

CYMHSU Community of Practice 10th In-Person Gathering



Photo: 1: From left to right; Dr Rob Lehman, Dr Roberto Sassi, Dr David Smith, Sonia Virk, Dr Shirley Sze, Dr Steve Matthias, and Dr Eva Moore.

Event summary

On April 17, 2026, the Shared Care Committee's Child and Youth Mental Health and Substance Use (CYMHSU) Community of Practice (CoP) hosted their 10th annual in-person gathering, celebrating more than a decade of working toward improved pediatric mental health and substance-use care in BC.

This year's event highlighted the work the CoP has achieved over the past ten years and looked to the audience, along with presenters, to reflect on the work done nationally to implement integrated youth models, successes, gaps, and how we can continue to find innovative solutions to address them. Additionally, the Atleo Group presented on compassionate leadership and the Ministry of Children and Family Development's Child and Youth Mental Health (CYMH) service delivery division shared their strategic priorities.



In all, 133 family and specialist physicians, Ministry officials, Allied Health, and CYMHSU care professionals gathered from all corners of the province at the Sheraton Vancouver Wall Centre.

“The interaction and the knowledge of what has been done for the past 10 years is really incredible. It was very well organized.” – Survey respondent

Event highlights

Indigenous **Elder Syexwáliya Ann Whonnock** (top right) welcomed attendees to the unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Peoples with a traditional blessing and provided cultural and historical context to the land on which the event took place.

Opening remarks

Opening remarks were provided by Shared Care Committee (SCC) physician co-chair **Dr Reena Khurana** (middle right), who acknowledged the breadth of work that CoP members have participated in and highlighted examples, such as the child and youth substance-use and eating-disorders pathways that members helped create. She highlighted the importance of recognizing each other’s unique value to the health care system—whether you’re a physician, counsellor, therapist, or any other professional working in this space, there is inherent value in understanding each other’s professional and personal perspectives to ensure the solutions we develop are inclusive.

Speakers

Dr Eva Moore (bottom right), a Vancouver-based pediatrician specializing in adolescent medicine and program director of the Adolescent Medicine Subspecialty Residency Program at UBC, led the gathering as emcee.

She spoke of the success of the CoP, with more than 3,000 health professionals attending CYMHSU-hosted webinars on topics such as adolescent anxiety, depression, and mood disorders, neurodiversity, and many others. Additionally, through partnerships with PreVenture and Foundry, the CoP has helped train clinicians in personality-targeted early intervention, early identification, and support for youth substance use.

Dr Moore encouraged attendees to reflect on and discuss the ways in which the CoP has supported them—and how they have contributed to the CoP’s work and community.



Anchor Youth Space Nova Scotia: Creating an integrated ecosystem of care

Dr Alexa Bagnell (top right), chief psychiatrist at the IWK Health Centre at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia, presented on the clinic's model, services offered, what concerns they see the most, and the ways in which children and youth are interacting with them.

Having achieved provincial funding in 2025, eight IWK sites are in development.

Their work is grounded in the principles of accessibility, cultural safety, social justice, engagement, responsiveness, learning and improving, collaboration, and health—all with a holistic, youth-centred focus.

Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario: How we catalyzed development of Integrated Youth Services in Ontario and are measuring impact

Dr Jo Henderson (middle right), chief scientific officer of Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario, went over the research that informed their integrated approach to youth services in Ontario.

Thirty-two youth wellness hub networks now span Ontario. They focus on free, rapid access to mental health, substance use, and physical health/sexual health care, along with other community and social services.

Through providing key services, coupled with social activities, they're able to create an environment that supports multiple aspects of wellbeing and is, crucially, somewhere youth *want* to be.

Dr Henderson talked about the importance of meeting kids and teens where they are and listening for what's on their minds or how they're feeling.

"Youth don't actually say to us, 'I hope my PHQ-9 gets better,'" explained Dr Henderson. "We have to actively listen to understand their needs."

Understanding Foundry: Its role and impact in primary care

Julie Zimmerman (bottom right), provincial director of Primary Care and Virtual Services at Foundry, talked about how Foundry is transforming access to services for young people ages 12-24 in BC.

