmind, which build on participatory action research we began with the CHEO Research Institute during the pandemic.


Glancing back


First, let's take a quick look at a snapshot of 2023–24 by the numbers and a few related highlights.


 **318** coaching, consultation, or program sessions

 **1,264** participants from agencies across Ontario

 **7** articles published in peer-reviewed publications

 **20** knowledge products including reports, toolkits, guides, and other resources

 **20** webinars, workshops, presentations, posters, and panels

 **26** grants supporting research, quality improvement and projects on substance use and addictions care, culturally responsive services, and engagement

Financials

Salaries and benefits	4,553,099
Office supplies and expenses	200,530
Office equipment	43,767
Staff training and development	34,749
Communication: promotions, materials, translation	37,941
Staff travel and accommodation	72,523
Meeting expenses	107,220
Purchased services	526,926
Distributed funds	59,904
Rent	92,543
Administration fee	641,105
Total	6,370,308



Among the grants we awarded last year were three studentships, offered in partnership with Mental Health Research Canada and Mitacs to support impactful research projects undertaken by the next generation of mental health researchers. [See what Candace and Maria told us about their projects.](#)



“My time at the Knowledge Institute allowed me to develop writing and research skills that I now apply to my studies. It was my first workplace collaboration experience, too. It was an incredibly enjoyable and educational experience that I would do all over again!”

Jordyn, co-op student

Honours double major Health Sciences and Communication, Western University



Jordyn helped develop several resources for a post-secondary audience – our first-ever [Good2Talk resources](#) specifically for young people to support their mental health and well-being.

Updating our sector's toolbox

Over the years, we've heard that our toolkits are tried and trusted resources accessed by those within and outside our sector. So much has changed since these resources were first developed! We've now updated our toolkits on knowledge mobilization and program evaluation with the latest evidence-based knowledge, practical tools, and step-by-step guidance to ensure they continue to be useful and informative in driving change.

Late in 2023, we released [Doing more with what you know](#), our refreshed knowledge mobilization (KMb) toolkit. It features new examples, the latest evidence on KmB, and topics like clear language, storytelling, and navigating challenges related to KmB. We co-hosted workshops with our partners at the National Newcomer Navigation Network and McMaster

University and have mobilized this tool through community tables and KmB collaboratives. We will be showcasing this work at the national KmB forum in June 2024.

In March, we unveiled [Clearer insights, bigger impact](#), a program evaluation toolkit designed to help agencies plan and conduct evaluations and use their findings to improve their services, secure funding, and increase their impact. This updated toolkit has been completely redesigned, including a focus on equity and collaboration and the latest changes in the field of evaluation. We've also developed a brief complementary resource, [Evaluation and quality improvement: Complementary approaches to improve your programs](#).



The revamped [Evaluation toolkit](#) and the [KmB quick guide](#) was released at the beginning of 2024.

Mapping out care pathways for the early and middle years

In September 2023, we released [From building blocks to care pathways: Working together to support timely access to infant and early mental health care](#). This evidence-based guide brings together the knowledge and lessons learned through our early years pilot project. It was developed for community partners in all sectors who support infant and early mental health. The guide identifies key phases of developing community care pathways for this age group and includes helpful resources and suggested activities for strengthening local support systems for families.

Throughout the year, we developed and mobilized several resources to support implementation, evaluation, and cross-sectoral work with key partners in and outside our sector. We also continued mobilization activities around our 2023 middle years policy paper, [Stemming the tide: Investing in the mental health of Ontario's 7-to-12-year olds](#), including presenting in a national webinar. Most recently, we've begun collecting data for a new family-focused resource addressing evidence-based programs for children in both the early and middle years.



Helping clinicians steer clients in the right direction

Our work on strengthening the connection between primary care and community-based child and youth mental health services is continuing. This includes new work with Ontario Public Health, along with continued efforts to integrate the HEADS-ED into the OCEANS e-referral platform.

The [HEADS-ED](#) is the brief, easy-to-use screening and triage tool at the core of our ongoing primary care projects. Used within an integrated care pathway, the tool is like GPS, helping intake workers, physicians, and other service providers make informed decisions about their client's care journey based on real-time information. The HEADS-

ED provides scores across several domains, helping users pinpoint specific needs for more targeted referrals to community-based mental health and addictions services.

