

Youth Bring Fresh Approach to Mental Health Research

An OSSU-funded project is benefiting from the lived experience of young people.

Jackie Relihan, a Youth Engagement Facilitator with YouthCan IMPACT, is applying her own experience with mental health in this innovative research project aimed at improving mental health and substance abuse services for youth in Toronto.

“Many youth feel mental health services are not relevant to them,” says Jackie. “It is intimidating when they are not being listened to or their opinions are not being taken seriously or acknowledged.”

Traditional mental health services are often located in clinical, sterile locations which can be alienating to young people. By contrast, the YouthCan IMPACT community drop-ins are colourful, welcoming spaces, co-designed by youth, where youth can drop in when they want to find help for anxiety, depression, substance abuse and more.

Jackie is eloquent about the role youth can play in health research to improve health care overall.

“One of the values YouthCan IMPACT has is bringing different perspectives, backgrounds and knowledge into the project,” she says. “People with lived experience can help inform the project as they know what can work for them.”

In her role, Jackie brings a youthful voice to the research table, ensuring projects are ethical and respectful to youth, advising and relaying back issues that need decisions to the Youth Advisory Group, a diverse group of 10 youth aged 16–24 years with lived experience.

These perspectives are invaluable to the research team and have had impact beyond the project.



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“We learned there was a big demand for youth experience,” says Joanna Henderson, researcher, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) and co-principal investigator of the project. “A lot of people at CAMH and beyond are interested in integrating voices of youth and the role has really expanded. We now have additional funding beyond OSSU.”

Based on the project's success, Ontario's Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is funding up to nine Youth Wellness Hubs across the province with one-stop walk-in mental health and addiction supports for young people aged 12 to 25.

Youth have also been invited to develop a youth-friendly version of Canada's Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines with the Canadian Research Initiative in Substance Misuse, to consult on other CIHR projects at CAMH, and more.

“In my view, this is how the system should be working,” says Joanna. “I applaud the government for pushing people to work differently, to push people to transform the system.”

NEWS



World-renowned researcher **Dr. Jeremy Grimshaw** of the Ottawa Methods Centre and Provincial KTE Network (an OSSU centre) and former colleagues at the University of Edinburgh recently received the prestigious Queen's Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education. They were honoured for their roles in determining the most effective medical treatments for the UK's National Health Services.

A new Canadian centre, led by Dr. Grimshaw, will focus on translating research into practice to improve the health of people globally. The Ottawa Hospital's Centre for Implementation Research brings together a multidisciplinary team of experts who will work with patients, policy-makers and clinicians to improve the uptake of research.



Dr. Jennifer Walker, lead of OSSU's Indigenous Working Group and co-lead on an IMPACT Award, received the Ontario Public Health Association's 2017 Award of Excellence to recognize her contributions and leadership in the field of Indigenous health. Dr. Walker was also awarded \$500,000 from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research for her project Validation of the Canadian Indigenous Cognitive Assessment Tool in three provinces.



Dr. Christian Vaillancourt and a team of researchers received more than \$3.7 million from the Cardiac Arrhythmia Network of Canada (CANet) and matching funders to test if an educational tool can help 9-1-1 operators recognize cardiac arrest when abnormal breathing is present and improve survival rates across Canada. Dr. Vaillancourt also leads an OSSU IMPACT Award looking at transporting low-risk trauma patients by paramedics without immobilization.

Tips for Engaging Youth in Research



YouthCan IMPACT

Jessica Rong and Jackie Relihan are Youth Engagement Facilitators who consult on many research and program activities, including the YouthCan IMPACT project. They provide some tips for researchers wanting to involve youth in research projects.

Recognize diversity

Youth have multiple identities based on ethnocultural background, socioeconomic background, gender, where they live. Reflecting on, and respecting, this diversity is important.

Respect different perspectives

Youth will have different perspectives from researchers. This can be based on their personal experiences and social identity. Valuing these differences is important.

Involve youth in meaningful ways

Youth must be involved at every step of the project, from establishing the goals and values all the way through.

Don't be tokenistic.

Recruit several youths to get varied opinions. Remember that one youth voice does not represent all youth experiences.

Value lived experience

Reach out to youth with lived experience or whose family members have experience. This experience should be valued as a type of expertise.

Provide other benefits for participating

Describe the benefits of being involved, like putting it on their resumes, getting volunteer hours or an honorarium.

Be transparent

Be clear about roles, expectations and time commitment.

Be aware

Be aware of the dynamic and equalize the discussion. Are researchers dominating the discussion? Are others?

Be human

Researchers can be intimidating. Making the space more youth friendly or having a youth lead the conversation can help make it less intimidating.



Patients from The Ottawa Hospital at OSSU's Patient Day

OSSU's Patient Partnership Day

OSSU's recent Patient Day in Toronto was abuzz with ideas, energy and commitment to patient engagement in research. More than 100 patients and families from across the province as well as senior government officials, patient engagement experts and others convened for a lively meeting in March. Topics included "What is a learning health system? How has patient-engagement changed research in Ontario? How can patient-oriented research and lived experience contribute to improving the health system?"

Organized by OSSU's Patient Partner Working Group, the meeting featured

keynote speaker Julie Drury, Chair of the Minister's Patient and Family Advisory Council, and talks from Patrick Dicerni, Assistant Deputy Minister at the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and others.

"Glad to be included in the paradigm shift to patients as partners," said one patient.

The takeaway? That patient engagement in research is becoming part of the research DNA in Ontario, and that patients, families and health care organizations are committed to making it a reality.

**"Talking about a new concept gave us a chance to stretch and learn."
— Patient**

UPCOMING EVENTS

- May 16** McMaster Health Forum: Finding and Using Research Evidence webinar (In French)
- May 23** McMaster Health Forum: Finding and Using Research Evidence webinar
- May 29–31** CAHSPR Annual Conference, Montreal, QC
- June 6** Trillium Primary Health Care Research Day, Toronto, ON
- June 7–8** KT Canada Scientific Meeting, Vancouver, BC

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