

# Transforming Youth Mental Health in Edmonton

Summary of 'Transforming  
youth mental health services in  
a large urban centre: ACCESS  
Open Minds Edmonton' in  
the ACCESS Open Minds Early  
Intervention in Psychiatry  
Supplement



# ACCESS OM Objectives



Early Identification



Rapid Access



Appropriate Care



Continuous Care



Youth and Family Engagement

## Introduction

ACCESS Open Minds is a national evaluation project transforming youth mental health services across the country. The project was initiated through Strategy of Patient-Oriented Research (SPOR) and is funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Graham Boeckh Foundation.

The ACCESS Open Minds network is made up of 14 communities located in 6 provinces and 1 territory. The service transformation framework consists of 5 objectives: early intervention, rapid access, appropriate care, continuity of care, and youth and family engagement. Due to the diversity of geographic, political and cultural realities at each of the 14 sites, the transformation framework and objectives were designed to be adapted to each site in order to meet the specific needs of local youth in those communities.

The supplement describes how service transformation was achieved in seven of the ACCESS Open Minds sites. This document summarizes the article describing the service transformation which took place in the ACCESS Open Minds Edmonton site.



SPOR network funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and the Graham Boeckh Foundation.





# Context

Edmonton has a population of 1.32 million, 31% of which are 25 or under. They have the second largest urban Indigenous population as well as a large homeless population (estimated at 1,700) which is made up of mostly young adults. Edmonton also has a high level of unemployment, with one-third of individuals living without an income. ACCESS OM Edmonton is located in the city center where the population of youth aged 10-24 is about 17,000.

Edmonton





# Background



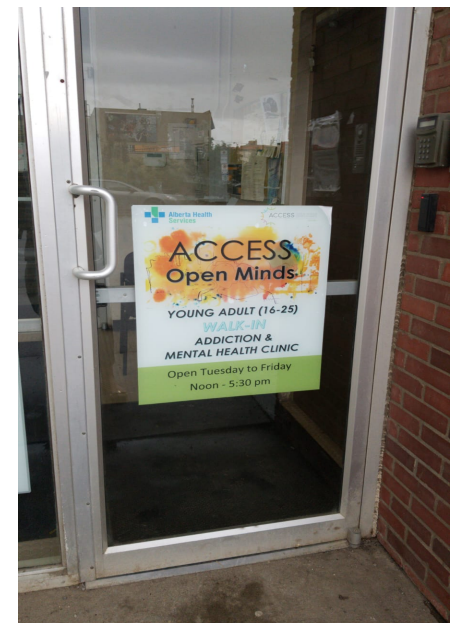
## Previous services

Mental health services in Alberta are primarily provided by Alberta Health Services and organized based on geographic zones. Before the ACCESS OM project, Edmonton Zone Addiction and Mental Health program had provided health care to youth experiencing addiction or mental health challenges. Youth aged 16-25 were however still at risk for poor outcomes due to the system's age-based service delivery model, a lack of engagement in appropriate care options, and a disorganized transition process. Only youth experiencing psychosis were likely to receive rapid access to services, and when they did, these services were often fragmented with little continuity across teams. This meant that many youth needing services fell through the cracks. For example, 80% of youth aged 16-25 discontinued services after 3 visits without a planned discharge. Youth least likely to engage in appropriate care were those close to aging out of the traditional youth healthcare model or those without adequate supports in navigating the access point. There was a need for adequate continuity of care of patients transitioning to general adult psychiatry.



## ACCESS Open Minds

In 2017 the ACCESS OM Edmonton site opened in order to meet the needs of youth aged 11-25, and focused on engaging underserved and marginalized youth. This led to the aligning of services from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and general adult psychiatry. Edmonton Zone Addiction and Mental Health services organized a multidisciplinary steering committee to determine what the ACCESS OM Edmonton project should focus on. Community mapping was done in order to determine services and resources available in the context of socioeconomic demographic and population density needs. This led to the mapping of services located along public transit routes within Edmonton.





# The Mobile ACCESS OM Clinician

ACCESS OM clinicians meet youth and family where they are at!



## Early Identification



As part of the ACCESS OM Edmonton transformation, three ACCESS OM Clinician roles were created. The ACCESS OM Edmonton team also relies on public awareness campaigns for visibility. They work to build relationships with other community organizations, community networks, and are regular attendees in areas known to be youth drop in spaces. The newfound relationship with the ACCESS OM Clinicians provides agencies with a clear pathway to accessing services without needing to wait until a threshold for emergency or urgent care is met.

