



ACCESS OPEN MINDS
ESPRITS OUVERTS

Eskasoni First Nation, Nova Scotia

**Impact Report
2018**

ACCESS Open Minds Eskasoni First Nation

Transforming Youth Mental Health Care



Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research



Fondation
Graham Boeckh
Foundation

CANADIAN INNOVATION IN ACTION

ACCESS Open Minds is changing youth mental health care in Canada by transforming and improving services, generating new knowledge, and forging connections across the country.

This report highlights key site activities, clinical approaches, and success stories from the ACCESS Open Minds team in Eskasoni First Nation.



We do things outside the mainstream, and for a long time we weren't telling anyone what we were doing. But with ACCESS Open Minds, we have the confidence to share our processes and approaches.



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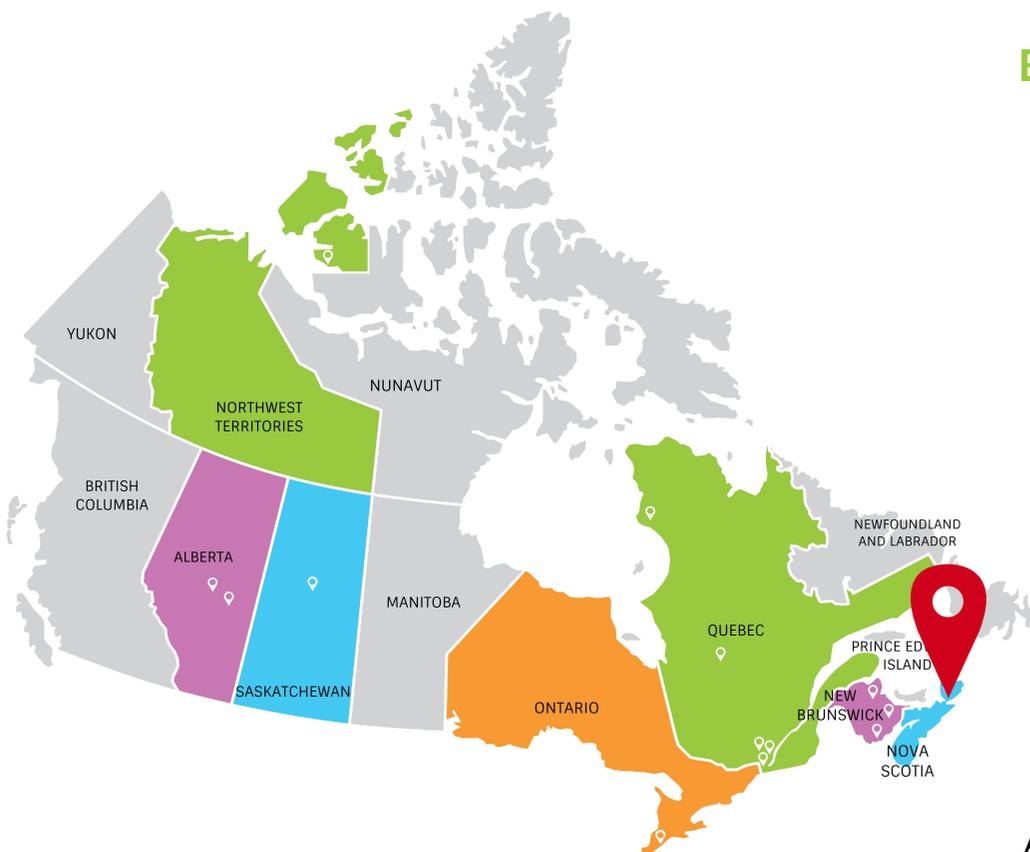
About ACCESS Open Minds

Initiated in 2015, ACCESS Open Minds (ACCESS OM) is a **pan-Canadian service transformation and research project**, jointly funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Graham Boeckh Foundation under CIHR's Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research.

The ACCESS OM network is made up of over 300 individuals including youth, family members and carers, service providers, researchers, and policymakers from across Canada, all working together to **transform youth mental health services**.

