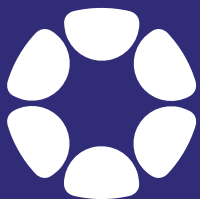


# Growing the Forest of Mental Well-Being:

A Collective Journey  
Toward Connection and Impact  
on Prince Edward Island



**Alliance**  
*for Mental Well-Being*



# WELCOME MESSAGE

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On Epekwitk, the land known today as Prince Edward Island, forests have long been places of strength, shelter, and deep interconnection. They remind us that thriving systems are not built overnight, they are grown, slowly and intentionally, over time. Like a forest, the work of building mental well-being across communities requires care, collaboration, and conditions that support life at every layer.

The Alliance for Mental Well-Being has spent the past several years planting seeds of knowledge, trust, innovation, and relationships. This report tells the story of how those seeds are taking root and how, together, we are growing something vital and enduring. It is a story of people and organizations linking arms to respond to a growing mental health crisis not with quick fixes, but with long-term commitment grounded in science, shared purpose, and community wisdom.

From the strong roots of research and lived experience, to the trunk of an evolving, evidence-based approach, to the canopy of relationships and collective action, we are beginning to see the shape of a system transformed. This forest is still growing. It is diverse, resilient, and alive with possibility. And like any healthy ecosystem, it will thrive only through continued tending, reflection, and shared responsibility.

This report outlines the impact of our collective efforts so far. It also maps the terrain ahead, offering lessons learned and new questions we must face together as stewards of mental well-being on this island.

**Let us move through the Forest of Mental Well-Being... together.**

## Moving with Care on Epekwitk

The Alliance for Mental Well-Being acknowledges that the land on which we live, work, and grow is part of Epekwitk, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People. For thousands of years, the Mi'kmaq have lived in deep relationship with this land, water, and sky, tending to it with wisdom, care, and reciprocity. The quality of life we enjoy today is rooted in their stewardship and resilience, and we carry a responsibility to honour that legacy.

We recognize the ongoing impacts of colonization, including the harm it has caused to the mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being of Indigenous Peoples. As we work to strengthen mental well-being on this island, we must walk forward differently: with humility, accountability, and care.

Truth and Reconciliation is not a destination, it is a shared journey, much like tending to a forest. It takes time, relationship, and a commitment to restoring balance.

This acknowledgement is just one step. We remain committed to learning, unlearning, and growing with the original stewards of this land.

# GREETINGS

Just as every thriving forest is nurtured by experienced and attentive caretakers, the Forest of Mental Well-Being is guided by individuals committed to long-term, collective stewardship. Our leading stewards, those who help shape and tend to the vision of the Alliance, share their reflections on where we've been, what we're growing, and where we're headed. These are voices from the lead Stewards within our forest, welcoming all who travel the forest paths and offering guidance, gratitude, and vision.

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In a time when systems feel stretched and individuals feel isolated, the work of tending to mental well-being must be both bold and deeply rooted. Over the past year, I've witnessed remarkable acts of care, collaboration, and courage across this island. Our shared forest is growing...branch by branch, root by root. And while the path is not always linear or easy, it is full of possibility. I invite you to explore this report not just as a record of what we've done, but as an invitation to continue travelling together.”

— Nancy Anderson, Executive Director, Alliance for Mental Well-Being

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Stewardship means holding space for growth while ensuring we don't lose sight of the bigger picture. As Chair of the Board, I've had the privilege of witnessing the dedication, wisdom, and interconnectedness that define this Alliance. The forest metaphor is more than symbolic, it reflects the way we work: with patience, intention, and a belief that the health of the whole depends on each of its parts. I am deeply proud of the path we are on, and grateful to all who walk it with us.

— John Horrelt, Chair of the Board of Directors, Alliance for Mental Well-Being

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Our team is dedicated to fostering creativity and collaboration across all our initiatives, nurturing the shared vision of the Forest of Mental Well-Being. We believe that innovation thrives when everyone has the opportunity to contribute their ideas and insights. By engaging with our community, we aim to turn bold concepts into meaningful outcomes that benefit our organization and the people we serve. Thank you for being an integral part of this journey toward a more dynamic and connected future.

