SEPTEMBER 2024

Innovation Initiatives 2025: Application Guide

Knowledge Institute
on Child and Youth Mental Health and Addictions

Suggested citation

Funded by: **Ontario**

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About the Innovation Initiatives

The Knowledge Institute's Innovation Initiatives grant provides funding for innovative solutions to pressing issues in Ontario's child and youth mental health and addictions sector (the sector). The grant is open to lead and core service agencies in the sector.

To date, we have supported 33 organizations in implementing innovative interventions to improve service quality and access. You can find out more about our previous Innovation Initiatives here!

In the past, funded projects have focused on solutions addressing virtual care, care pathways and access. In the 2023 call, we focused on efforts to advance equity, diversity and inclusion. The Knowledge Institute is continuing the call for innovative projects that address one or more barriers in implementing or evaluating culturally responsive child and youth mental health and addictions programs in Ontario.

Grants of up to $75,000 will be awarded for an 18-month term (March 3, 2025 – September 30, 2026).

What are culturally responsive programs and why are they important?

Culturally responsive programs in mental health and addictions refer to evidence-based programs that are modified to meet unique aspects of a client's culture, language and values.[1,2] These programs are sometimes referred to as culturally adapted interventions.

Research shows that programs adapted to meet the needs of children and young people who are impacted by systemic inequities tend to be more effective than those where culture or context have not been considered.[3-6] For example, one systematic review showed that compared with control conditions, culturally adapted motivational interviewing (MI) programs had more positive outcomes, including higher motivation and involvement with the treatment.[5]

Culturally responsive programs address assumptions about mental

health and integrate clients' experiences of racism, discrimination or microaggressions into the assessment and treatment approach.[7] For example, interventions for Indigenous youth integrate cultural practices, beliefs and values by involving meaningful rituals and community members such as Elders.[8, 9]

Implementing culturally responsive programs is one concrete and direct way to address equity and access to mental health and addictions services for Ontario's diverse communities.[10] For example, having cultural brokers can be helpful, as they are "paraprofessionals trained to act as mediators or go-betweens in clinical settings."[10] Cultural brokers can serve as care navigators, help identify cultural assets or resilience, and help reduce shame or stigma related to mental illness.[11]

One of the important considerations in implementing culturally responsive services is attention to integrating social determinants of health.[12] Collaboration among mental health and addictions services with cross-sectoral partners is essential, such as working with housing or employment supports and with primary health care teams.[13]

The challenge and opportunity

Communities affected by systemic inequities are a large and growing population in Ontario. One in five people are immigrants to Canada,[14] and more than one in four households in Ontario are multilingual.[15]

Agencies in our sector have implemented several strategies to meet the unique cultural needs of Ontario's diverse communities, but culturally responsive services are not yet widespread.[16] In a recent scan of organizational practices to advance racial equity, most agencies indicated they provide translation services (79% or 76/102 agencies), but only 57% reported providing culturally responsive services. Additionally, agencies providing select culturally responsive services must sometimes refer their clients to other agencies; in fact, a recent study shows close to 70% of agencies referred their clients to other organizations for culturally responsive programs.[16]

For more information on why cultural adaptation is important and for a glossary of key terms, see our overview of culturally adapted programs.[22] Check out A guide to culturally adapting mental health and addictions programs [23] to learn how the Ecological Validity Model can help you adapt programs for different cultural groups.

The effectiveness of culturally adapted evidence-based programs is demonstrated by several systematic reviews.[6, 9, 11, 17-19] There are also several frameworks providing guidance on how to adapt these types of programs.[1, 21] However, there is a clear gap between research and practice, as culturally adapted interventions are not widely implemented in our sector.

The Knowledge Institute Innovations Initiatives will fund projects that adapt evidence-based programs to help agencies meet the unique needs of children, young people and families affected by systemic inequities. Applicants are encouraged to identify which one of these priority areas they will focus on.

