

Walking wisely towards an Indigenous Integrated Youth Services Network

Coming together of Indigenous partners across the country to connect and build on shared knowledge and experiences to lay the foundation for an Indigenous Integrated Youth Services Network



On April 24-25, 2023, one hundred diverse stakeholders from nine provinces and one territory gathered in Montreal as part of the first steps towards building an Indigenous Integrated Youth Services (IYS) Network, funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). This Indigenous network builds on the work of the ACCESS Open Minds Indigenous Council, which is part of the larger pan-Canadian ACCESS Open Minds youth mental health initiative (funded by CIHR's Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research and the Graham Boeckh Foundation), that supported the organization of the Montreal gathering.

Led by Christopher Mushquash (Psychologist, Professor and Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Mental Health and Addiction at Lakehead University) and Srividya Iyer (Psychologist and Professor at McGill University and the Douglas Research Centre), this event aimed to connect existing partners, while also providing the grounds for new partnerships to blossom.



In attendance were diverse groups such as members from the Indigenous Council at ACCESS Open Minds; Indigenous organizations (including the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation and the First Peoples Wellness Circle); Indigenous community leaders and service providers; provincial IYS; federal agencies (Health Canada, CIHR, Indigenous Services Canada); philanthropic foundations; researchers; students; and service providers.

The gathering opened and closed with blessings from Elders Amelia Tekwatonti McGregor, Ed Connors and Georgina Doucette, who shared their wisdom and experiences throughout the sessions. Twenty-one Indigenous youths from across the country participated in youth sharing circles and larger group discussions on topics from service provision to Indigenous youth and community engagement and funding. The event saw participants sharing their stories, successes and challenges.

Along with the learnings from the Indigenous communities in the ACCESS Open Minds Network, the knowledge shared and the connections made at this gathering will help:

- 1) Develop wise practices and recommendations to implement context-specific and culturally relevant youth mental health systems change in Indigenous contexts
- 2) Build and foster a strong network of Indigenous young people, leaders, organizations, service providers and researchers