Last August marked the end of two years of data collection for a validation study on the version of the tool for children under the age of 6, conducted in partnership with 1Call1Click. That makes two studies – including a cross-validation with the interRAI early years assessment. These studies affirm that HEADS-ED is useful in guiding conversations with caregivers, communicating the severity of mental health needs and helping determine the level of service required.



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papers about our HEADS-ED pathways work have been published in the Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health and 2 manuscripts for our HEADS-ED under 6 validation work have been submitted.

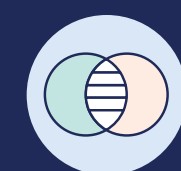
Advancing substance use and addictions priorities

We've always known there is a relationship between mental health and substance use health. However, few programs provide concurrent care, limiting access to care for young people with concurrent disorders. Last October, we shared our report [Priorities in substance use and addictions services for young people in Ontario](#), which deepened our understanding of our sector's priorities, strengths, challenges, and needs. These insights informed our subsequent efforts to develop new resources for [harm reduction](#) and [concurrent disorders](#). A series of resources for supporting those with problematic technology use is now underway.

In 2023, we partnered with Mental Health Research Canada to support Impact grants of up to \$100,000 to advance integrated mental health, substance use, and addictions care. We funded two projects. The first was an evaluation to understand the impact of a local integrated youth service site. The second centered on building community capacity for a trauma-informed and addictions approach to help more young northern Ontarians access the care they need in their home communities. [Learn more about the selected projects.](#)



Findings in the priorities report were drawn from 62 consultations with 113 people, including young people and families. Here are a few of the things we heard.



Building strong partnerships between local agencies and sectors is essential to ensuring quality care.



Children and young people need integrated services that respond to their diverse and unique needs.



Young people's cannabis use and problematic technology use are primary concerns.



Few programs focus both on mental health and substance use and addictions together, and few options support behavioural addictions.

New quality standard taking shape

It's one thing to direct people toward appropriate and timely care. It's another thing to be sure that when they do get through the door, they're getting consistent, high-quality care, no matter where they are in Ontario. That's a big part of why the Knowledge Institute has been investing in developing quality standards for the child and youth mental health and addictions sector since 2018.

After establishing a [standard development process](#) in 2022, we began work last year to bring together a team of sector experts, young people, and families to co-develop a new quality standard focused on levels of care. The goal is to ensure that all children and young people get the care that best matches their needs

and goals. By aligning this with the right level of care, it's possible to optimize the use of resources within the sector so that more children and young people receive necessary services in a timely manner.

The scoping phase was completed in October of last year, after which the team carried out literature reviews and consultations with key partners. The quality standard, which will be accompanied by a suite of implementation and measurement supports to facilitate its adoption, is currently in the drafting phase. In early 2024, the team laid out 10 draft core principles, grouped around four components of levels of care models, that will serve as the foundation of the new standard.



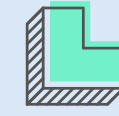
Increasing quality improvement capacity

Last year we guided a third cohort of seven agency teams through improvement projects as part of our Quest program. Once again, participants received a range of supports including tailored, team-based quality improvement (QI) coaching, Lean Six Sigma training, and funding to use to successfully complete their projects. Cohort 3 projects focused on improving access, brief services, and organizational systems.

Cohort 3 participants networked and shared reflections on their QI journeys at a close-out event in November 2023, the first such event to be held in person since the program's launch in 2020. Many past participants also shared their experiences at the annual virtual QI Innovation conference in April, which focused on building a culture of quality. In 2024, we partnered with E-QIP and

Ontario Health on this conference for a third time.

Over the years, we have seen growth in QI culture across our participating agencies. Using a tool adapted from Ontario Public Health, our QI maturity assessment gives teams a basis for understanding their agency QI culture across three domains: organizational culture, capacity and competency, and perceived value. We've observed agencies' increased attention to their QI culture, notably through creating new QI positions, staff training in QI, developing QI frameworks, and using Lean Six Sigma (LSS) tools beyond their Quest projects. We are confident that we will see even more growth through Cohort 4, which kicked off in June 2024. We also continue to facilitate a QI community of practice and an advanced QI working group focused on system-level QI topics.