— Sharon Jollimore, Director of Innovation and Engagement

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Disclaimer: The data findings, quotes and statistics presented in this report are from the Alliance for Mental Well-Being's 2025 Evaluation Report. This ongoing independent evaluation project is led by Taylor Newberry Consulting.

### OUR PURPOSE

Our purpose is to help create a future where everyone on Prince Edward Island can achieve and maintain the best possible mental well-being throughout their lives and effectively navigate the challenges they face.

### OUR VISION

Our vision is to be a leader and champion in mental well-being by empowering our community partners to achieve their most ambitious goals.

### OUR MISSION

Our mission is to support and empower our community partners so we collectively create a future where everyone on PEI can achieve and maintain the best possible mental well-being throughout their lives.

## OUR VALUES

We are deeply committed to embodying our values. They guide our approach to our work, our evolution, and our partnerships.

#### COLLABORATION:

Collaboration is at the heart of everything we do. We believe the sum is greater than its parts and that by working together we can go much further. We actively seek out partnerships with individuals, communities, and organizations who share our values and goals. Open dialogue and mutual respect underpin all our collaborative relationships. We empower our partners and leverage their collective strengths to co-create a better future for all.

#### LEARNING:

We foster a culture of curiosity, inquiry, and reflection, encouraging everyone in our community to pursue ongoing learning and personal development. We embrace new ideas, recognizing that diversity of thought strengthens our impact. We share knowledge openly and encourage creativity to drive transformational change.

#### EXCELLENCE:

We are committed to pursuing the highest standards of quality in our mission-driven work. Through innovation, continuous improvement, and care for detail, we strive to deliver exceptional outcomes that positively impact our community. We aim to inspire hope, foster resilience, and empower creativity to meet the challenges and change that are a constant in our work.

#### AUTHENTICITY:

We choose to be genuine, transparent, and true to ourselves and our mission. Honesty and integrity are rooted in our core being. We are committed to staying true to our values and what we stand for, even in the face of challenges. Through authenticity, we aim to create a world where everyone is empowered to be their truest selves.

#### RESPECT:

We respect and value the inherent dignity of every individual. We are committed to creating an environment where all voices are heard, and diverse perspectives are honoured. We believe in treating every person with empathy, kindness, and fairness. We strive to cultivate a community of understanding and support, where our staff, Board, and community partners can thrive.

## BOARD OF DIRECTOR STEWARDSHIP

**John Horreht** - Board Chair

**Mary Pendergast** - Vice Chair

**Danielle Osagie** - Treasurer

**Chelsey Rogerson** - Director

**Carolyn Francis** - Director

**Lucas MacArthur** - Director

**Ayodhya (Nish) Fonseca** - Director

**Guillerma Richardson** - Director

**Tiago Hori** - Director

## STEWARDSHIP TEAM

**Nancy Anderson**  
Executive Director

**Sharon Jollimore**  
Director, Innovation & Engagement

**Megan MacKenzie**  
Director, Knowledge Mobilization & Impact

**Paula Gallant, FCPA**  
Manager, Finance & Administration

**Kelly Mullaly**  
Operations Coordinator & Board Secretary

**Rose Dennis**  
Communications & Engagement Lead

**Nate Lewis**  
Community Impact Coordinator

**Leslie-Ann Ruben, FCCA, CFE**  
Finance & Enterprise Assistant

**Floramie Rose Rolian**  
Digital Marketing & Information  
Systems Admin

**Rebecca McQuaid**  
Training & Development Lead

**Sarah Visser**  
Research & Evaluation Coordinator

**Sam Doucette**  
Events Coordinator

## ENTERING THE FOREST OF MENTAL WELL-BEING

Entering into the Forest of Mental Well-Being, we find ourselves surrounded by a landscape rich with opportunity for reflection, growth, and balance. This is not just a forest of trees and trails, it is a living metaphor for the many layers of our community's well-being. Each path, clearing, and canopy represents a unique aspect of being well, and in the pages ahead, we will explore them one by one.