Youth getting lost in the siloed world of health care services led to the idea of a community-based, storefront model for integrated youth services, culminating in Foundry.

With 20 centres open throughout BC, including new locations in Coquitlam and Burns Lake, the Ministry of Health-funded initiative offers support across various streams, including mental, physical, and



sexual health; peer support; substance-use health; work; education; and community services.

Foundry works with the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction to educate and support people and youth with day-to-day administrative needs.

“It’s not called Foundry Youth Support, or Foundry Mental Health; it’s just called Foundry—you come when you need support, and you may not even know exactly what kind of support you need.”

– Julie Zimmerman

Partner booths

To celebrate the partnerships that have made the CoP a success, participants had time and space to engage with friends from:



- ▶ Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
- ▶ Compass Mental Health
- ▶ Mind Space: Raising Resilient Kids
- ▶ Emotions BC

Thank you to our partners for your ongoing support!

Fireside chat with change agents from Ontario, Nova Scotia, and British Columbia

Presenters **Dr Angela Bagnell**, **Dr Jo Henderson**, and **Julie Zimmerman** joined **Steve Mathias**, psychiatrist and co-executive director at Foundry, for a moderated panel where audience members could ask thoughtful questions to hear the panel’s perspectives.

Participants engaged with panellists on a broad range of topics, including working with multiple provincial ministries, pediatric referrals within integrated youth services programs, increasing access points to primary care in schools, and others.



Panellists shared personal experiences, strategies for engaging with and navigating within provincial programs, and shared information on programs like the School-Based Health Hubs.

Update on Physician Input Survey—Strengthening CYMHSU Services in BC

Dr Rob Lehman, a family physician and member of the CYMHSU CoP Steering Committee, reviewed results from the Physician Input Survey, which was conducted earlier this year by the CoP to understand the current strengths and challenges in the CYMHSU space, as identified by our members.

Top barriers identified included: lack of integrated care pathways, geographic and demographic inequities, workforce limitations, access to specialized care, fragmentation between services and ministries, access to affordable psychotherapy, and long wait times.

Top opportunities identified were early intervention and prevention, integrated cross-ministry pathways, expanded community supports, and improved crisis and transition supports.

Dr Lehman noted that service realignment to more integrated models could result in:

- Reduced wait times through early-intervention capacity and streamlined pathways
 - Enhanced psychotherapy access and multi-disciplinary support
 - Integration of service pathways across ministries supported by shared documentation and joint governance
 - Scaling up of promising models in BC that demonstrate high-quality coordinated care
 - Addressing rural inequities and stabilizing the workforce
 - Involvement of physicians as partners in governance and clinical leadership
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- A photograph of a man with glasses, wearing a blue blazer over a light-colored shirt, speaking at a black podium. He is gesturing with his right hand. The background is dark.



Local and regional breakouts

Participants met at poster boards around the room and, by region, discussed the journey map for a CYMHSU patient, adding Post-it notes (green for successes and red for opportunities) to celebrate what is going right in their communities and identified areas for improvement. We've compiled common themes from across the posters into word clouds.

Successes



Opportunities



Changing the CYMH Narrative: Aligning for impact through dedicated focus and shared priorities

Jennie Egyed (bottom-right), director of child and youth mental health (CYMH) advancement and coordination, and **Kyle Deleurme** (top-right next page), director of CYMH operational enhancement, from the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), gave a presentation on how the ministry is aligning to achieve positive outcomes in child and youth mental health.

They spoke about the significant cross-ministry Integrated Child and Youth initiative currently underway, with 39 teams in more than 20 communities, providing multiple access points to a continuum of mental health and substance-use services. Through E-CYMH, a provincial solution to respond to mental health needs in rural and remote areas through provincially led service delivery, as well as Foundry Central, they've expanded access to services, helping address waitlists, wait times, and geographical and capacity constraints.



