



“WE HAVE MOMENTUM”

REPORT AND SUMMARY OF THE INAUGURAL PEI MENTAL WELL-BEING RESEARCH FORUM

HOSTED BY THE PEI ALLIANCE FOR MENTAL WELL-BEING
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE MENTAL WELL-BEING RESEARCH ADVISORY TABLE

SEPTEMBER 27, 2023 - CHARLOTTETOWN, PEI

ABOUT THE PEI ALLIANCE FOR MENTAL WELL-BEING



The PEI Alliance for Mental Well-Being exists to create the conditions for positive change that advance resiliency and improve the mental well-being of all Islanders. The Alliance was launched in November 2021 as a response to community-informed recommendations with a specific intention to focus and accelerate activities at the prevention end of the spectrum. Day-to-day, the Alliance serves as a backbone support, providing leadership, coordination, and communication for the PEI mental well-being landscape.

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR WELCOME

Let's build an innovative Alliance that changes lives

In September 2023, the Alliance hosted a Provincial Mental Well-Being Research Forum that brought together representatives from government, academia, healthcare, social services, education, municipalities, and our community non-profits. Interest in the Forum was stronger than anticipated, with over 70 people in attendance.

We felt strongly that this kind of gathering would spark interesting conversations, and that we would unite around a shared commitment to build a common research agenda and action plan that consolidates, aligns and commits to evidence-based approaches for improving mental well-being outcomes on PEI. We were right.

The Forum reinforced our belief that Island leaders are committed and willing to explore new ways to solve some of our most challenging problems. We also share a desire to use research as a foundation for innovative policy and effective practice. And because we are a small province, we have a unique opportunity to lead, to be an incubator of solutions that can serve as a model for others in Canada.

The Forum enabled powerful new connections among leaders who have already invested decades in this work. Their passion for sharing knowledge was an inspiration for the creation of the PEI Mental Well-Being Research Advisory Table earlier this year. Our role as the Alliance is to bring this expertise into focus and to elevate the importance of decision-making that is based on local research and evidence.

The Forum demonstrated that there is a strong desire for collaboration and action. The Alliance is committed to support coordination, convening, and conversations to keep momentum going. We are energized about this important work and moving forward together.

Karen Cumberland
Executive Director
PEI Alliance For Mental Well-Being

BACKGROUND

The first-ever Mental Well-Being Research Forum was held in Charlottetown on September 27, 2023. It was hosted by the PEI Alliance for Mental Well-Being, in partnership with the Mental Well-Being Research Advisory Table. Participants included senior representatives from community organizations, government and academia.

The purpose of this facilitated collaborative event was to:

Explore the existing landscape of research on mental well-being	Identify what we should research for the greatest positive community impact on PEI
Articulate common research values	Develop concrete actions for how to move forward together

Participants had the opportunity to share their expertise, collaborate with peers in research and community, and make connections with other leaders across sectors. Guest speakers were featured, and an environmental scan of mental well-being research on PEI was shared. Participants engaged in discussions on how to work collaboratively to enhance a research-based action plan for mental well-being on PEI.

This document is a succinct summary of highlights from the Forum. It is prepared as a tool to stimulate further conversations and to enable future research opportunities and partnerships. With a shared commitment to people living on PEI, and a focus on research, we can build on consensus and create meaningful and measurable change.





WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “MENTAL WELL-BEING?”

Mental well-being is a multidimensional concept that is influenced by several socioeconomic and personal factors. Socioeconomic factors, such as housing, employment, gender, race, and sexuality, shape our identities, the environment we live in, and how we interact with it. These factors are closely related to our subjective senses of belonging and connection to community. Because of the complex and often personal nature of mental well-being, it is difficult, if not impossible, to find a single definition of mental well-being that would be representative of all residents of PEI. For our work, mental well-being will be defined as:

“Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right. And it is crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development.”

- World Health Organization, 2022

At the PEI Alliance for Mental Well-being, we know that the term “mental well-being” means different things to different people. This presents an opportunity for deep conversations, collaborative research and innovative public policy.

We asked Islanders to reflect on mental well-being in their own words. This art piece is a visual representation of the answers we received.



AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING *access to healthy food*
WALKING **POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS** *MY MENTAL WELL-BEING IS SUPPORTED BY POSITIVE SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, A HEALTHY BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND OPPORTUNITIES TO FEEL MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY ENGAGED AND CHALLENGED*
HAVING A ROOF OVER YOUR HEAD *SET PEOPLE UP FOR SUCCESS, NOT FAILURE* **GENDER AFFIRMING CARE**
READING **FOOD IN THE FRIDGE** **MY KIDS** **PEER SUPPORT**
SAFE HOME AND RELIABLE ACCESS TO RESOURCES SUCH AS CLEAN WATER AND NUTRITIOUS FOOD *BEING OKAY WITH WHO YOU ARE AND YOUR OWN SKIN*
WORKING *MY NETWORK OF FAMILY, FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES, POSITIVE LIFESTYLE BEHAVIOURS, AND GOING LEISURE ACTIVITIES I LOVE* **RECOGNIZING SIGNS** *SUFFICIENT INCOME, SUPPORTS FOR GARDENING, ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT GENERAL HEALTH, FREEDOM FROM FEAR OF VIOLENCE*
SLEEP *self-care* **EXERCISE** **WRITING** *family*
MENTAL WELL-BEING LOOKS LIKE A CIRCLE OF SUPPORTS (PEOPLE, ACTIVITIES, AND PLACES) THAT I NURTURE BUT ALSO LEAN INTO TO MAINTAIN MY OWN WELL-BEING *A SENSE OF PURPOSE*
KNITTING *freedom* **COMMUNITY RESOURCES** *getting out of the house* **FOOD** *TALKING TO SOMEONE TRAINED IN OWNS* **STABILITY** *BEING ABLE TO HELP* **TAKE TIME FOR ME** *PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS* **safe house**
BEING AROUND LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE WITH GOOD THOUGHTS *TO HAVE A DOCTOR TO TALK TO, OR OF US* *IT USED TO BE ALCOHOL, BUT NOT ANYMORE. YOU'RE ONLY FOOLING YOURSELF IF YOU BELIEVE THAT*
FAITH *being stable* **COUNSELLORS** **CHURCH** *ACCEPTANCE* **BLESSED** **LENDING AN EAR**
NOT PUTTING TOO MUCH PRESSURE ON MYSELF *TO HAVE CONSISTENT*
JOURNALLING *ADVOCATES affordable medication* **JOBS**
HAVING PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE THAT CARE FOR YOU *ABLE TO TALK, HAVE CONVERSATIONS AND DISCUSSION* **MOBILE HEALTH UNIT** **FINANCIAL STABILITY** *CONSISTENT BELIEF THAT THERE ARE FAR MORE GOOD THINGS AND 'GOOD' PEOPLE THAN BAD THINGS AND 'BAD' PEOPLE ON THIS PLANET WE CALL HOME.*
FINANCIAL STABILITY **BEING SELF-AWARE** *healthy thoughts*
BEING HERE **LAUGHING** *MAKING TIME FOR WHAT BRINGS ME JOY.*
taking courses

A LIVED-EXPERIENCE PERSPECTIVE

We engaged Jackie Kane to invite and gather personal reflections and perspectives on mental well-being on PEI. Her testimony and recommendations provided a real-world context for the mental well-being practitioners, advocates and researchers who were present.

Jackie is passionate about reaching voices from those who usually aren't heard, because of her own lived experience. Her unique life experience and perspective informed our discussion and made it personal and relevant.

Jackie described her past experience of homelessness, and reflected on how difficult it can be to access community services. She spoke openly about her recovery journey, and more than a decade of experience as a front line worker supporting community members in recovery from substance abuse.

Jackie gets it. She approached participants with empathy and as a peer, and reported back to the group.

Here are a few of her suggestions:



AVOID USING JARGON

Research needs to be relevant and personal to real people.



LISTEN TO BUILD TRUST

Those who need support the most, want to share and want to be heard, but feel ignored.



INCLUDE REAL PEOPLE

People with lived experience must be part of innovative solutions. We need to collaborate closely with those who can provide direction and meaningful feedback.

HOSTED BY
 PEI Alliance for
Mental Well-Being

WELCOME TO THE 2023
Mental Well-Being
RESEARCH FORUM 

Please check in at the welcome table
outside of the Rotary Room.
9:30 AM - 4:30 PM ADT

Charlottetown Library
Learning Centre

What's On:
Wednesday, Sept. 27

Time
Children's Program Room

Book Club
The Jay Room

Women's Program Room

Cafe
Play Room

WHAT'S THE STATE OF MENTAL WELL-BEING RESEARCH ON PEI?