- Determining whether a specific evidence-based program should be adapted (looking at the conditions for adaptation using a data-driven approach or a practical framework) and begin to adapt the program for a specific cultural group.

  o Example: A review of the ethnocultural make-up of clients in a program shows that a majority are from a racialized group. Through focus groups and consultations, the agency engages with relevant community groups and identifies areas that need to be adapted. The team explores frameworks to guide their efforts, with an overall participatory action research approach. The team begins to examine potential adaptations such as those listed in a systematic review by Arora and colleagues.[11]

- Piloting a culturally adapted evidence-based program.

  o Example: An agency has worked with various communities impacted by systemic inequities and has begun to identify areas where it can adapt materials for the agency's Cognitive Behavioural Therapy program (CBT). The agency had previously developed materials for older adolescents and now wants to pilot the program for younger teens from the same racialized group. Focus groups and interviews are planned to get feedback from clinicians and clients.

- Scaling up an existing culturally adapted program.

  o Example: An agency has implemented a CBT program for South Asian youth at one of their program sites, and now wants to offer the program at all their sites. The agency also wants to partner with the school board to implement the program.

- Evaluating and improving a culturally adapted program.
  - Example: An agency has been implementing a CBT program for Black youth based on adaptations and feedback from young people five years ago. The agency wants to know whether the adaptations are still relevant and what improvements need to be made to the program. They decide to use the Cultural Adaptation Process Model[20] (CAP) to guide their evaluation and improvement plans, making sure that young people from the community work with them to evaluate the program and identify areas for improvements.

Funding conditions

In this section, we describe the timelines, eligibility criteria, budget and selection criteria.

Timelines

Date	Activity
September 16, 2024	Launch call for applications
November 15, 2024	Applications due at 4:00 pm
January 15, 2025	Feedback and decisions to be communicated
March 3, 2025	Award term begins
Spring 2025	Project kick-off meetings between the Knowledge Institute and recipients
September 30, 2026	Project conclusion
October 30, 2026	Final reports due

Eligibility

Innovation Initiative project proposals must:

- Be submitted by a lead or core service agency funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health to provide child and youth mental health and addictions services. Agencies that are not core service provider agencies are strongly recommended to partner with the lead agency in their service area.

- Describe an evidence-based intervention or practice that will be adapted to meet the unique needs of children, young people or families affected by systemic inequities.

- Demonstrate partnership within the broader community/service area and describe participation of local community partners in implementing or evaluating the evidence-based program.

- Include a plan to engage young people, family members and community partners in meaningful ways; and

- Demonstrate potential for scaling up the program to the broader child and youth mental health and addictions system in Ontario.

Projects that focus only on staff training are not eligible for funding. However, staff training can be one of the activities of the project and a strong link to the intervention approach should be demonstrated in the application.

Budget

ELIGIBLE items include:

- Backfill or salary costs for personnel.
- External consultant or contractor fees (up to a maximum of 50% of the total budget, unless negotiated otherwise with the Knowledge Institute).
- Honoraria for students.
- Honoraria or consultant fees for youth or family members for activities related to youth or family engagement.
- Honoraria for Elders, Knowledge Keepers, cultural brokers or community partners.
- Training fees (there must be other activities beyond staff training).
- Travel expenses associated with data collection, meetings, training.
- Knowledge mobilization activities (up to a maximum of $5,000).
- Computer software costs.
- Language translation of materials.
- Administrative costs associated with the project such as photocopying, purchase of evaluation measures (up to a maximum of 10% of the total budget).

INELIGIBLE items include:

- Capital and operational expenses associated with existing and proposed services, such as buildings and facilities (rent, utilities), furniture, phones and computer hardware (laptops, tablets).

Innovation Initiative funds are not intended to supplement organizational operating budgets.

Selection process and criteria

A review committee comprised of Knowledge Institute staff, youth advisors, family advisors and external reviewers will evaluate all

applications based on the following criteria:

- Aligned with current call on culturally responsive programs.
- Demonstrates need for action.
- Has clear, reasonable goals and strong evidence base for the approach.
- Demonstrates innovation and originality in the proposed work.
- Has a feasible workplan and budget.
- Demonstrates plans for collaborating with key partners within the sector.
- Demonstrates plans for meaningful and appropriate engagement of youth and/or family members.
- Includes reasonable preliminary plans for process and outcome evaluation.
- Includes appropriate plans to mobilize knowledge generated through this work.
- Demonstrates potential for a transformative, positive impact on improving equitable mental health and addictions services.