The ACCESS OM clinicians provide consistent and non-judgemental connections to the system for young people and their families. A significant investment was made in developing the skills of the ACCESS OM clinicians in motivational interviewing, harm reduction approaches and strengths-based models. These clinicians are also mobile and will meet with youth and their families in their homes, schools, community agencies, coffee shops and work spaces. This helps meet the goal of early identification because these clinicians can reach more youth who may not have accessed the site.

# Rapid Access



While the mobile ACCESS OM Edmonton Clinicians facilitated rapid access, the development of a physical ACCESS Open Minds site helped tremendously. A youth advisory group helped select a location and the new ACCESS OM Edmonton site was established within a local YMCA building. This new space allows for quick, accessible care from a team of multidisciplinary professionals. Additionally, most of the staff has been reoriented from clinic-based appointments to mobile availability in youth friendly spaces. Hours of the site have also been extended into the early evening to accommodate youth schedules. Youth can access a walk-in appointment within less than 30 minutes with a counsellor or peer-support worker. This initial visit then opens up opportunities for further solution-focused counselling sessions and/or an initial intake conversation or more informal or social visit.

# Appropriate Care



Within 6 months of the clinic opening young people reported a goal related to mental health 55% of the time (such as “feeling better” or “coping with my anxiety”). The site adapted to this demand by providing single session counselling, developing drop-in programming (employment support, addictions counselling, mindfulness, group interventions), increasing their clinic hours, and allocating additional staff, including health professionals from the inpatient unit who began to work one day per week at the ACCESS OM site. This also helped facilitate seamless transitions for youth experiencing an inpatient acute care stay.





# Youth and Family Engagement



Youth and family advisors have been part of the steering committee, have been engaged in strategic planning, and the development of awareness tools such as video and promotional materials. As part of the ACCESS OM project, staff have also developed and implemented an inclusive care guideline to formally address working with families and friends of young people. A major transformer of family engagement was the creation of a Family Peer Support Worker position that was created to assist with system navigation and to advocate for the family by prioritizing the viewpoint of the lived-experience of a parent/carer. Family oriented groups have covered topics such as education about symptom monitoring, side effects of medication, coping strategies and improving communication.



# Continuity of Care



Before the ACCESS OM project, youth in Edmonton could have a stable transition from young adult programs to adult services thanks to a shared vision between two programs for youth under 18 and youth over 18, however, youth seeking services outside of the young adult program would have to be referred after "aging out". With ACCESS OM youth aged 16-18 receive continuous care from the same young adult team for as long as necessary until the age of 25. In the rare event that a youth under the age of 14 seeks services, clear pathways to developed child and adolescent services are in place for after an initial assessment is conducted.