We did a scan of the landscape

We consulted numerous resources, including peer-reviewed articles, government reports, white papers, strategic action plans, and policy briefs as part of the final environmental scan. Ten distinct PEI population groups were represented in research from 15 sources. A variety of data collection methods were used in the 15 identified studies, including surveys, key informant interviews, literature reviews, focus groups, and Photovoice. About half of the studies (7) used a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Only one study was purely qualitative.

The complete environmental scan is available on the Alliance website (allianceformentalwellbeing.com), or via the QR code below.



Dr. Shamara Baidoobonso, PhD Provincial Epidemiologist at the PEI Chief Public Health Office reviewed the results.

The resources we identified covered a variety of topics related to well-being, including:

- **Social Determinants of Health**
- **Prevalence of Mental Illness on PEI**
- **Substance Use**
- **Life Satisfaction**
- **Well-Being of Children**
- **Indigenous Well-Being**
- **Capacity to Deliver Services**
- **Community Well-Being**

Here's a summary of what we found:



INCOME PREDICTS OUTCOMES

Islanders who earn the lowest incomes are more likely to be diagnosed with hypertension, diabetes, mood disorders, and anxiety disorders.



FOOD INSECURITY THREATENS FAMILIES

In 2017, 15.2% of parents of toddlers and 12.7% of parents of preschoolers struggled to purchase food for their families.



CHILDREN ARE AT RISK

About 50% of Island children live in the most deprived neighborhoods in the province.



DISCONNECTION UNDERMINES RESILIENCE

Many Islanders have reported that they love their community but do not always feel connected to it.



SUBSTANCE USE IS ON THE RISE

From 2017-2019, alcohol use by Islanders 15+ increased from 68-76% and cannabis increased from 15-23%



“WELL-BEING” DOESN'T INCLUDE ALL

Minority populations on PEI, including LGBTQ, Indigenous, Gender-diverse, those living with a disability, and those living under the poverty line experience lower levels of well-being.



THE CONCLUSION?



People living on PEI face increasing threats to mental well-being. What's needed is a research-based approach that enables community-based projects and innovation.

We asked Dr. Bill Montelpare, PhD Professor and Margaret and Wallace McCain Chair in Human Development and Health at UPEI, to reflect on this challenge. His recommendations align with the mandate of the Alliance:

To create the conditions for positive change that advance resilience and improve mental well-being outcomes for Islanders.

Dr. Montelpare put this in context for us.

“

Meaningful community collaborations are essential to the development of an effective research network. This will require new partnerships, ongoing and active engagement between partners and the community, and a commitment to diversity. Every step of the process must be rooted in research and ongoing evaluation. Information and evidence must be widely shared, even when the outcomes are not what were intended. Authenticity is key.

”



WHAT WE LEARNED AT THE FORUM



**THERE IS CONSENSUS
ON THE IMPORTANCE
OF COLLABORATION**



**PEI IS AN IDEAL PLACE
TO EXPLORE AND TEST
INNOVATIVE MODELS**



**WE NEED TO MOVE
BEYOND TALK AND
TAKE ACTION**

The Forum held space for inspirational remarks by Dr. John Weekes, Director, Knowledge Mobilization at the Canadian Centre of Substance Use and Addiction, who joined us to share a national perspective. He set the tone for the day, and reminded us of who we are coming together to serve.

“Fundamentally... We listen. We engage. We are selective in strategic priorities that are impactful. Our approach is ‘Nothing about us, without us,’ and is shaped by the vision, priorities and perspectives of people for whom these issues (substance use) are personal. - they are the experts.”



Working groups at the Forum identified key areas of focus and recommended next steps:

- Establish cross-sector groups to create new networks for access to data and information sharing
- Create a coalition focused on knowledge mobilization
- Advocate for and promote evidence-based interventions
- Connect with knowledge mobilization experts
- Explore the idea of a Knowledge/Research sharing Forum
- Understand and address Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) through Brain Story training
- Create a network of champions to advocate for embedding Brain Story science into core training of government and front-line workers
- Clarify and amplify the shift towards social determinants of health as a policy foundation
- Enhance infrastructure and partnerships for collaborative participatory process and approaches to research
- Engage more individuals with lived-experience
- Test, research, share, repeat.

