

Mental Health and BIPOC Students

OCDSB Trustee Meeting:

Good evening , Board of Trustees, Director of Education and other members of the Committee of the Whole.

I come to you as the Executive Director of the National Collaboration for Youth Mental Health NCYMH. NCYMH is a Canadian Registered Charity founded in 2002. We are a group of dedicated educators, youth, university students and humanitarians from across Canada who decided that our responsibility to children, youth and university students involves caring about their emotional and psychological, mental health, as well as their physical wellbeing so that learning could be achieved and students could reach their full potential.

With support from our various sponsors, NCYMH has developed programs that promote mental health of youth in Canada and support the resilience and recovery of youth experiencing mental illness. NCYMH accomplishes this mission through advocacy, education, research and service. Our tools include research and information services, training workshops, advocacy meetings, youth peer mental health clubs, and promotional materials such as fliers. One program, Systemic Discrimination Curriculum Workshops, acts as a social advocate to encourage public action and commitment to strengthening school and community mental health services. This program is based on the principles of empowerment, peer support, community support, and youth participation and involvement.

Keeping in line with the Ottawa Carleton District School Board's Mental Health Strategy and commitment to "Identity Based Data Collection" , we at NCYMH believe having access to reliable information on positive mental health and mental illness is crucial for students and needs to be addressed.

Even if students have not experienced mental illness, it is very likely that they know someone who has. Consider the following statistics to get an idea of just how widespread the effects of mental illness are in society, among young people in particular.

Globally, statistical Facts from the United Nations, World Health Organization (September 28, 2020) on Adolescent Mental Health states

- **One in six people are aged 10-19 years.**
- **Mental health conditions account for 16% of the global burden of disease and injury in people aged 10-19 years.**
- **Half of all mental health conditions start by 14 years of age but most cases are undetected and untreated(1).**
- **Globally, depression is one of the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents.**
- **Suicide is the third leading cause of death in 15-19-year-olds.**
- **The consequences of not addressing adolescent mental health conditions extend to adulthood, impairing both physical and mental health and limiting opportunities to lead fulfilling lives as adults.**

From a Canadian perspective, according to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, in any given year, 1 in 5 Canadians experiences a mental illness or addiction problem. By the time Canadians reach 40 years of age, 1 in 2 have—or have had—a mental illness.

Who is affected? According to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health:

- 70% of mental health problems have their onset during childhood or adolescence.
- Young people aged 15 to 24 are more likely to experience mental illness and/or substance use disorders than any other age group.
- 34% of Ontario high-school students indicate a moderate-to-serious level of psychological distress (symptoms of anxiety and depression). 14% indicate a serious level of psychological distress.

From an Equity Lens, a report titled A STATISTICAL REPORT ON THE STATE OF INDIGENOUS MENTAL HEALTH IN CANADA states, in Indigenous communities, suicide is the leading cause of death for young people aged 10-29. The report cites Statistics Canada which states that suicide rates among First Nations youth are five to seven times that of non-indigenous youth, depending on their location and affiliation, with some of the worst suicide rates in Canada being amongst Inuit youth who are eleven times more likely to commit suicide than the national average.

A recent Statistic Canada report released June 23, 2020 titled “Indigenous people and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic” states Six in ten Indigenous participants report that their mental health has worsened since the onset of physical distancing. Among Indigenous crowdsourced participants, 38% reported fair or poor mental health, 32% reported good mental health, and 31% reported excellent or very good mental health. When asked how their mental health has changed since physical distancing began, 60% of Indigenous participants indicated that their mental health has become “somewhat worse” or “much worse”

Again from an Equity Lens, Black Mental Health Canada Incorporated, an organization whose vision is to bring awareness that Mental Health issues are a real and significant problem within the black community states the current issues are

1. Black individuals are more likely to qualify as low-income, experience unemployment and be uninsured.
2. Negative attitudes towards the health care system reduces black individuals’ willingness to seek and receive care.
3. Mental health issues are not openly discussed in the black community and thus individuals struggle silently.
4. Treatment providers are less likely to be black and many are not educated on black culture and black struggles.

Their proposed solution

1. A network of culturally responsive care providers.
2. Affordable and accessible mental health services.
3. To increase awareness & education of mental health issues and create space for open dialogue .
4. To collaborate with community agencies and partners to address mental health issues that impact recidivism.
5. To offer diagnosis & assessments at early onset for black children at risk of ADHD, ODD & other cognitive deficits.

That being said, the National Collaboration for Youth Mental Health understands schools provide an ideal environment and natural opportunities to address issues of mental health and illness. Schools are well positioned to be at the vanguard of public health strategies designed to prevent and detect mental health disorders among young people. Educators can play an important role by delivering accurate, comprehensive information and by challenging the stereotypes about mental illness held by the general community. Mental health and illness are issues that are urgent and needs to be addressed immediately. We also believe the OCDSB cannot address this alone. In the spirit of Reconciliation and the OCDSB commitment to The International Decade for People of African Descent proclaimed by the United Nations, the National Collaboration for Youth Mental Health is looking forward to working closely with the OCDSB to further collaborate on an action plan that will assist the OCDSB in reaching its goal of student success and well being for all.