We begin at The Stewards Station, establishing a foundation for the journey ahead. The Roots explore the grounding principles and core supports that keep the forest, and ourselves, anchored. Moving upward, The Canopy reveals the overarching perspectives and growth that come with a broader view. Beneath that, The Understory examines the subtler, often hidden processes

that shape our experiences. On the ground level, The Forest Floor captures the everyday interactions and resources that sustain life. From there, New Growth highlights the emergence of fresh opportunities and development. Clearing the Path focuses on removing obstacles and creating space for progress. Finally, The Forest as a Whole brings these layers together, showing how each part contributes to a vibrant, interconnected ecosystem.

Through these explorations, we will examine practical tools, reflective exercises, and actionable insights designed to help strengthen and balance each area of Prince Edward Island's well-being. By the end of this journey, we will not only have mapped the forest, but we will also have learned how to thrive within it.

So, step forward with us, take a deep breath, and let the Forest of Mental Well-Being guide the way.

Your path awaits...



# The Stewards' Station:

## Guiding the Paths of the Forest

The Alliance plays an essential and evolving role in supporting others as they enter and move through the work of improving mental well-being on PEI.

### Our mission as stewards of the forest is fulfilled by:

- > Providing learning and development opportunities.
- > Sharing cutting-edge research in practical, accessible ways.
- > Creating opportunities for deep connection and collaboration.
- > Encouraging innovation and bold new approaches.
- > Offering capacity-building support to strengthen organizations.
- > Advocating for our partners and amplifying their impact.

The Stewards' Station symbolizes the infrastructure behind the scenes, systems, relationships, evaluation, and strategic learning, that help the entire ecosystem thrive. This role requires humility, responsiveness, and presence. Stewardship is not about control, it is about care.

In every forest, there are trails, some well-worn, others newly carved. There are places of gathering, places of discovery, and places where quiet growth takes hold. In the Forest of Mental Well-Being, no one enters the same way, and no one follows the same path. That's not only accepted, it's also essential.

No matter how someone enters, through engagement, collective impact, or community impact, their journey contributes to the larger whole. These paths are flexible and non-linear, shaped by each person's role, strengths, readiness, and purpose. Some will move naturally between areas, while others will remain grounded in one place, deepening their work. Every path through the forest is valid.

At the heart of it all stands the Stewards' Station, a central point of orientation, guidance, and connection. The Alliance for Mental Well-Being serves as this steward: tending to the conditions of the forest, supporting those who walk its trails, and ensuring that the forest remains a place of possibility for all who enter.

The Stewards' Station symbolizes the role of the Alliance as both guide and system-builder, helping individuals, organizations, and communities find their way, connect meaningfully, and build capacity as they go.

It is a place of support, tools, feedback, and shared learning, where anyone can come to ask questions, make sense of the path, or find the right companions to walk alongside.

It reflects the belief that systems need intentional caretaking, not just programs, but pathways, people, and places to connect.

### Stewards' Station: Championing Support and Engagement

Within the Stewards' Station of the Forest of Mental Well-Being, the Alliance stands as a careful and attentive guide, nurturing those who journey through its pathways. Here, stewardship is not only about offering resources but about walking alongside partners, tending to their growth with both structure and care.

In this Station, the Alliance has reviewed 247 granting applications, ensuring that each one is met with thoughtful attention. Forty-nine applicants in Cycle 5 received dedicated coaching, supported by 13 peer reviewers who acted as fellow stewards, lending their expertise to the adjudication process. Across 7 cohorts of core Brain Science Training, approximately 200 individuals from over 70 organizations have been welcomed into this circle of learning, expanding a network of support that stretches across the forest.

