



IWK Health



IWK MHA Health Promotion Team

YEAR IN REVIEW

2022-2023

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MEET THE TEAM

Our team of health promotion specialists work collaboratively with government, health professionals and community organizations to contribute to the creation of supportive environments (through advocacy and policy recommendations).



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OUR PURPOSE

Where people live, grow, learn, work, and play has a profound influence on mental health and wellbeing. Children, youth, families, and communities thrive when equitable living conditions and supportive surroundings exist. When these conditions are met, people are able to experience positive mental health and wellbeing.

Sadly, oppression, racism, discrimination, and systemic barriers continue to exist and contribute to inequitable conditions that contribute to poor health outcomes for children, youth and families in Nova Scotia.

The IWK MHA Health Promotion team strives to ensure positive mental health and wellbeing is a reality for all Nova Scotians.

We strategically address unfavourable and inequitable surroundings and circumstances that contribute to poor health outcomes. Through the lens of the most recent evidence and data, we build integral relationships with community partners and advocate for population health policies that will improve population-based health outcomes, today and in the future.

Our work centres on children's rights and strives to achieve the three key social determinants of mental health:



Access to Economic Resources

Access to living wages, food and housing security, affordable childcare, education, and equitable employment opportunities provide people with the supportive conditions to live with few barriers and limitations. This increases dignity, ensures access to basic human rights and reduces distress. It also allows for the time, opportunity, and access to participate in the broader community and benefit from social connections.



Freedom from Discrimination and Violence

When people feel safe and are supported and encouraged to be their authentic selves, they experience belonging and connection to their family, community, and society. When people experience discrimination, racism, and violence, their human rights are violated and the impact on mental health can be significant.



Social Inclusion

Supporting people and groups to feel attachment to, and to feel represented in their family, community, school, and neighbourhood is critical. This fosters connection and a sense of belonging that allows people to thrive.

Rallying Support for Alcohol Warning Labels



Nationally, a thirst for revised public policy surrounding alcohol is rising. This year, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction released [Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health](#). In step, our team, along with other health advocates, are calling for a Federal Alcohol Act to regulate marketing and apply standard warning labels on alcohol products.

We are so fortunate at IWK to have champions who create the conditions for this essential work to be possible.

Aligned with our local and national partners, we are advocating for the creation of new conditions where children, youth and families can thrive, free from the influence of regulated substance industries.

Dr. Krista Jangaard, IWK Health CEO, recently signed a letter to the Federal Ministers of Health and Mental Health and Addictions calling for enhanced warning labels and a Federal Alcohol Act.

To reduce alcohol-related harm for children and youth, our team:

- Secured IWK Health CEO endorsement on a letter to the federal government advocating for alcohol warning labels
- Engaged Dr. Andrew Lynk and the [Pediatric Chairs of Canada](#) in garnering their support for alcohol warning labels
- Connected with Canadian Cancer Society and Canadian Alcohol Policy Evaluation research team, through connections created by our team led Atlantic Alcohol Policy Network



To re-orient health systems at IWK Health, our team:

- Secured funding from the Government of Canada for the 18-month Anti-Racism Action Program (ARAP), coordinating with IWK teams to develop the proposal
- Alongside project lead Juanita Paris, created IWK Health's first Diversity Census and developed ARAP's *Areas for Action*, supporting continued anti-racist movement for greater employment equity
- Supporting the development of IWK Health's first employment equity policy through the EDIRA Employment Equity Action Group

Advancing Employment Equity at IWK Health

Creating a more equitable IWK Health is a responsibility we all share and play a role in.

As one of the larger employers in the province and specifically within HRM, we knew that we needed to act.

Employment equity has the opportunity to directly impact the three key social determinants of mental health: access to economic resources through good jobs, social inclusion through representation and a sense of belonging and reduced levels of discrimination.

Employment equity and freedom from discrimination are critical components for population-level mental health and wellbeing.

Enhancing Children's Rights in Nova Scotia

The foundation for lifelong health and wellbeing is built during childhood and yet Nova Scotia is one of the last provinces to establish an independent body focused on asserting and protecting children's rights.

Children and youth have a fundamental right to have their needs met and for their health and wellbeing to be prioritized.

In November, in recognition of [National Child Day](#), our health promotion team participated in a critical panel discussion with community advocates focused on ongoing work in Nova Scotia to address child rights and wellbeing. Our shared goal aimed to use insights to guide the work of a Child and Youth Commission.