At the 14 ACCESS Open Minds service sites located across the country, youth and their families and carers are able to get **rapid and barrier-free access to mental health support** based on their own goals and needs, where and when they want it. By implementing a common research program and evaluation toolkit, all ACCESS Open Minds sites provide evidence-based care, and are generating **evidence** that will inform policy makers and ultimately improve mental health care across the country.

Where are we? 14 diverse sites across Canada...



Eskasoni First Nation, NS

Ulukhaktok, NT

Edmonton, AB

University of Alberta, AB

Sturgeon Lake First Nation, SK

Chatham-Kent, ON

Puvirnituk, QC

Cree Nation of Mistissini, QC

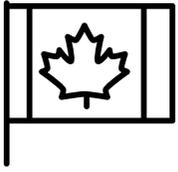
Dorval-Lachine-LaSalle, QC

Parc-Extension, QC

RIPAJ-Montréal, QC

Province of New Brunswick:
P.E.R SJ in Saint John, Péninsule
Acadienne, Elsipogtog First Nation

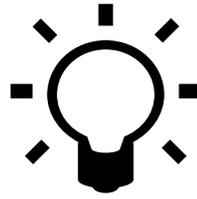
Project outcomes... we are:



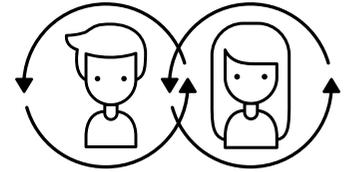
Creating a pan-Canadian network



Transforming services, making mental health care systems into *learning* health care systems



Generating new knowledge and evidence through research



Involving youth and families/carers

Core Values at ACCESS OM services

ACCESS OPEN MINDS
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CORE VALUES

SPOR
Putting Patients First

Fondation
Graham Boeckh
Foundation

- 1 PERSONAL GOALS:** Care is recovery-oriented and evidence-informed, with the aim of working towards personally meaningful goals for the youth.
- 2 WHOLE PERSON:** Recognition that a youth in distress is a “whole person,” not just their “disorder” or “symptoms”. Care focuses on all aspects of a young person’s well-being: psychological, physical, social, functional, spiritual/existential, etc.
- 3 STRENGTHS AND RESILIENCE:** Services are delivered from a philosophy of hope, resilience, empowerment and respect for personal agency. The approach draws from the young person’s own strengths, their network and community.
- 4 COMPASSION:** Services are delivered from a place of caring, empathy, transparency, respect and patience.
- 5 DIVERSITY:** Care values all expressions of diversity including gender, ethnicity, cultural and historical background, and personal preferences.
- 6 SHARED DECISION MAKING:** The young person is informed and shares decision making about their care. Service is in the language in which the young person can express themselves.
- 7 ACCESS:** Youth access services when and where they want.
- 8 FAMILIES AND CARERS:** The services value the involvement and contribution of families, carers and others who may be significantly engaged in the lives of a young person, recognizing their role in the recovery of young person.

Background and History

Eskasoni First Nation

The Mi'kmaq people of Eskasoni First Nation are familiar with the impacts of youth suicides. Following a suicide crisis in 2009, the community has worked to make sure that youth have a place to go when they're in need.

“We lost nine youth in a very short period, and a lot of people were hurting – it was a dark time,” says Arnold Sylliboy, a youth support worker from Eskasoni.