The voices of those who have paused at the Stewards' Station speak to the warmth and responsiveness found here:

*“One of the biggest successes I think you folks have hit with these grants is their adaptability. Whenever we reach out to the staff team for questions regarding our grant, they're quick to respond and are really helpful through the process.”*

— Community Grantee

A peer reviewer reflects the same sentiment of steady guidance: “I find as the years progressed that it really improved year by year, by year. This year I found it just exceptional. For anyone who was coming on as a peer reviewer, they must have found it very easy to navigate... It was really straightforward, easy to navigate, lots of help from the office. Yeah, it's really improved by a long shot.”

At the Stewards' Station, the Alliance also provides the tools that guide travellers forward with clarity: a theory of change model, evaluation rubrics, and application guides act like well-marked paths and signposts, helping everyone find their way with confidence. One Brain Science participant described how these supports ripple outward:

*“This will be extremely useful in designing and implementing programs that are aligned with the Alliance's framework. It will also strengthen how we communicate impact in our evaluations, reports, and future funding applications by ensuring our language and rationale reflect current evidence-based practices.”*

Community Grantees passing through this Station often share a sense of ease and empowerment:

*“Our experience with the Alliance has been extremely positive... the process is very streamlined.”*

— Community Grantee

*“The streamlined application process and clear communication made it easier to navigate requirements.”*

— Community Grantee

Through each interaction, metric, and voice, the Stewards Station reveals what it means to nurture a forest of mental well-being: steady guidance, clear pathways, and a human-centred approach that helps every partner grow in strength and confidence.



Since launching the grant program in 2021, we've received 247 applications totaling \$38.6 million in funding requests. As of March 2025, we've awarded \$8.9 million to 63 projects — each one contributing to a healthier, more resilient PEI.



## The Importance of the Stewards' Station

The Stewards' Station matters in the Forest of Mental Well-Being because it serves as the heart of guidance, connection, and support for everyone who enters.

Like a station in a physical forest, it provides maps, tools, and trusted advice, helping travellers navigate trails that are sometimes familiar and sometimes new.

It transforms the forest from a place that might feel overwhelming into one that invites exploration, learning, and belonging. By tending to the systems, relationships, and pathways that sustain the ecosystem, the Steward's Station ensures that each person can move with confidence and curiosity, ultimately becoming an active part of the forest's thriving community.

# The Roots: Foundations of Change

Beneath the surface of Prince Edward Island’s mental health landscape, the roots of the Alliance stretch deep, drawing strength from an urgent need to respond to a growing crisis. Rates of distress have risen, system gaps remain unaddressed, and the demand for services continues to outpace the resources available. These roots, the unseen foundation of our work, anchor the Alliance in its mission to respond to the pressing mental health and substance use health challenges across the Island.

The roots are nourished by evidence and shared values. They intertwine research, best practices, and the lived/living experiences of people living in Prince Edward Island, forming a strong underpinning for our two interconnected pillars of action: Building a Shared Knowledge Base and Building and Nurturing Partnerships for Collective impact. This foundation ensures that every grant and training opportunity focuses on proven approaches that strengthen resilience and mental well-being.

“My biggest takeaway was understanding the science behind it. We tend to focus on the practical, common sense understanding of what a good program looks like. But why we are achieving those results helps us develop our programs and more clarity around reviewing program ideas developed by my staff.”

— Brain Science Training Participant

These roots also feed a culture of collaboration and evidence-informed action:

“We are very grateful for the Alliance and appreciate the fact that it promotes research and evidence-based practices. We have put a lot of effort into the evaluative component to ensure that the funding being dispersed is truly making a difference in Prince Edward Island. We appreciate the Alliance’s focus on research, collaboration, and community networking.”

— Community Grantee

Like a forest ecosystem, the strength of the Alliance depends on these initial, unseen supports. Through educational initiatives, community conversations, and practical support for organizations, the Alliance’s roots are driving change that begins below the surface. They allow for adaptation, integration, and the building of new relationships across sectors, ensuring that the growth above ground is sustainable and aligned with the Island’s vision for collective well-being.

