

# **ACCESS Open Minds:**

## Continuing and Growing a Network of Indigenous Youth Mental Health and Wellness Services

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### **ABOUT ACCESS OPEN MINDS**

ACCESS Open Minds is a pan-Canadian network of youth mental health and wellness services operating since 2014 to improve youth mental health services across Canada. The approach is revolutionizing services by making meaningful connections, spreading innovation, and generating evidence and data to fill critical gaps in what we know about how youth are doing, how their needs are being met, and identifying critical areas for improvement.

ACCESS Open Minds is big in scope, but local in impact. The network is made up of 16 service sites located across the country that provide high quality, easy and fast access to meaningful mental health support for youth and their families. The sites are incubators for innovation and, as a network, provide unparalleled learnings from across the country.

### **THE APPROACH: BUILDING WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES**

ACCESS Open Minds is a one-of-a-kind initiative that has co-created services with diverse First Nations and Inuit communities across the country. Each ACCESS Open Minds partnering community has spent the last seven years transforming their local youth mental health and wellness services through youth family and community engagement. They combine traditional healing and Indigenous identity-affirming practices and culturally-safe western approaches to meet local community needs and preferences.

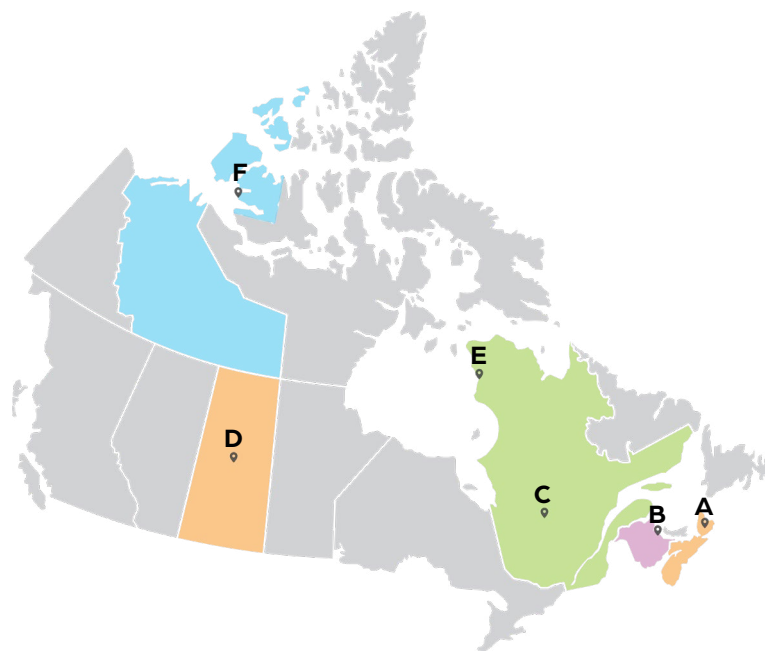
United as a network, ACCESS Open Minds sites helps spread innovations in real time by sharing approaches and solving problems collaboratively. There is no other network in the country providing the resources and space for Indigenous youth services to collaborate, scale, and spread this work.

The network is supported by an Indigenous Council with representation from Indigenous partnering communities, to advise and provide oversight on Indigenous engagement through ACCESS Open Minds. The council also independently identifies, pursues and supports new initiatives of interest to the ACCESS Open Minds Indigenous sites.



## THE IMPACT: IMPROVING LIVES ACROSS NATIONS

ACCESS Open Minds released [preliminary research data](#) highlighting the concrete impacts its innovative mental health care model has on youth and communities across the country. Six sites are Indigenous-led organizations and nine sites offer Indigenous interventions and programs, among other youth mental health services. The participating Indigenous sites include:



### Four First Nations communities

#### A) Eskasoni First Nation

Mi'kmaq community in Unama'ki (Cape Breton, Nova Scotia)

#### B) Elsipogtog First Nation

Mi'kmaq community in Sikniktuk (eastern New Brunswick)

#### C) The Cree Nation of Mistissini

Eeyou Istchee, the territory mostly covered by the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement

#### D) Sturgeon Lake First Nation

Nēhiyawēwin (Plains Cree) community in north central Saskatchewan and one of the Treaty 6 First Nations

### Two Inuit communities

#### E) Puvirnituk

Nunavik (northern Quebec)

#### F) Ulukhaktok

Inuvialuit Settlement Region of the Northwest Territories



One of the biggest game-changers of the ACCESS Open Minds network is its mechanism to partner with youth mental health services working in very diverse contexts and structures, including both Indigenous and non-Indigenous sites alike, and gather invaluable national data.



**Youth-friendly physical spaces**  
(Eskasoni First Nation  
ACCESS Youth Space)



**Culturally appropriate services and activities**  
(Launch of youth space in Ulukhaktok)

With support from the network, Indigenous communities lead and design holistic, strengths-based and culturally appropriate youth services that emphasize wellness and are tailored to individual community needs.