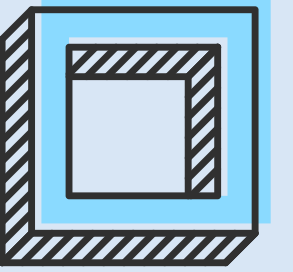
“What we are grateful for [about Quest] is all the quality improvement tools that we can take with us and move forward to other projects with higher efficiency.”

Project team

Keystone Child, Youth & Family Services

“As someone with limited QI knowledge who struggles with data, this information was easy to understand and made it feel like something I can effectively (use).”

LSS white belt session participant



3 Quality Connect events bringing together the community of practice around themes like using data for decision-making and the importance of meaningfully engaging young people and families in all improvement efforts.

96 participants earned white or yellow belt certificates through our various training sessions.

100% of Cohort 3 participants reported feeling better prepared to support future improvement initiatives in their organization.

Prioritizing culturally responsive services

Adapting programs to meet the cultural needs of racialized children, young people, and families is an essential step toward a more inclusive and equitable system for all. In 2023, we awarded Innovation Initiatives grants worth up to \$75,000 and ongoing coaching to five agencies to implement and evaluate culturally responsive child and youth mental health and addictions programs in Ontario. We then hosted the project teams for a knowledge exchange event in March.

The projects included:

- Culturally adapting Stop Now and Plan (SNAP) for Black children and families.
- Adapting cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) for newcomer, immigrant, and refugee families from Middle Eastern countries.
- Improving trauma-informed services for Muslim immigrant and refugee children, young people, and families.
- Incorporating Indigenous practices and perspectives into the delivery methods of an evidence-based program.
- Expanding cultural programming that supports access to traditional teachings, historical knowledge, customs, and ceremonies.



Last fall we released [A guide to culturally adapting mental health and addictions programs](#). The guide provides valuable strategies for agencies to ensure they meet the unique needs of diverse communities, focusing particularly on historically overlooked or underserved populations. We also remain contributors to Children’s Mental Health Ontario’s work to identify the sector’s strategic priorities related to equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism (EDIA-R), including providing support for evidence and capacity- building.

Making headway on meaningful engagement

In early 2023, we received a [CIHR catalyst grant](#) as one of 25 research projects to inform the development of national standards for mental health and substance use services. Our study with the CHEO Research Institute examines barriers and facilitators to the uptake of the youth and family engagement quality standards.

We continue to support the engagement community of practice and ad hoc requests for information and guidance on implementing the engagement quality standards in Ontario. Notably, over the past year our engagement team has been working with the nine agencies that received funding through our one-time engagement grants to remove barriers to engagement within their organizations or communities.



Engagement grant recipients met in February to share their project outcomes, which included:



New organizational policies for youth and family engagement.



Several new or redesigned youth, family, or combined advisory groups.



The development of a child engagement toolkit based on research and best practices.



Greater awareness of community resources and opportunities for peer support and engagement.



New connections and enhanced visibility and participation for council members with the community.



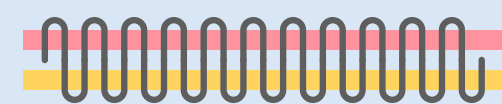
Events and redeveloped resources that are more inclusive of newcomers, immigrants, and international student populations.

Gearing up for what's next in groundbreaking collaboration

This past year, the Ministries of Education and Health worked together in lockstep to enhance access to high-quality mental health and well-being services for children and young people across the province. Using Right Time, Right Care as its foundation, the Ministries have set out expectations for school boards and community-based organizations to jointly develop plans and strategies to ensure that children and young people receive the right level of care in the right setting. Our team will continue to collaborate with our partners at School Mental Health Ontario, the LAC,

CMHO, and YWHO to support the implementation of this important, evidence-based approach to care.

We're proud to be part of this groundbreaking cross-sectoral work, which will impact many young Ontarians and pave the way for future collaborations with other ministries, including youth justice and child welfare. What an exciting road ahead!






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The views expressed herein are those of the Knowledge Institute
and do not necessarily reflect those of the Province.

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