We came together around a shared commitment to make PEI better, for everyone. We left with a sense of optimism that broader collaboration based on research is the way forward. By collaborating closely, sharing widely and being rooted in a commitment to transparency and solid research, we can carry our shared vision forward.



NEXT STEPS

The Forum generated momentum. Let's keep this moving.

The Alliance will continue to nurture the ideas and action items that emerged from the Forum and bring them to life via our strategic plan. We will also continue to engage and support partners that have the capacity to lead.

Next steps for 2024:

1

The Research Advisory Table (RAT) on Mental Well-Being will be formalized with new terms of reference and will be supported by the Alliance.

They will lead the development of an annual Research Forum on Mental Well-Being and will continue to build bridges among community, government and academia to generate measurable impact and change on PEI.

2

The RAT will also guide and support the launch of three working groups to mobilize the following action items that emerged from the Forum.

The working groups include: (1) Champion access to data and information sharing, (2) Develop and implement a Provincial Advisory Council of Lived Experience to inform research, policy and practice, (3) Facilitate knowledge translation/mobilization of research and support evidence-based practice in our community.

3

The Alliance will expand the understanding of how trauma and early childhood experiences impact physical and mental health and substance use by facilitating the new group curriculum offering of The Brain Story Certification Course, developed by the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative.

The province of PEI has provided critical funding to the Alliance to make this group curriculum available for leaders and front-line positions across sectors that serve some of the most vulnerable people in the Province. The Brain Story Certification Course supports understanding of the root causes of behaviours that lead to substance use and a deterioration of mental health. The Alliance is piloting the group curriculum of The Brain Story Certification Course in PEI from November 2023 to August 2024.

ALLIANCES ARE ABOUT PARTNERSHIPS

The Government of Prince Edward Island has made mental well-being a priority. This commitment was outlined in the 2023 mandate letter to the Honorable Mark McLane, Minister of Health and Wellness.

“

Working with the Alliance for Mental Wellbeing, provide \$250,000 to facilitate frontline workers — such as social workers, healthcare professionals, correctional workers, police officers and anyone who works with vulnerable Islanders — to take the Brain Story Certification training to better understand the connection between brain development to addiction and mental health.

”

We will continue to partner and innovate together to increase the reach and impact of research and create conditions for positive change that improve the well-being of people living on PEI.

Join us: [**AllianceForMentalWellbeing.com**](https://AllianceForMentalWellbeing.com)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the cross-sectorial leadership and collaborative work of the Mental Well-Being Research Advisory Table, who convened monthly during the spring and summer of 2023 to plan and execute this Forum.

The Research Advisory Table included:

Dr. Bill Montelpare | (Co-Chair) Principle Investigator, UPEI Health Research Network and Margaret and Wallace McCain Chair in Human Development and Health

Bonnie Lipton-Bos | (Co-Chair) Director, Knowledge Mobilization + Impact, PEI Alliance For Mental Well-Being

Nicole Peters | Research Coordinator, Mental Health & Addictions, Health PEI

Orgesa Dana | Policy Analyst & Planner for Mental Health and Addictions, PEI Gov., Dept. Health & Wellness

Dr. Shamara Baidoobonso | Provincial Epidemiologist, Population Health Assessment & Surveillance, CPHO

Dr. Kate Kelly | Postdoctoral Researcher, UPEI Health Research Network

Mary-Ann Standing | Director, Secure Island Data Repository & Research Manager, Health Centre for Health & Community Research, UPEI

Emily Cook-McDonald | Project Manager, Literacy Outreach Project, UPEI

Dr. Michael McIsaac | Faculty of Mathematical & Computer Science, UPEI

Connolly Aziz | Research & Evaluation Officer, PEI Alliance For Mental Well-Being

Sarah Doak | Mental Health Researcher, PEI Alliance For Mental Well-Being

The Advisory Table is the heartbeat of our collective impact efforts to align mental well-being research to achieve and track impact.

If you are interested in getting involved or learning more, reach out to the PEI Alliance For Mental Well-Being at info@afmwb.com or visit www.AllianceForMentalWellBeing.com



**Community Services
Recovery Fund**



Canadian
Red Cross



COMMUNITY
FOUNDATIONS
OF CANADA



United Way
Centraide
Canada

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