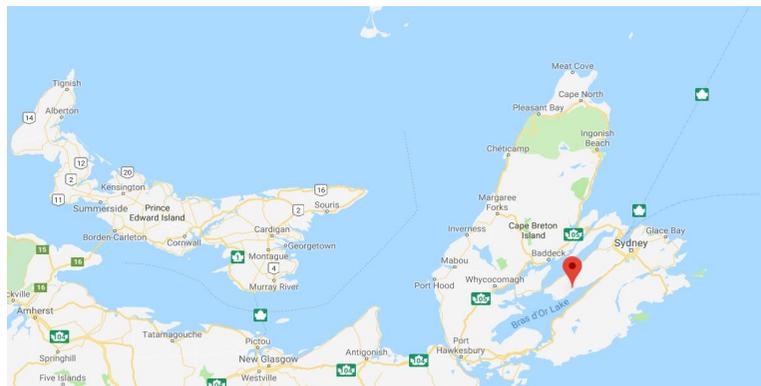
Since 2009, community mental health services have undergone a complete restructuring: through collaboration of health services in the community, four different services were brought under the common banner of Eskasoni Mental Health Services (EMHS). One of the first innovations was the creation of the region’s first 24-hour helpline, offering access to support in both Mi'kmaq and English, 24 hours a day, 7 days per week, 365 days a year.

In 2015, through a competitive grant process funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Graham Boeckh Foundation, Eskasoni First Nation was one of 14 sites that joined together to create the ACCESS Open Minds network, with the common purpose of improving youth mental health services across Canada by transforming and evaluating mental health services for youth aged 11-25.

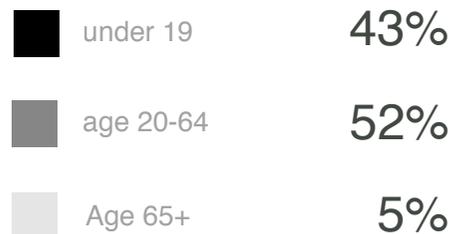
Through the ACCESS OM project, Eskasoni First Nation has been able to further enhance their local youth mental health programming. The site has become a national leader in the implementation and evaluation of effective youth mental health service delivery. Beyond providing support on an individual level, Eskasoni First Nation is helping to support the wellness of future generations, both in their community and as a model for communities across Canada.



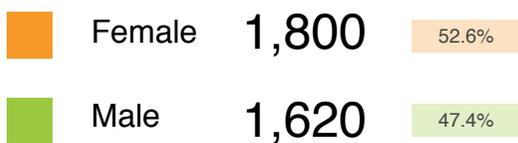
Location



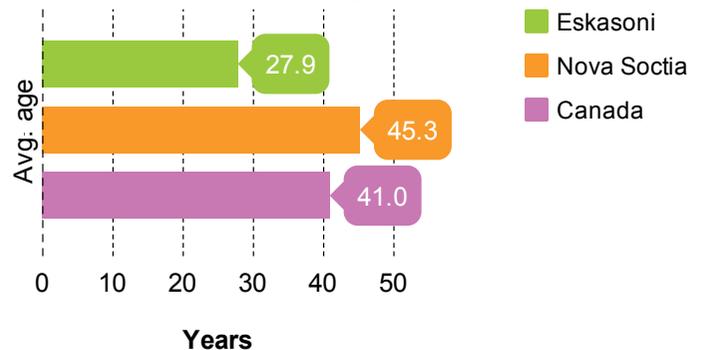
Age breakdown



Gender



Average age



Total population: **3,420**

The median age in Eskasoni First Nation (23.5 years) is 22 years younger than the provincial median of 45.5 years.

Project Timeline

Eskasoni First Nation

TRAM

- Transformational Research in Adolescent Mental Health (TRAM) grant competition is held
- Eskasoni First Nation participates in two strengthening workshops and submits joint application with the ACCESS (OM) Canada network

2014

2015

Getting started

- ACCESS OM is announced as the successful TRAM network
- Eskasoni First Nation participates in first ACCESS OM network meeting in Montréal, QC

2016

Boots on the ground

- Partnership Agreement signed between Eskasoni First Nation and ACCESS OM
- ACCESS OM staff hired: ACCESS OM Clinician-Psychologist and Research Assistant
- Renovations begin on ACCESS OM Youth Space
- Eskasoni Mental Health Services are the first team in the network to participate in ACCESS OM training
- Youth start receiving "ACCESS OM services" and data collection begins

