



National Pre-Service Teacher Education Mental Health Literacy Curriculum

PROBLEM: Although 70% of mental illnesses start before age 25 and 1 in 5 youth will experience a mental illness in his or her lifetime, understanding and knowledge of mental health is still problematic. Even those who interact with youth on a daily basis often lack the basic knowledge and skills to recognize and understand mental illness. Educators have repeatedly raised the concern that existing teacher-education programs do not adequately provide educational foundations in mental health literacy (MHL). As a result, teachers enter the workforce with insufficient capacity to be able to understand student's mental health challenges, which they face in their everyday work.

SOLUTION: To address this need, we have brought together four partner institutions (TeenMentalHealth.org; University of British Columbia; University of Western Ontario; and St. Francis Xavier University) that specialize in pre-service teacher education and mental health literacy to create a comprehensive pre-service teacher-education curriculum resource to enhance the MHL of teacher candidates and thus, better prepare them for their teaching careers.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT: In 2014, we completed a *national scoping exercise* to determine how faculties of education in Canada are addressing (or not addressing) MHL at present. We also conducted a *needs assessment* with more than 30 educational institutions and organizations from across the country to ensure that our curriculum resource will provide the most value to those who intend to use it. Those institutions and organizations are part of our Participant Observer network and have also been invited to provide feedback on the curriculum once it is developed. Thus far, we have had an overwhelmingly positive response to this project from everyone with whom we have spoken, with one Dean of Education noting that this curriculum resource would be "a timely and critical piece in teacher preparation."

The information garnered from the needs assessment and national scoping exercise, along with current literature on school mental health, expertise from mental health experts and educators, and involvement of the four partner organizations were used to develop a *framework* for the MHL curriculum resource. Currently, we are building upon this framework to develop a modular MHL resource, which will then be reviewed by our Participant Observer network and field-tested with teacher candidates at each of our partner institutions (UBC, UWO, and St. FX), prior to its final incarnation as an *interactive online open-source curriculum resource* for pre-service teachers. This work is partially funded by a private family foundation.

FINAL NOTE: This project will help develop, foster and enhance MHL in pre-service teachers. It will enable these future teachers to understand and address mental health problems/disorders in their students, to decrease stigma around mental health in both teachers and students, to better understand the best practices for support and treatment of students with mental health problems and mental disorders, and to develop their own positive mental health strategies. It will also form a basis for these teachers to foster positive mental health initiatives in schools, whether those include safe and supportive environments, mental health promotion and prevention, or the use of the school setting as part of a comprehensive pathway to mental health care access and support for young people.