Knowledge Institute support and expectations of recipients

A Knowledge Institute staff member will coordinate tailored supports on engagement, implementation and evaluation planning for project teams based on identified priorities, needs and capacity. Regular updates on project progress will be held on a quarterly basis between the project lead and a staff member.

Key events

Welcome webinar – April 2025

Project teams will introduce their work, learn about others' projects and identify opportunities to share knowledge or collaborate.

Kick-off meeting – May 2025

Each Innovation Initiative project team will participate in a kick-off meeting with Knowledge Institute staff to review project plans and discuss potential support needs.

Expectations of applicants

- This grant is intended to provide resources and consultation support to develop, pilot, scale up or evaluate an evidence-based program to be culturally responsive to the needs of children, young people and their families affected by systemic inequities.

- Recipients will work with Knowledge Institute staff to contribute to the development of resources to support the sector in implementing and evaluating culturally responsive programs. For example, project teams will participate in providing examples of cultural adaptations, and reviewing toolkits, evidence briefs or tip sheets on implementing and evaluating culturally responsive programs.

- While the Knowledge Institute will work with project teams during the term of the grant to refine implementation and evaluation plans, proposals should demonstrate clear, preliminary directions for the work.

Final report

All Innovation Initiative recipients are required to submit a Final Report on or before October 30, 2026 (one month following the end of the award term). The report will address the following questions:

- What was the overall goal (or goals) of your Innovation Initiative?
- What were the main activities of the project? How did the project meet the unique needs of children, young people and families affected by systemic inequities?
- What were key factors that contributed to the success of your project?
- What challenges did you encounter along the way and how were these resolved? What was the result?
- What were the outcomes achieved through the course of this work? How did you measure these? What did you learn while implementing the project?
- How have you or how do you plan to share and mobilize knowledge gained through this initiative?
- What are your next steps?

A 25-page report (excluding references and appendices) is highly recommended.

Knowledge-sharing and mobilization

All Innovation Initiative recipients are asked to create a knowledge product (to be shared publicly) to share their stories, evaluation results and lessons learned with partners in the sector. The project team is encouraged to be creative and consider engaging formats appropriate to their work and context. Members of the Knowledge Institute team will be available for consultation for product development.

Innovation Initiative recipients must notify the Knowledge Institute of all knowledge products and communications activities related to the project. Recipients should appropriately acknowledge funding from the Knowledge Institute as a partner of the work. Additionally, recipients should include the Knowledge Institute logo or a statement of acknowledgement on all electronic and printed products, and all posters and presentations.

Innovation Initiative recipients will partner with the Knowledge Institute to share information about their projects in various ways. These may include:

- Participating in knowledge mobilization and communications efforts after the award term (developing a knowledge product to communicate about the project, promoting the project in social media).
- Co-developing and presenting information at learning events or through publications.
- Being available to discuss their project and lessons learned with provincial colleagues and partners.

Tips for submitting your online application

- **Getting started.** To access the questions that are included in the online application, see the Appendix. Write your responses to the open-ended questions in a Word document. When you are ready, you can copy your responses into the online application.

- **Writing concisely.** Take note of the recommended word limits for each section. When combined, all responses to the open-ended questions should be about 5 to 6 pages. Your proposal should be clear and concise so that reviewers can make informed decisions.

- **Creating an application.** To create an application, click the link marked "Apply."

- **Returning to an application.** You do not need to complete your application in one session. Be sure to click the "Save Application" button before you log off.

- **Filling in required information.** Required fields are marked with an asterisk. You will not be able to submit an application without completing all required items. If an item does not apply to your application and is not marked with an asterisk, you may leave it blank.

- **Submitting an application.** When you have completed and reviewed your application, click the "Submit application" button. Once an application is submitted, it may be viewed but not edited.

Email initiatives@cymha.ca for more information.

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Appendix: Application questions

The application form has four sections:

- General information
- Project description
- Budget sheet
- Commitment statement

The application deadline is 4:00 pm on November 15, 2024. Incomplete and/or late applications will not be reviewed.

