

National Family and Prevention Summit: Meeting Summary Report

Overview

- Families play an integral role in substance use health and prevention but are often left out of discussions or are not adequately supported to play a role in healthcare and social service systems.
- The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) partnered with the (Prince Edward Island) PEI Alliance for Mental Well-Being to host a national summit on the role of family in the prevention of harms associated with substance use.
- The summit brought together 30 participants from various sectors, including federal and provincial governments, researchers in the field, public health agencies and officials, community-based organizations, representatives from First Nations, Métis and Inuit groups, family advocates, and people with lived and living experience.
- Summit panellists presented research evidence that involving family can prevent substance use-related harms. Many family-focused programs have been effective, but there is a lack of widespread investment or adoption of these programs in Canada.
- The summit resulted in eight calls to action across four priority areas: intersectoral collaboration and communication, funding, education, and lived and living experience.
- Since the summit, partners in Prince Edward Island have committed to providing more supportive programming to families and to include their voices in decision making. CCSA has committed to strengthening prevention programs through training, updating key resources and enhancing our role in facilitating multisectoral collaboration on preventing harms related to substance use.

Background

As part of the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction's (CCSA) summit series on Strategies to End Substance Use Crises, CCSA partnered with the PEI Alliance for Mental Well-Being to host a summit on the role of family in the prevention of harms associated with substance use. The summit took place in Charlottetown, PEI, on October 13, 2023.

Gathering a range of subject matter experts and lived experience experts to take part in solution-focused discussions from across Canada and the United States, the summit offered evidence-based guidance and direction on the role of family in preventing or delaying the onset of harms related to substance use. The summit's focus on family was driven by increasing calls from communities and families to expand the use of evidence-informed family-focused interventions.



Meeting Context

PEI Alliance for Mental Well-Being is one of Canada's only organizations with a provincewide mandate to support prevention efforts. PEI's small size and distinct rural and urban settings offered an opportunity to hear broad perspectives and examine the effectiveness of prevention efforts in a more contained context, relative to larger jurisdictions. Hosting the summit in PEI where the PEI Alliance for Mental Well-Being and their partners have had significant momentum in prevention, allowed participants to see the possibilities in prevention initiatives that involve family.

Before the summit, CCSA and PEI Alliance for Mental Well-Being hosted a dinner for participants and leadership officials from across Canada. Also happening in PEI at that time was a gathering of provincial and territorial ministers of health, along with federal leadership. Many of these officials attended the dinner. Throughout the dinner, attendees heard about the critical role of family in preventing harm. The Premier of PEI, Dennis King, and the federal Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Ya'ara Saks, both spoke. This event created significant momentum and energy leading into the summit.

The summit brought together key people in the substance use health sector. Despite varying backgrounds, views and responsibilities, they could unite on the importance of family in preventing substance use-related harms. Thirty delegates participated in the summit, representing organizations from across governments, researchers, public health and community-based organizations, with significant representation from First Nations, Métis and Inuit groups, family advocates and people with lived and living experience (PLLE).

At the beginning of the day, a series of panellists shared evidence-informed perspectives. Panellists included people who implemented evidence-based family interventions and PLLE. They spoke about why families need to be at the centre of prevention efforts, and how communities and coalitions can support families. The presentations supported a shared understanding among summit participants on the existing evidence and created a foundation as the summit activities shifted to action planning.

The moderator posed key questions to breakout groups to help inform action planning. Some examples of questions included:

- What possibilities do you see that could transform you, your community, your province or territory, and maybe even the whole country?
- What are the possible challenges that might present themselves and how might we overcome them?
- What opportunities currently exist that have the power to achieve these possibilities and how do we best connect the various possibilities together?

Finding Common Themes

Breakout group discussions showed common themes, which were used to identify four priorities.

1. **Intersectoral Collaboration and Communication:** Prevention of substance use harms is a multisectoral issue that requires people to work together. Effective collaboration and communication can help identify champions for work in different sectors and improve public understanding. It supports the building of community coalitions, system-level multisectoral policy, co-ordinated and integrated care, and navigation support.



2. **Sustainable Funding:** To ensure consistent quality delivery, organizations need sustainable funding to plan and budget properly. Adequate and appropriate funding allows leaders to focus on other aspects of their organization, such as partnerships, succession planning, quality evidence-based programming and enhancements.
3. **Education:** Core life skills support mental well-being and prevent harms. Given the link between trauma and substance use health issues, education is needed to mitigate the impacts of trauma. Children and families interact with various sectors across their lifespan. Enhancing core life skills-based education at all ages is a critical prevention opportunity. Evidence suggests that parent-targeted education during their children's early years (i.e., up to age 12 years) is key to initiatives aimed at reducing or preventing harms related to substance use and re-enforces positive intergenerational relationships.
4. **Lived and Living Experience:** As members of the lived and living experience community, family members, including parents and grandparents, save lives by playing the role of informal case managers and system navigators for their loved ones. Prevention work can not lose sight of the important role that families play. From an Indigenous perspective, incorporating the expertise and perspectives of PLLE supports capacity development for communities and individuals. Lived experience is expertise that needs to be valued as much as all other expertise.

