

# STEPHEN SMITH



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British Columbia Ministry of Health

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## DIRECTOR OF MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION AND MENTAL HEALTH ILLNESS PREVENTION, BRITISH COLUMBIA MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Shaylyn asked me to come and speak to you today to provide a little bit of context to this initiative in terms of how the Ministry has supported it and why the Ministry has supported it. I am really pleased to be here to do that today and to represent the Ministry of Health at this exciting event. I work in the Ministry of Health in the Population and Public Health Division, which is focused on population health, health promotion, and prevention. In that capacity, I have the responsibility for policy initiatives on the government level related to mental health promotion and the prevention of mental illness or mental disorders.

I am part of a team at the Ministry across a number of divisions that has some responsibility for oversight around our provinces ten year mental health and substance use plan: Healthy Minds, Healthy People. The plan was released in November of 2010 and I actually think it's a really exciting initiative for British Columbia because it's presenting for the first time a truly transformational kind of approach to how we address mental health and substance use in the province. For the first time with Healthy Minds, Healthy People we are actually looking at a policy framework that not only addresses the profound and ongoing needs of people who are living with a mental illness or with a significant substance use problem, but it also looks at the mental health needs of the entire population. It really looks at how we can support the entire population of the province in terms of improved mental health and well-being. This emerged from an early recognition in our planning around this document that mental health as a positive state, is an asset of itself, it is not only the absence of a mental illness, which of course is desirable in all circumstances but it is a state where people are actually supported to thrive and to experience positive and fulfilling and sustaining relationships and connections to those who are around them and their families and their communities. We wanted to actually pay close attention to the opportunities to promote positive mental health and wellbeing for all people in the province.

To do this, we actually undertook designing some strategic directions and actions that populate the plan that really take us in some exciting directions and prescribe some very different types of work to support the outcomes we want to achieve. The plan has 63 actions in total and more than 33 of those are actually focused on opportunities to promote positive mental health and to prevent mental health and substance use problems before they occur. They were chosen in order to take advantage of opportunities to do this work with a particular emphasis on the lifespan and opportunities and key transition points within the lifespan. And I think the transition point is significant particularly when we are talking about promoting health in a campus context because certainly the transition from secondary school to post-secondary institutions is a significant transition point for many people. And of course there are transition points in the courses of study when people are engaged in their studies at a post-secondary institution. The actions in the plan really place an emphasis on the developmental trajectory and I think that that's also an important context to keep in mind. We were really looking for opportunities to advance development and to help people through those transition stages so that they experienced every opportunity to thrive in the context of their families, their communities, and the work that they were doing.

The actions also reflect a deliberate settings approach, so we really focused on opportunities in that context to take advantage of situations where people live, where they work, where they play, and where they learn, which of course is relevant to our discussion today. As we started to actually develop the plan, figure out what actions should be reflected within it and how we were going to go about implementing those actions, we recognized that this kind of work really required a coordinated and collaborative effort from partners across government, across sectors, and across disciplines. We took that approach and really put it into play in terms of designing and developing the plan and continue to engage in that manner as we are working towards implementing all 63 actions within the plan. As we move into that implementation work, we are well into it now (3 years along the line), we deliberately sought out partners that traditionally may not have been part of the health system kind of activity or initiative, or who were deliberately taking a broad based kind of, settings wide approach in their work. This is where Healthy Minds/ Healthy Campuses comes in because as we determined that we needed to address post-secondary institutions as a key setting for action in the context of the plan.

We knew we needed to work with a partner who had demonstrated the kind of collaboration and engagement that was demonstrated through the Healthy Minds/ Healthy Campuses initiative. We were really, really happy to be able to work with the initiative in order to bolster their capacity, not only to continue the fine work they had been doing around mental health but to actually start to explore where the opportunities existed on campuses to move that work just a little bit further and to start to look at the overall mental health and well-being of all campus community members. I have had the great privilege through that support and through that additional capacity that we provided to Healthy Minds/ Healthy Campuses to work with the Canadian Mental Health Association, BC Division, with the Centre for Addictions Research of British Columbia at the University of Victoria and all the members of the Healthy Minds/ Healthy Campuses Community of Practice. In order to advance, what we've really determined is an appropriate socio-ecologically based kind of approach to this work in order to build mentally healthier campuses in British Columbia.

The video that we are launching today, is one of a number of products and outputs of that particular investment from the Ministry of Health and from my perspective, it is actually a brilliant knowledge exchange tool because it takes what can be on the surface to folks that haven't done this work before seemingly complex and challenging work to grapple with, and distills it to very simple concepts and very simple ideas and principles that can be applied in a very direct way in our day-to-day work here in campuses.

I need to congratulate both the Canadian Mental Health Association, BC Division and SFU for the fine work that you have done with the video. I think it's just actually an amazing tool and I am really proud to have played a really small part in its development. I think it really, really, definitely supports the kind of transformation that we are attending to achieve through Healthy Minds, Healthy People not only in campus contexts, but in broader community contexts as well too so I think it's application has great potential beyond post-secondary institutions and I'd really like to explore that at some point in the future as well. I really want to thank you for this opportunity to come and speak to you today, for the privilege of being involved in this work and I look forward to the rest of the discussions today. Thanks very much.