General information

1. Project title:

2. Total amount of funds requested (maximum of $75,000): $

3. Please indicate if you are a lead agency or a core service provider agency.

   - Lead agency
   - Core service provider agency
   - Unsure

4. Name of organization:

5. Does your agency have responsibilities under the French Language Services Act?

   - Yes
   - No

6. What is the overall budget for your organization, including all funding sources?

   - Under $5 million
   - $5 million to $25 million
   - $25 million to $50 million
   - Over $50 million

7. Service area in which the agency operates:

8. Service area in which the proposed project will take place (if different from above):

Project description

The challenge/opportunity

The Knowledge Institute is offering Innovation Initiative grants to lead and core service providing agencies (and their partners) to implement and evaluate culturally responsive child and youth mental health and addictions programs in Ontario.

9. Please indicate which one of the following areas your project will address (Select one only):

   o Determining whether a specific evidence-based program should be adapted (i.e. looking at the conditions for adaptation using a data-driven approach/framework or a heuristic framework) and beginning to adapt an evidence-based program for a specific cultural group
   o Piloting a culturally adapted, evidence-based program
   o Scaling up an existing culturally adapted program
   o Evaluating a culturally adapted program
   o Other, please describe:

10. What is the challenge/opportunity you will address? What led you to initiate this project? How do you know this is a need? Do you have any data or feedback that can confirm this? Provide relevant background information including existing literature and local evidence. [Maximum 250 words]

The solution

11. What are you planning to do about it? What is the intervention that you plan to implement and test? What theoretical framework are you using to guide your plan to be culturally responsive? Please specify the intervention program and the specific cultural group you plan to work with and why. [Maximum 250 words]

12. Why do you think this will work? What outcomes do you expect to achieve? What are the key factors that will ensure your success in implementing a culturally responsive program? How will you address and mitigate potential barriers? Please draw on existing evidence to support your plan. [Maximum 250 words]

13. What is innovative about this initiative? How is your approach different, new and/or interesting? [Maximum 250 words]

The plan

14. Who will be involved in this project? How are staff, young people, family members or community partners involved? Identify key team members and partners for this work and provide a brief description of the role they will play in project governance, design, implementation and evaluation.

    ○ Name of partner:
    ○ Role:
    ○ Name of partner:
    ○ Role:
    ○ Name of partner:
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    ○ Role:
    ○ Name of partner:
    ○ Role:

15. Please outline your project workplan that includes key activities, deliverables, roles, and timelines for the following: [Maximum 500 words]

    ○ Engagement (youth, families, community partners)
    ○ Ethics approval (if research ethics board approval is not required, please describe reason)
    ○ Project design
    ○ Implementation
    ○ Evaluation

16. Please outline a preliminary evaluation plan outlining process or outcome evaluation questions, indicators, methods, tools, roles and timelines. [Maximum 250 words]

17. Please outline preliminary plans to mobilize knowledge gained and lessons learned through this project. See here for ideas for innovative knowledge mobilization processes and activities. [Maximum 150 words]

The next steps

18. Describe the potential you see for this initiative to have a broader impact on mental health and addictions services for racialized

children and young people in Ontario. [Maximum 150 words]

Budget sheet

- Personnel

- Backfill or salary costs for personnel (Personnel name, position title, full/part-time, full-time rate per annum and fringe benefits, projected budget costs).

- Consultants and other services

- Consultant services up to a maximum of 50% of the total budget. Please provide written letters of estimates.

- Other expenses

- Please specify (e.g. travel for service coordination, meetings, etc.). NB: computer hardware and equipment are ineligible expenses.

- Administration (Overhead costs)

- List specific items. Administration costs up to a maximum of 10% of the total budget.

- Knowledge mobilization activities
  - Up to $5000 maximum.

Total budget (Add lines A to E):

Commitment statement

By signing the following, we acknowledge the time commitment required to complete an Innovations Initiative project and for the project team members to participate in required events.

(Name, date and signature), Project lead

(Name, date and signature), Project team members (optional)