2017

Doors open

- ACCESS OM Youth Space in Eskasoni First Nation opens its doors! Many activities are run out of the space, and youth mental health services are co-located at the new space
- ACCESS OM Eskasoni gives multiple presentations at the International Association for Youth Mental Health conference in Dublin, Ireland
- Site team hosts visitors from the northernmost ACCESS OM site, Ulukhaktok, NT, to share learnings from the transformation of youth mental health services in their community

2018

Growing momentum

- ACCESS OM Eskasoni First Nation continues to expand its programming and activities, while providing clinical services to youth in the community and supporting them in their mental wellness journeys
- The community's new health centre opens its doors down the road from the ACCESS OM Youth Space
- A Behaviour Interventionist/Family Support Worker and Youth Support Work join the Eskasoni team

2019

Next steps...

What's special about ACCESS Open Minds in Eskasoni?

Building a Strong Community

Programming is geared towards all youth in the community, and is informed and put on by youth themselves. All youth – including those who participate in ACCESS OM programming – are the future of the community, so hiring and training local youth to provide programming, as well as offering many different types of programs, are keys to building a strong community.

Youth Space

The ACCESS OM Youth Space in Eskasoni First Nation is a local hub for all sorts of activities, social enterprise and programming, including gamer nights, cooking classes, and music classes – as well as a central hub for youth mental health services available for anyone in need of support.



Clinical Approaches

The clinical approaches taken by the ACCESS Open Minds team in Eskasoni First Nation are community-focused in nature. Informed by Mi'kmaq teachings (e.g. Two-eyed Seeing) and honouring the integration of Indigenous healing practices and Western ways of providing help, the ACCESS OM team provides appropriate care to youth seeking help.

Building a strong community

Eskasoni First Nation

One of the ways that ACCESS OM Eskasoni is building greater capacity for youth mental health is by recruiting local community members, and creating a learning space for local youth. 24-year-old Bernadette Bernard, a Behavioural Interventionist with the ACCESS OM Eskasoni team, has been involved with her Eskasoni Mental Health Services or its programs for 22 years:

"I was a camper, junior counsellor, and on up. I've just seen over time how beneficial the services are at EMHS. Growing up, it was just normal to come get help from the clinicians. Now that I work here as a Family Support Worker/Behavioural Interventionist, I see how it's benefitted me, and I want to give back to the community. I do a bit of everything. I work with youth, the crisis line, and sometimes I'm a carpenter. There's no typical day!"

- Bernadette Bernard



ACCESS OM Eskasoni & Central Office Knowledge-Sharing and Training Session, August 2016

The ACCESS OM service framework is based on building capacity within the community to design and deliver services. By combining local training in both service provision and data collection, the ACCESS OM project has helped build on Eskasoni's strengths, all the while encouraging the growth of local staff, and youth, family and carers, and other community members.

Staff member growth and well-being is encouraged through the delivery of "Passion Programs," which are staff-initiated projects based on their own interests and passions. Passion Programs act as a means to build relationships between staff and youth, to identify mental health problems early on, and as a staff wellness initiative that simultaneously supports staff recruitment and retention.

In the case of the Catch and Relief fishing program, youth and staff go on fishing trips in and around Eskasoni First Nation. This activity normalizes help-seeking and receiving behaviours while providing youth with an opportunity to interact with staff in a non-clinical environment. For staff, it is a fun and engaging way to take their job outside. An added benefit of these types of hands-on activities is that they help to destigmatize the topic of mental health, and they act as long-term investments in local capacity building for staff and youth alike.



Winter Catch and Relief Program

ACCESS Youth Space

Eskasoni First Nation

Through the ACCESS OM project, Eskasoni First Nation opened a much-needed and long-anticipated new youth centre. With an initial investment of \$50,000 in funding from ACCESS OM and over \$35,000 in local fundraising, the ACCESS OM Youth Space in Eskasoni has given the community's youth their very own building, designed by and built with youth.

