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New Report Released on Improving Health Care for Aboriginal Youth

Mental health and addictions services in the Champlain region examined

OTTAWA - Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health today released the report, “My Life, My Well-Being,” which explores the life circumstances of Aboriginal youth with mental-health conditions and substance use issues. The report was commissioned by the Champlain Aboriginal Health Circle Forum, representing First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities throughout the Champlain region.

The research project, funded by the Champlain Local Health Integration Network (LHIN), was undertaken to better understand why many Aboriginal youth are facing significant challenges, and how the health system can better respond to their needs. Youth, parents and service providers took part. The intergenerational legacy of Canada’s Indian Residential Schools was noted as an important factor.

“My Life, My Wellbeing” includes survey results from more than 300 Aboriginal youth. As well, focus groups were held with youth and parents, and service providers were also interviewed.

Key findings of the report included:

- 48 per cent of survey respondents had a high probability of a diagnosis for depression, suicidal ideation, anxiety or other related disorders.
- 40 per cent had a high probability of a diagnosis for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), disruptive behaviours or other related disorders.
- 29 per cent showed symptoms of problematic substance use.
- 29 per cent reported having been mentally/emotionally abused in the last year.
- 17 per cent reported being a victim of bullying.

The youth explained that racism, disrespect and the stigma associated with mental-health conditions were the main barriers preventing them from accessing mental-health services. They expressed a desire to work with providers who understand their culture and who can incorporate Aboriginal teachings and practices into their services.

In addition, health providers indicated that culturally-appropriate services are lacking for Aboriginal youth with mental-health conditions and addictions, and that the system is burdened with long wait lists.

The report made five recommendations. They include developing a comprehensive plan, emphasizing prevention, closing service gaps, including culture in services, and promoting system-wide collaboration.

The Champlain LHIN has begun to respond to the needs outlined in the report. For example, the LHIN recently funded a youth mental-health system navigator at Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health. The new role provides culturally based services and helps eliminate barriers in accessing care through enhanced coordination of services. In addition, the LHIN has expanded walk-in counseling services to serve Aboriginal youth.

Quotes

“It is often difficult to get representation of the voice of Aboriginal youth. A youth’s active presence within this study creates a starting point in which to understand their needs. It is evident in this study that their voices so clearly project an urgency for the provision of culturally appropriate supports, belonging to community , freedom from racism and accessibility to care.”

Allison Fisher, Executive Director, Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health

“This project involved direct engagement with Aboriginal youth to better understand their challenges and needs. The Champlain LHIN has carefully reviewed the recommendations, and will be working with the Champlain Aboriginal Health Circle Forum to ensure better access to more culturally based care.”

Chantale LeClerc, Champlain LHIN CEO

"As a society, we must be willing and able to pay particular attention to the challenges facing Aboriginal youth. Our entire community benefits from providing culturally-sensitive supports, and access to first-hand accounts will enable us to better determine a path forward."

Madeleine Meilleur, MPP (Ottawa-Vanier)