## Connecting to Our Theory of Change

At the heart of the Alliance’s work is a clear Theory of Change that guides every initiative and investment. This framework ensures that our efforts to educate, empower, and build capacity across Prince Edward Island are linked to measurable outcomes for mental well-being.

This Theory of Change provides the bridge between evidence and impact. By aligning our roots, knowledge, partnerships, and shared values, with clear pathways to action, we ensure that each initiative contributes to a sustainable shift in how mental well-being is supported across the province. It is the blueprint that transforms research into practice, and practice into positive transformative change.

7

Brain Science Training cohorts completed

200+

individuals trained across

70+

Island organizations



With support from our measurement and evaluation partners, Taylor Newberry Consulting (TNC), we have invested significant energy and resources to envelop these guiding principles in our work. TNC shares the following when it comes to having the Theory of Change positively weave its branches through all we develop.

“There is lots of research showing how brain development is affected by adverse childhood experiences and early trauma. Until now this research has not been available to people in an accessible way. The Alliance has translated this into public messaging, training curricula, and other resources and bringing it in strategic ways to organizations. Alongside this education, they are building the financial capacity of organizations to use this information to build programs and interventions that are focused on well-being. In addition to training and financial support, the Alliance is convening people around how to improve mental well-being on PEI, with a focus on building community-based research partnerships. This is creating dialogue, connections, and energy to take actions,

from improving service delivery practices all the way up to building provincial wide policy and funding solutions to promote mental well-being for everyone on the island.”

In the words of our work: All actions are grounded in evidence (brain science). These roots, our shared understanding, partnerships, and commitment to prevention, are what allow the Alliance to thrive in the complex soil of PEI’s evolving mental health landscape, providing the nourishment for systemic, long-term change.

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The Alliance has translated this (brain science) into public messaging, training curricula, and other resources and bringing it in strategic ways to organizations. Alongside this education, they are building the financial capacity of organizations to use this information to build programs and interventions that are focused on well-being.  
— Taylor Newberry Consulting  
”

## The Importance of the Roots

In the Forest of Mental Well-being, roots are the silent architects of life above. They weave together strength, stability, and sustenance, ensuring that the visible growth of the Alliance, its programs, partnerships, and community impact, can flourish. By grounding every effort in evidence, shared values, and collaboration, these roots prevent the forest from toppling under the weight of ongoing challenges. They nourish innovation, foster resilience, and create the conditions for lasting change. In valuing and tending to the roots, we invest in a healthier, more connected ecosystem where mental well-being can thrive across the Island for generations to come.

# The Canopy: Collective Action in Motion

In the Forest of Mental Well-Being, the canopy is the layer where sunlight is captured and energy moves freely, where life is most visible and vibrant. For the Alliance for Mental Well-Being, the canopy represents the programs and initiatives that reach into the community, where knowledge, resources and relationships are invested to create action and momentum.

From 2021 onward, the Alliance’s grant program has stretched wide branches, allocating nearly \$9,000,000 to 63 community-based projects out of 247 applications reviewed, with Cycle 5 achieving a 10% funding ratio. These investments reach across Education, Health, and Arts/ Culture, strategically focusing on upstream prevention. Seventy per cent of 2024 applicants had 24 staff or fewer, and 34 new applicants emerged in 2024, reflecting an intentional effort to support small organizations and projects that focus on vulnerable groups like familial caregivers, migrant workers, rural residents and farm families.

Research branches extend outward, linking academic strength with community needs. At the Reverse Science Fair, 121 participants, including 33 persons from the academic community, gathered to explore new partnerships, with a 4.7/5 satisfaction rating for networking. The impact was immediate: “We met one of the professors of statistics... you’re just the guy we need,” shared Cindy Lapeña of the Learning Disabilities Association of PEI. Ashley Travis of the PEI Humane Society noted, “We’ve definitely spoken to a few other organizations that will form partnerships down the road.” These connections illuminate how the Alliance fosters vibrant, community-driven research.