The network's unique, unified learning health system and data platform brought together researchers, services, youth, families, decision makers and Indigenous partners. This platform follows Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAPT<sup>TM</sup>) principles and perspectives outlined in the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans: Chapter 9 entitled Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada. Leveraging this co-conceived platform, participating Indigenous communities have built capacities to gather, learn from and share data-informed insights, and authored six scientific publications and numerous presentations.

**"At first I didn't know them that much. But slowly over time they started to feel like family. In my sense, family is people that you can trust when you go to when you have problems. That's what the youth centre means to me."**

– Youth at ACCESS Open Minds Sturgeon Lake



## KEY FINDINGS: INDIGENOUS SITES

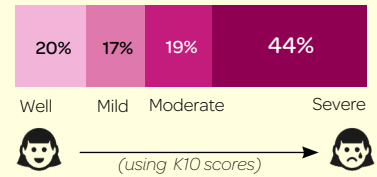


Almost **1,200** Indigenous youth sought help and/or were referred to an ACCESS Open Minds site from 2017-2020.



**72%** of youth say ACCESS Open Minds was their first point of contact to mental health services

### Psychological distress



**63%** of youth present moderate to severe psychological distress during their initial assessment

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for young people in Canada.

Rates of acute care hospitalizations for intentional self-harm are concerning high among First Nations, Inuit, and Metis youth.

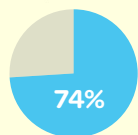
### Suicidal thoughts



Transforming the way mental health care is delivered means that more Indigenous youth get quicker access to quality care.

Across ACCESS Open Minds sites, there were statistically significant reductions in distress and severity of mental health problems, and improvements in mental health and school, work, and social functioning.

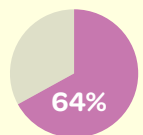
### Decrease in youth-reported distress



of young people who received services had less distress

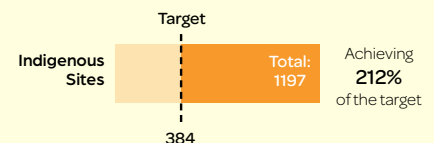
compared to the average youth at intake

### Increase in school, work and social functioning (Clinician-reported)



of young people who received services had higher functioning

The number of youth seeking help or being referred at ACCESS Open Minds Indigenous sites well surpassed the initial target.



**75%** of youth were offered an appointment within 3 days of contact



**93%** of youth received a service within 30 days



**97%** of Indigenous youth would recommend ACCESS Open Minds services to a friend.

## IMPACTS



Improved youth mental health and wellness services with measurable impacts



Scalable approach incorporating unique needs, resources, and cultures

## THE NEED

ACCESS Open Minds sites were funded through an initial federal (CIHR) and philanthropic investment that ended in March 2021. Ongoing sustainability funding is needed to continue ACCESS Open Minds services and help other communities benefit from this proven, community-involved approach.

Without additional funding, youth and families living in the ACCESS Open Minds partnering communities will no longer be able to access the high-quality and timely services established through the initial investment.

In addition, the return on investment for ACCESS Open Minds will also be limited. Infrastructure, relationships, and capacity to scale this proven approach into other communities will be lost.

## THE ADVOCACY

Championing the ACCESS Open Minds model would help build on the momentum we have created, to shift and improve the approach on how we provide youth mental health services in this country.

This would also help support a systems approach to care outlined in the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework and the Inuit-specific Mental Wellness framework.

You can support and advocate for:

- **Sustaining** the six Indigenous ACCESS Open Minds youth services
- **Scaling up** to other Indigenous communities
- **Strengthening** a national network

## THE OPPORTUNITIES

### **Wellness and mental health services**

Implementing ACCESS Open Minds principles across teams and the entire youth mental health continuum reduces wait times, enhances youth care through integrating current best-practices, and provides measurable impact and outcomes of services.

### **Unique Indigenous culture and healing programs**

More sites will be able to offer enhanced services to young people that are grounded in the culture of communities and build upon traditional healing and Indigenous identity-affirming practices. This is strengths-based and helps reduce the possibility of distress and harm.

### **Improved outcomes and satisfaction**

For young people seeking help from ACCESS Open Minds services, there were statistically significant reductions in distress and severity of mental health problems, and improvements in mental health and school, work, and social functioning.

### **Evidence, knowledge-sharing, and innovation**

A core value of ACCESS Open Minds is a shared, high-quality data system across diverse contexts. This data informs service design and improvement in real-time and helps communities learn and share stories of their experiences. Such ability to gather and use data is invaluable to transforming youth mental health services in Canada, especially for under-served and under-funded Indigenous communities.