# Uniqueness of ACCESS OM Edmonton

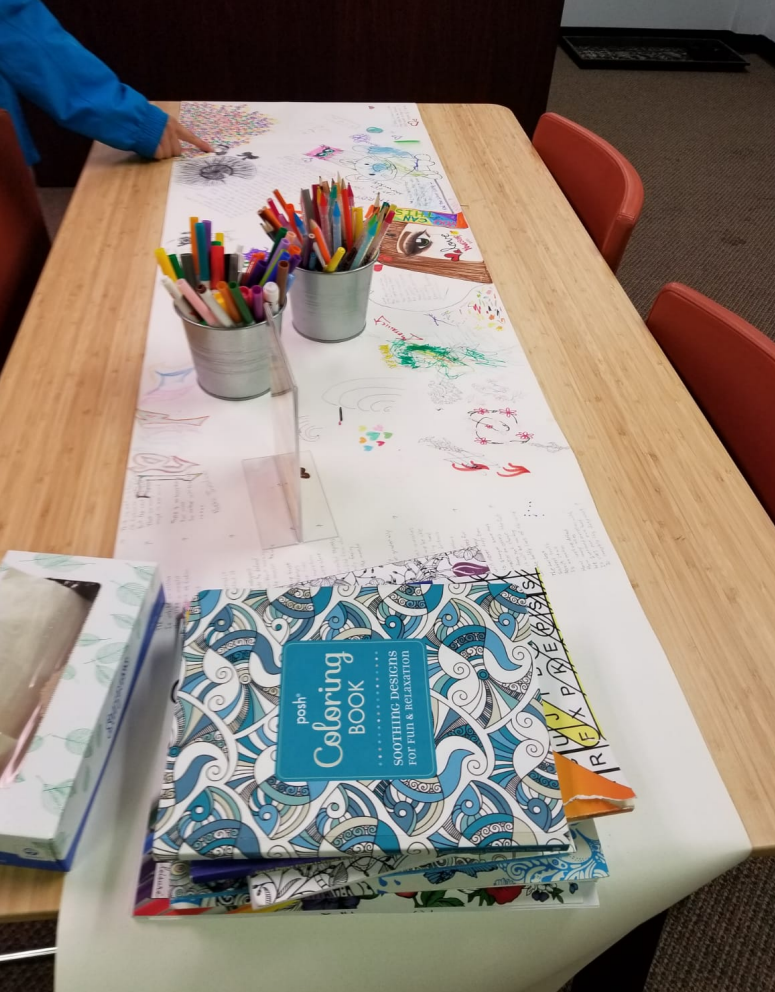
There was a need to create operational flexibility in order to ensure that objectives of the project could be achieved. For example, job descriptions were rewritten to ensure clarity about the expectations of working with youth. New postings were also developed in order to attract the appropriate type of applicants. Documentation templates were created in order to standardize data collection and inform service development. As a result, this service has been required to continuously evolve in order to manage the expectations of family and youth. The connections between inpatient and community programs to ACCESS OM have also been a unique aspect of the project's implementation in Edmonton.





# Research and Evaluation

ACCESS OM Edmonton is involved in data collection as part of the larger ACCESS OM research protocol. The data collected will be helpful in determining if the model of care is in fact achieving its goals. At the Edmonton site, a research evaluator is increasingly being integrated into ACCESS OM clinical process and meets with youth after their clinical visit. Peer advisors have worked with evaluators to modify consent forms and ensure that these forms are as youth friendly as possible. One full-time and two part-time evaluators meet young people and families in locations of their choice across the city to reinforce the value of continued participation.







# Community Impact and Sustainability

Given the Edmonton Zone team's focus on youth with complex needs, ACCESS OM has facilitated transition of care to the ACCESS OM clinic after an acute episode of illness or entry into services via urgent access points like emergency rooms. The Youth Diversion program is now also embedded within the young adult program allowing a connection to be made between youth identified in the criminal justice system that would benefit from treatment with addiction and mental health systems. ACCESS OM has also forged stronger connections between inpatient and community programs that have led to more seamless discharges for youth requiring inpatient stays.

ACCESS OM Edmonton plans to collaborate with the Edmonton Zone to plan additional outreach activities as their mandate is already to provide public and student education as well as prevention and promotion in the community. A dedicated child and adolescent psychiatrist will be located on site at the ACCESS OM clinic beginning in early 2019 for youth under 14 who seek service. The service's sustainability is well supported by Alberta Health Services Edmonton Zone which has allocated operational funds of approximately \$1 million per year to increase the capacity of ACCESS OM Edmonton. This will facilitate the scaling-up the ACCESS OM Edmonton clinic to a network of integrated youth hubs in the Edmonton Zone.





# Challenges

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## Outreach in such a large city

Promoting a single clinic in a large city with limited resources has been a challenge. The Edmonton team have worked on outreach and plan on collaborating with the the Edmonton Zone addiction and mental health prevention and promotion team to continue outreach, however with greater outreach, more youth in need of care may try to access the clinic which is already outgrowing its space.

## Securing non-traditional clinic space

Securing clinic space through a lease and partnership with the YMCA was more difficult than securing a more traditional AHS clinic space.

## Meeting target timeline

It is hard to meet the target timeline with more intensive care options due to limited resources, lack of appropriate care options, and gaps in service.

## Data collection

There have also been challenges with regards to meeting the required targets for both recruitment and data collection. This was because of the initial lack of staff and proper alignment between the data collection and clinical teams.

## Change in a bureaucratic organization

Finally, managing change of services of such a significant magnitude within AHS, a large bureaucratic organization has demonstrated some unique challenges that the ACCESS OM team must navigate. Moving forward an ongoing challenge will be the integration of services from a number of sectors in order to continue to meet the needs of youth and their families/carers.