The space is fully staffed by workers who are trained in mental health, but the services and activities offered there cover so much more: from game nights to social enterprise (by operating a community café and catering service), the ACCESS OM Youth Space has become a vital part of the community. In small and rural towns, a major challenge for youth can be having somewhere to go, something to do. For youth in Eskasoni, the Youth Space has been a game-changer; it's a place to connect, to get engaged in the community, and to learn some new skills along the way.

Activities that take place through the ACCESS Youth Space include:

Mental health services on-site:
Psychologist, Counselling, Family Support, Peer Support
Cyber café
Gaming and movie nights
Library
Archery
Cooking programs
Sweat lodge
Guitar, piano, and other music lessons
...and so much more!

Staffing

- **Youth Peer Support Workers (4 full-time & 8 part-time):** trained in Mental Health First Aid for First Nations, and Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST), these youth workers plan, organize and facilitate activities at the ACCESS Youth Space. Youth Peer Support Workers are an essential component of the "Net" in our community-based Fish Net Model of Mental Health service delivery. The youth worker program provides community youth with a diversity of activities to join, but also offers an opportunity, for older emerging adults, to have meaningful and informative entry-level job training without having to leave the community.
- **Psychologist (ACCESS OM Clinician, 1 full-time):** provides youth in need with clinical mental health intake assessments, and follow-up support and counselling as needed.
- **Research and Intake Assistant (1 full-time):** works closely with the ACCESS OM Clinician to support youth seeking support, and to collect data with youth who consent to participate in the evaluation aspect of the ACCESS OM project. Their main office is at the ACCESS OM Youth Space, however the RA is also mobile and spends a few days a week at the local school.
- **Social Workers (2 full-time):** youth support workers/mental health clinicians, providing intake, triage, and counselling support to the ACCESS OM clinical team.
- **Family Behaviour Interventionist (1 full-time):** supports youth and their families in need.

The staff who work out of the ACCESS Youth Space are part of, and work closely with, the Eskasoni Mental Health Services team.



Clinical Approaches

Eskasoni First Nation

Two-Eyed Seeing

It has been a struggle and a challenge for Indigenous youth encountering mainstream Canadian health care services. At times, this medical model can feel completely separate from traditional approaches to wellness. To address this disconnect, the ACCESS OM Eskasoni team applies a “Two-eyed Seeing” approach, created by honoured Mi’kmaq Elders Albert and Murdena Marshall. This approach is based on the idea that one can learn to take the perspective from one eye, the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and from the other eye, the strengths of Western (or mainstream) ways of knowing, and to use both of these perspectives when delivering care and services. Daphne Hutt-MacLeod, the site lead of the ACCESS OM Eskasoni team, and Director of Eskasoni Mental Health Services, explains: “It’s a blending of Indigenous and Western ways of providing help and healing to people. We work with Western workers and traditional practitioners as partners to provide the best possible care to clients who walk in the door.”



“Culture, language, family, and self-esteem are important. We’ve always known this, but now we hear it straight from the youth,” says Hutt-MacLeod. She says this is why it’s important that “everything is integrated. It’s like making a cake; all the ingredients to making the perfect cake are coming together.” The integration of the ACCESS OM framework into existing community services is a core value of the project.



The Summer Culture Camp is one of several examples of the Two-eyed Seeing approach to mental wellness and service delivery at ACCESS OM Eskasoni. Young mental health clients are provided with the opportunity to attend the summer culture camp to participate in cultural teachings, learn outdoor skills, immerse themselves in their cultural identity, form friendships and relationships, and discuss their mental wellness. It is hoped that the bonds and friendships created in these summer camps will serve as a lasting support network for youth.

