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British Columbia News

Expanded suicide prevention programs support Indigenous youth, post-secondary students

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/23354>

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Victoria - More young people in B.C. will have expanded access to life-saving interventions and mental health care through suicide prevention programs for First Nations and Métis youth, and post-secondary students.

The Province's \$2.3-million investment will provide essential supports for hundreds of young people who are at risk of increased mental health decline during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

“It is vital that youth in our communities struggling with suicidal thoughts have access to help when and where they need it. Nobody should have to face mental health challenges alone,” said Sheila Malcolmson, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. “Expanding the reach of suicide prevention programs for students and Indigenous youth gets more young people access to the tools, skills and community supports they need to cope in challenging times.”

To support the wellness of Indigenous youth, who are disproportionately impacted by suicide, the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) will receive \$800,000 in funding to deliver expanded suicide prevention and life promotion activities in First Nations communities and expand FNHA youth advisory committees to more regions. An additional \$200,000 will support Métis Nation BC to promote youth wellness initiatives by developing Métis-specific online mental health support courses, as well as anti-stigma and awareness campaigns.

The remaining \$1.3 million will support the Canadian Mental Health Association – BC Division (CMHA-BC) to expand and enhance suicide prevention programs available, including a series of grants administered to post-secondary institutions. Grants will support engaging students at risk, treatment, supports and referral programs. Training for students, teachers and other members of the campus community will be a key strategy of the expanded programs, with the goal of reducing stigma and increasing awareness of supports available to help students who may be experiencing mental health decline. Opportunities to provide grants to other population groups underserved by existing suicide prevention resources are being assessed by CMHA-BC.

Launched in April 2020, post-secondary students in B.C. can access Here2Talk, a free provincewide mental health and counselling referral service that is available 24-7 via online chat and telephone. The Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training is considering the application of new voluntary guidelines in the National Standard of Canada for Mental Health and Well-Being for Post-Secondary Students, released by the Mental Health Commission of Canada in October.

Improving access to mental health supports for B.C.'s young people is a commitment under A Pathway to Hope, B.C.'s roadmap to creating a system of mental health and addictions care that works for everyone. The funding is a vital part of StrongerBC, B.C.'s Economic Recovery Plan to support people and jobs. Through StrongerBC, government is focused on making health care stronger, getting people back to work and supporting businesses and communities.

Quotes:

Clara Morin Dal Col, president, Métis Nation British Columbia –

“Suicide does not discriminate. It impacts Métis people of all ages and in every community in the province. We have a shared responsibility, and we all have the opportunity to help make an impact and save lives. Our

Nation's Ministry of Health is committed to creating culturally appropriate materials that truly support our Métis people, and I know that this funding will have a deeply positive impact on the lives of people in our communities."

Jonny Morris, CEO, Canadian Mental Health Association, BC Division –

"This is such a critical phase for post-secondary students across B.C. as they cope with the pandemic, adapt to new and challenging learning environments and manage the regular pressures of transitions and student life. These capacity-building grants will help campuses across B.C. develop and expand systems designed to prioritize student mental health and strengthen the safety net during an incredibly challenging time."

Anne Kang, Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Training –

"We know that many post-secondary students may be feeling upset, confused and uncertain about their safety or the future, especially if they are far from home or their loved ones this holiday season. We're committed to providing the supports they need to ensure they can stay healthy and focused on their education goals. It's okay to not feel okay, and students need to know there is help available 24-7, because stress isn't on a schedule."

Dr. Nel Wieman, acting deputy chief medical officer, First Nations Health Authority –

"First Nations youth suicide is a long-standing concern, so more funding for suicide prevention is critical in building on the work the FNHA is already doing in collaboration with our health partners during the pandemic. Furthermore, including B.C. First Nations youth in all aspects of life promotion is critical to productive engagement. It is often said our youth are our future, but they are also our present and their mental health needs are urgent."

Quick Facts:

- Suicide is the leading cause of injury-related death among children and youth in B.C. and accounts for more deaths than other leading causes, including motor vehicle incidents or overdose.
- Half of Canadians have reported worsening mental health since the COVID-19 pandemic began, with young adults among the groups most affected.
- Indigenous peoples have disproportionately higher rates of suicide compared to the Canadian average.
- Due to COVID-19, youth and young adults are disproportionately experiencing joblessness and other factors that can lead to an increase in stress and mental health decline. Research shows a 1% rise in the unemployment rate increases the suicide rate by 2.8%.

Learn More:

If you or someone you know is struggling with thoughts of suicide, the Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention Centre provides confidential, non-judgmental, free emotional support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including thoughts of suicide.

Call: 604 872-3311 (Greater Vancouver), or toll-free 1 800 SUICIDE (784-2433), or visit:

<https://crisiscentre.bc.ca/>

Virtual mental health supports and services during COVID-19:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/managing-your-health/mental-health-substance-use/virtual-supports-covid-19>

Healthy Minds, Healthy Campuses: www.healthycampuses.ca

Here2Talk: <https://here2talk.ca/>

A Pathway to Hope – a roadmap for making mental health and addictions care better for people in British Columbia:

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/initiatives-plans-strategies/mental-health-and-addictions-strategy/bcmentalhealthroadmap_2019web-5.pdf

Stronger BC – B.C.'s Economic Recovery Plan: <https://strongerbc.gov.bc.ca/>

Mental Health Commission of Canada - National Standard of Canada for Mental Health and Well-Being for Post-Secondary Students:

<https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/news-article/14000/first-national-standard-its-kind-aims-help-canadas-post-secondary-institutions>

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