Calls to Action

Participants identified the concrete next steps needed to begin implementing the following calls to action for each priority area.

Intersectoral Collaboration and Communication

1. Continue collaboration and partnerships across jurisdictions and sectors to support coalition building within provinces, territories and communities. CCSA's work will include:
 - Advocating for funding for coalitions that would allow for dedicated program staff and include sustainable, multi-year funding.
 - Establishing a champions table to bring together diverse voices from various sectors to support collaboration and collective action.
 - Providing training for multisector groups, including representatives from groups working with education, justice, health and others.
 - Sharing knowledge within and between sectors and sharing a common language to better understand what change and collaboration are possible.
 - Creating opportunities for coalitions to make joint commitments to support prevention and health promotion easier by pooling their resources.
 - Drawing attention to the need for a dedicated focus on school-community partnerships that support whole child development (e.g., BGC Canada [formerly the Boys' and Girls' Clubs]).
 - Fostering collaboration and partnerships to support the implementation of comprehensive school health approaches.



Summit Impact

Following the Summit, the P.E.I. Alliance for Mental Well-Being delivered the P.E.I. Brain Story Pilot Program to more than 140 individuals. The comprehensive 35-hour training provided valuable insights into the science of resilience and brain development. The goal was to equip participants with knowledge and insights they can build into their prevention-based programming and services, to build a common language around the science, and foster connections and spark collaborative ideas amongst participants.

Sustainable Funding

2. Establish clear commitments from governments to fund prevention. Encourage partnerships by identifying similarities between federal, provincial, territorial and local governments for funding requirements and criteria.
3. Extend funding duration (e.g., one to two years) to longer term to allow time for organizations to plan, properly resource, grow, learn and measure, ensuring efforts are tailored to the unique capacities and needs of rural and remote regions.

Summit Impact

CCSA is working in collaboration with people with lived and living experience (PLLE), including family and friends across Canada to develop structures, tools, training and policies to ensure meaningful engagement. As a result of the summit and ongoing consultation with PLLE, CCSA is committed to expanding and diversifying its network of family members and friends who contribute to CCSA's work.

Education

4. Create a blueprint for multisectoral education on prevention for people of all ages that builds a common language. Adequate resources need to accompany the blueprint to support its implementation. This blueprint should align with the science of brain development, be comprehensive and include various groups working across the lifespan, such as healthcare professionals, parents, caregivers, community organizations and school-community members. It should include:
 - Education for prenatal care providers to support soon-to-be parents and families about prenatal health and early childhood development.
 - Education for parents, soon-to-be-parents and caregivers on development and attachment theory.
 - Education from early childhood through Grade 12, integrating age-appropriate mental and substance use health literacy into existing social science courses. This could include teaching students about attachment theory and family dynamics.



- Education for students about the role and value they play in the community to support their growth and development to create a sense of purpose and value and better support their mental health.
- Ensure postsecondary school graduates (e.g., teachers, pediatricians etc.) are equipped to know how to communicate about family dynamics and attachment with clients.
- Integrate diversity within the blueprint as needs differ by culture and language. The blueprint should be inclusive of a broad range of individuals in contact with children and youth.

Summit Impact

CCSA is committed to renewing its prevention standards, including its family-based standards. CCSA will seek funding to support this work, which includes resources to support implementation. CCSA will work with key groups who participated in the summit such as people with lived and living experience and public health agencies.

Lived and Living Experience

5. Develop and implement a national training program on how to meaningfully engage with PLLE about substance use, so the content is led by and defined from their perspective.
6. Establish policies to ensure that work with PLLE is a mutually beneficial interaction that leads to action.
7. Redefine and nationally promote the meaning of expertise, so it is reflective of all perspectives needed to inform effective policy, research and practice.
8. Establish the commitment to enhancing well-being, ensuring it is a holistic and inclusive definition.

Summit Impact

The P.E.I. Mental Well-Being Research Advisory Table identified the involvement of people with lived and living experience as one of three main areas of focus for their three-year workplan to inform research, policy and practice. The Alliance is providing backbone support to this work.



Conclusion

Summit participants agreed that families need to play a central role in preventing substance use harms and made clear calls to action on how the power of families can be harnessed to prevent substance use-related harms. To effectively implement the eight calls to action, all levels of government, non-governmental organizations and communities need to work together. Discussions during the summit were mostly positive and solution focused, which resulted in strong connections being made. Based on summit discussions, it was evident that priorities are shifting, and key system partners are ready to re-invest and re-invigorate efforts to address root causes of substance use and take proactive measures to prevent substance use-related harms.