The ACCESS Youth Space acts as the community's one-stop hub for a host of programs and services, but it's not enough to build the space and expect youth to just show up; the ACCESS OM Eskasoni team is constantly out and about in the community. Through their Fish Net Model, they are continuously engaging the community through hosting and participating in many events. Arnold Sylliboy describes the Fish Net Model:

"Our mental health workers are out providing sports, recreation, cultural, and traditional activities. So they're out in the community doing non-traditional clinical mental health services, so that people in the community see them and interact with them freely. We try to reduce the stigma associated with being involved with a mental health worker. The net is our workers, and when people need our help, they scoop them up and bring them into the office and have them referred, with their permission."

Eskasoni First Nation's Fish Net Model of Care



Just some of the ways we reach out to the community...

- Addiction services
- AfterSchool Gym Program
- Behaviour Intervention & Family Support
- Craft nights
- Culture Camp
- Drum making
- Eskasoni Powwow
- Eskasoni Schools Services
- Expressive arts therapy
- Family & Carers Council
- Fish & Relief
- Gamer nights
- Healthy Youth Relationship Training
- Mental Health First Aid for First Nations (MHFAFN)
- Mi'kmaq Summer Games
- Mi'kmaq Youth Hockey
- National Aboriginal Day
- No Stigma Needle Exchange Program
- Parenting programs
- Storytelling
- Sweetgrass picking
- Traditional gardening
- Trauma-Informed Yoga
- Youth Council

On the pier (left side):

- Psychiatrist
- Physician
- Psychologist
- Social worker
- Para-professional
- Lived experience Peer supporter

On the canoe (bottom):

- Adult Mental Health Team
- Youth Mental Health Team
- Crisis and Referral Centre
- Case Management
- Tui'kn Case Residential School Survivor Team

Next Steps

Eskasoni First Nation

Changing the status quo

ACCESS OM Clinician, Dr. Heather Rudderham, explains how different it is to work with the ACCESS OM team in Eskasoni:

“I came from a more medical mental health approach, and since I’ve been in Eskasoni, the emphasis has been to get out of the office and be a real person. I was reticent at first, but I got more referrals from a Halloween dance than I ever got by sitting in my office!”

The team in Eskasoni believes that not all therapy needs to happen in a clinical setting; help can be offered even in the absence of a large team of costly professional clinicians. Since uniting services, Eskasoni Mental Health Services has been able to provide services much faster than provincial services.



Data collection is ongoing

Data collection is scheduled to wrap up in September 2020, and the project results will be published in 2021. ACCESS OM Eskasoni has made the decision to continue using the protocols, assessments, and data collection techniques beyond the 2020 sunset of ACCESS OM. The information gleaned has been far too valuable in guiding and informing our service delivery model.

What is still needed?

Funding



Consistent long-term funding for clinical and evaluation staff is needed. Currently, the site is funded through multiple funding streams on short-term contracts.

Specific ask: long-term (10-year) funding for clinical positions and reserach/evaluation staff

Donations



Donations — such as furniture, musical instruments, equipment to build a greenhouse — are needed to keep the ACCESS Youth Space going.

Specific ask: Funding for expansion of the Cyber café kitchen facility

Transportation

Transportation is a major challenge in Eskasoni. The site team is currently fundraising to purchase a community van to be operated by youth as a social enterprise, and to facilitate transportation in and around the large geographical area that is Eskasoni First Nation.

Specific ask: a van/bus to allow youth and community members to access services on-reserve and in Sydney. Services will be provided on a cost-recovery basis.





CONCLUSION

Eskasoni First Nation is a close-knit community that is deeply invested in the way they address the mental health needs of their youth. The ACCESS Open Minds Eskasoni team is an example not just for other Indigenous communities, but for all communities across Canada. Creative and community-based approaches, as well as unified local services, are beginning to have a tremendous impact on the way that mental health care is able to be provided quickly, appropriately, and in a youth-centred fashion. These changes are good for Eskasoni First Nation and for all Canadian youth. The lessons learned in Eskasoni contribute to the pan-Canadian ACCESS OM research and evaluation project, and are helping to build a robust framework for any context across Canada.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

<https://www.accessopenminds.ca>

<https://www.eskasonimentalhealth.org>



@ACCESS_OM_Esk



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