When basic rights and needs aren't met, children and youth are vulnerable to poor health outcomes. For example, Nova Scotia has the highest reported rate of human trafficking for 13 - 17 year-olds in Canada. We're working to change that.



To enhance children's rights through the prevention of commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth, our team:

- Co-authored the report [Hearing Them: Exploring the vulnerability and risk factors for commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth in Nova Scotia](#), within which six recommendations are outlined
- Highlighted the above report and recommended public policy actions in a provincial panel discussion for National Child Day
- Participated in media interviews with [CBC Mainstreet](#) and the [French Radio Canada](#)



To improve access to economic resources, our team:

- Precepted a Master's of Public Health Student, Meghan Cisecki, to co-create an SBAR to lobby support from IWK Health's Executive Leadership Team to sign off on and endorse a national movement led by the [Coalition for Healthy School Food](#). IWK Health became the 106th organization to support a universal school food program for Canada
- Created a Housing and Food Resource Hub; found on Shelf (IWK MHA's Knowledge Management System) and Pulse (IWK Health's intranet); working alongside Andy Cox, Community Liaison

Raising a flag for better food and housing resources

By collaborating internally at IWK Health, our team identifies needs and starts conversations about the most pressing issues affecting the children, youth, families and communities we serve.

Given the current state of these industries in Nova Scotia, access to food and housing resources are needed.

By collaborating with various departments across IWK Health, our team helps build capacity around protective factors, such as adequate housing and food security, which helps children, youth, and families thrive and reduces the need for health services later on.

In Nova Scotia, one in three children can't focus in school because they are hungry. Children have a right to access food. We're advocating for improved access and better conditions.

Building connections and sharing our expertise

Our partner organizations share similar visions and goals to improve health outcomes for children, youth, and families in Nova Scotia.

We know that we are stronger together and continuously seek opportunities to align our strategies. This year, our team provided consultative support and shared evidence and knowledge with many key partners in both government and community organizations.

We know that the factors influencing the Social Determinants of Mental Health can be measured and trends monitored over time. Wellbeing data, although vast, can have important influence on decision making at the municipal, provincial and federal levels when considering healthy public policy.

We continue to apply and share what we know through existing evidence and advocate for better data and related practices in the future.



To align goals and share expertise, our team:

- Collaborated with the Nova Scotia Health MHA program, Public Health and others to dig deeply into measuring wellbeing for Nova Scotians
- Assisted government and youth-serving organizations to improve their collaborative approach to addressing substance-related and gambling-related harms; shared qualitative evidence obtained through interviews and network connections
- Connected with Engage Nova Scotia on measuring wellbeing for children, youth, and families



To reduce gambling-related harms, our team:

- Participated in [media engagement](#) exposing the rise in online gambling and calling attention to the need for updated local data; interviewed by Saltwire's Paul Pickrem
- Plans to meet with newly established partners within provincial government to inform future data collection and possible research on youth gambling

Denormalizing gambling to protect Nova Scotian youth

Online sports betting and gambling is more prominent than ever, with young users vulnerable to risk.

There is great need for current youth gambling data. Grounded in data and evidence, new priorities and policy recommendations can be made to protect the health of youth.

We highlighted these issues through media interviews, alongside former MHA Health Promotion MPH Student* Placement Sophie Duffy, who [spoke to her recent research](#) in this [journal article](#).

*The MPH students explore their interests in population health public policy and often use this experience to kickstart their careers.

Public health policy which regulates marketing and sponsorship activity can limit the influence and impact of the gambling industry. Children have a right to a childhood without the corporate influence of gambling marketing.

We have lots to celebrate. A few highlights from 2022-2023:

- ✓ Mobilizing IWK Health leaders to endorse the Coalition for Healthy School Food policy
- ✓ Successfully concluding the Government of Canada "Anti Racism Action Program" funded project specific to diversifying our IWK workforce
- ✓ Contributing to the One Chance to Be a Child Report's spotlight essay on Substance Use among Youth
- ✓ Presenting in four public forums on the team's reports including topics of alcohol consumption trends, alcohol policy, and commercial sexual exploitation of children
- ✓ Submitting five Health Canada federal policy consultations specific to the Tobacco and Vaping Act and the Cannabis Act
- ✓ Participating in media interviews and contributing to media pieces seven times on the topics of youth gambling and commercial sexual exploitation of children
- ✓ Presenting a policy brief on the commercial sexual exploitation of children to the Inter-governmental committee hosted by the Status of Women