Within this canopy, the leaves of learning and shared knowledge are vibrant. A thriving community of participants have engaged in Brain Science Training since its inception, including close to 200 individuals completing the intensive core course representing more than 70 organizations across Prince Edward Island. This expansive reach builds collective understanding and a shared language, forming the foundation for evidence-based, collaborative action across the Island.

70%

of 2024 Grant applicants had 24 staff or fewer

34

new grant applicants emerged in 2024

The early growth of the PEI Brain Builders Network reflects the canopy’s evolving structure. As a developing community of practice, it aims to sustain the connections formed through grants and Brain Science Training, enabling shared problem-solving and knowledge exchange. Brain Science Training survey results already show strong motivation to connect, with an average rating of 4.1/5.

The canopy also reveals the human stories that make the Alliance’s work tangible. Initiatives such as PEERS Alliance demonstrate clear results, with 97% of participants indicating they feel less isolated during the winter months. One participant reflected: “One of the things that I use differently [because of the course] is I actually dig a little more into what a client’s history looks like.” These stories show how the Alliance’s upstream prevention strategies translate into real, positive change in people’s lives.

Diversity and reach define this visible layer. Brain Science Training and the Grant Program touch communities across the Island, adapting to both in-person and online delivery, and engaging participants from sectors spanning education, social services, healthcare, and justice. This breadth demonstrates the vibrancy and maturity of the Alliance’s canopy, an ecosystem of visible action, learning, and shared impact that continues to grow across PEI.



### Brain Science Training as a Driver of Collective Impact

Seven cohorts of core Brain Science Training have been delivered since the pilot.

Approximately 200 individuals from over 70 organizations participated.

Training participants reported increased understanding of evidence-based practices and brain science principles.

80% of participants intend to take new actions in their work.

Cohort 7 was intentionally composed of Grant recipients to integrate theory and practice.

Brain Science Training survey results: Average network connection rating of 4.1/5.

Participant feedback highlights impact on program design, evaluation, and communication of evidence-based rationales.



Brain Science Training survey results already show strong motivation to connect, with an average rating of

**4.1** out of **5**

### The Importance of the Canopy

Ultimately, the canopy is vital to the Forest of Mental Well-Being because it is where connection, learning, and action come to life. It transforms the Alliance’s vision into visible impact, ensuring that ideas and resources reach the people and places that need them most. By fostering collaboration, nurturing organizations, and creating pathways for shared knowledge, the canopy sustains a thriving ecosystem of well-being for communities across Prince Edward Island. Its growth signals not just the health of the forest, but the collective commitment to building a resilient and supportive environment where everyone can flourish.

# The Understory:

## Connections and Collaboration

In the Forest of Mental Well-Being, the understory is where life quietly weaves the threads that hold the ecosystem together. Beneath the visible canopy of grants awarded and training sessions completed, the understory is alive with relationships, a common language around mental well-being, and the subtle alignment of actions that give the whole forest its resilience. It is here that the Alliance’s work truly comes together, connecting programs, people, and processes in ways that strengthen the entire system.

Within this hidden network, programs intertwine to create a synergistic effect. Seven community grantees became part of Brain Science Training Cohort 7, and 86% of grantees reported gaining a deeper understanding of the Alliance. These inter-connections allowed organizations to rethink their core purpose. One community grantee reflected, “Since engaging with the Alliance, we have completely reframed how we think about our organization. We’ve realized that well-being is central to what we do and have made sure to prioritize it in everything we do.” Here, training informs

grant applications, and evidence reshapes practice, all working together like the young shoots that nourish the forest floor.