Following the recent tragedy in Tumbler Ridge, BC, the presenters discussed the Provincial Crisis Mobilization and Response system, which provides rapid, coordinated support to children, youth, families, schools, and communities following significant tragedies and critical incidents. This work is grounded in both the E-CYMH infrastructure and the strengthened partnerships that have resulted from the integrated care teams.

Ya'akstulth: Leading with compassion in a tumultuous era

Ah-up-wa-eek (Shawn Atleo) and **Ya'ak'chamat'axa (Heather Atleo)**, partners in work and in life, led a session on compassionate leadership, conflict repair and healing, and relationality.

The duo, who lead the Atleo Centre for Compassionate Leadership in Squamish, BC, talked about the importance of mutual understanding and listening—especially when communication has begun to break down.

Rooted in Indigenous traditional governance systems, they emphasized how difficult it can be to move forward without first fully understanding the other side's position and motivations. Once we understand what matters to each of us, we can begin to walk closer together towards agreement.

They shared experiences and learnings from their work with Indigenous groups, corporations, and even the United Nations, bringing an Indigenous approach to understanding and leadership to help groups and organizations work more collaboratively.



"We need to build community without 'othering'." – Ya'ak'chamat'axa (Heather Atleo)

Closing remarks

Adrian Leung, vice president of Shared Care and Strategic Initiatives, closed the session with a message of gratitude. He expressed the committee's thanks for the work of the CoP, as well as for the time and energy that attendees from all backgrounds have invested in it.

He applauded their commitment and passion for pediatric mental health and substance use care and encouraged them to continue their work. Drawing on projects such as the school-based health hubs, the many webinars in collaboration with UBC CPD, the youth eating disorders and substance-use clinical pathways, and more, he showcased real-life examples of CoP work that are making an impact for BC patients.



He encouraged attendees to remain engaged, listen to each other's perspectives, and value the unique lens each person brings to the health care system, emphasizing that without their support, time, and dedication, the CoP would not be what it is today.

Participant feedback

The objectives of the CYMHSU CoP 10th In-Person Gathering were:

- ▶ Summarize key factors for success when adding new youth mental health services that relate to a critical access or care integration need in your community or region.
- ▶ Identify and apply compassionate leadership principles to address system gaps and challenges.
- ▶ Assemble a team to connect and collaborate on local and/or regional needs.

Attendees were sent a post-event survey and provided the following feedback and comments.

The CoP Gathering has increased my knowledge of provincial strategies for CYMHSU care and CoP activities to elevate CYMHSU care. (n=74)

96% Agree/strongly agree

There were adequate opportunities to dialogue on provincial strategies for CYMHSU care and CoP activities and generate solutions to address key gaps, with physician colleagues. (n=74)

76% Agree/strongly agree

The CoP Gathering helped me build and foster connections—locally, regionally and/or provincially—around the CYMHSU population. (n=74)

91% Agree/strongly disagree

There were adequate opportunities to interact with my peers. (n=74)

83% Agree/strongly agree

Overall, I was satisfied with this CoP Gathering. (n=74)

88% Agree/strongly agree

This CoP Gathering was a valuable use of my time. (n=74)

86% Agree/strongly agree

I would recommend this event to a colleague. (n=74)

87% Agree/strongly agree

As a result of completing this CPD activity, I am confident in my ability to achieve the learning objectives. (n=74)

91% Yes

Feedback

Based on this survey feedback, the CYMHSU CoP met its objectives by bringing together health leaders, physicians, mental health and substance-use professionals, educators, and others to identify collaborative opportunities and to learn about and celebrate the achievements of the CoP's past 10 years.

Many participants noted that the compassionate leadership session was one of the highlights of the event, finding it inspirational. Comments from survey respondents included:

“Heather Marie and Shawn's engagement with the Community of Practice held the biggest impact for me. Everything they shared felt so aligned and valuable to me as an individual and professional. Their involvement and speaking will have a lasting impact on this community without a doubt.” – Survey respondent

The opportunity to connect with a variety of professionals and perspectives was also valued:

“I appreciated the opportunity to provide a reset in having school, college, and campus physicians and nurses, along with the Ministry of Child and Family Development, at sessions like these.” – Survey respondent