The understory also thrives on knowledge-sharing and the cross-pollination of ideas. Peer learning sessions, co-presentations, and cross-organization collaborations form the pathways where trust and collaboration bloom. Participants in the Reverse Science Fair reported an average satisfaction of 4.7/5 for networking, while Brain Science Training participants felt 4.0/5 more connected to a network. These connections are not just numbers; they are the roots of collective

impact. “We’re drawing all sorts of people out of the woodwork... connections I never, ever would have made otherwise,” shared a Reverse Science Fair attendee. Another Brain Science Training participant from Cohort 2 said, “Meeting people [from other organizations] was really valuable because I got to talk to them.” The understory is where these encounters become the fertile ground for future collaboration.

Even within the Alliance itself, the understory thrives through internal processes and a discipline of reflection. Staff working groups, evaluation cycles, and adaptive strategy updates ensure responsiveness and alignment. After participant feedback, Alliance Staff reduced the Brain Science Training video library from 100 to 34, and evaluation used mixed methods, surveys, focus groups, and interviews, to guide its pivots. One community grantee explained the value of that flexibility: “One of the biggest successes I think you folks have hit with these grants is their adaptability. Whenever we reach out to the staff team for questions regarding our grant, they’re quick to respond and are really helpful through the process. We have had to adapt relatively frequently to respond to community needs, small changes in budget and the flexibility you folks have in place allows us to do that. I believe this has been instrumental in actually pinpointing the well-being needs of the community.” The quiet work of internal alignment keeps the ecosystem healthy.

The effects of this interconnected understory ripple outward. Data shows that 87% of surveyed community grantees formed new connections, and 79% strengthened existing relationships. These outcomes demonstrate that the Alliance is an interconnected system that nurtures community capacity and collaboration. As one community grantee reflected, “We have appreciated networking with multiple nonprofit



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**We all remember participating in Science Fairs in school as children. Our Reverse Science Fair is flipping that script... presenting questions instead of answers.**  
 — Megan MacKenzie  
 Director, Knowledge Mobilization & Impact  
 ”



### Reverse Science Fair Highlights

121 participants, including 33 academic partners

4.7/5 average satisfaction for networking and collaboration

Connections sparking future partnerships across sectors

*Bringing community and research together to create actionable collaborations.*

organizations during the course of this project, which has enhanced community capacity in relationships.” The emotional resonance of these relationships is clear: “We met people from UPEI... student wellbeing teams, students, folks that were interested in the services we provide,” said Natasha McKenna from Family Services PEI. Another Cohort 1 participant likened the experience to camp: “It’s kind of like that feeling when you go to camp, you go to camp, you’re hanging out together, and then you’re all hugging at the end of the week. For me, that’s how it felt.”



## The Forest Floor: Lived Experience and Emerging Needs

Beneath the canopy, on the forest floor, stories, feedback, and lived realities settle like fallen leaves. This is where the Alliance listens most closely, where the voices of community grantees, applicants, peer reviewers, training participants, committee members, board and staff gather to reveal the true landscape of community experience. These stories are not just anecdotes; they are the nutrients that guide growth, shaping programs and strategies to stay rooted in the conditions people face every day.

From the ground up, community voices speak of impact and inclusion. One Brain Science Training participant shared, “I have never felt so seen as a person with low vision in my whole career. The Alliance went so far above and beyond to make my experience accessible and inclusive.” One Peer Reviewer reflected on the program’s evolution: “I find as the years progressed that it really improved year by year, by year. This year I found it just exceptional.” These reflections capture the sense of being recognized and supported, affirming the Alliance’s transparency and commitment to improving the user experience.

On this forest floor, challenges rest alongside successes. Seventy-three percent of community grantees expressed a need for more targeted professional development on integrating brain science, while staff noted that the grant application process felt overwhelmingly complex — especially for smaller organizations. “I feel as if we are just scratching the surface,” one Community Grantee admitted. “I believe we could use more PD [professional development] on how the brain is affected by specific ACEs and activities and support that could be available to address these issues.” These insights reveal systemic barriers and gaps, like the need for deeper ACEs training and better access supports for small non-profits, which the Alliance is committed to addressing.

“  
**We have appreciated networking with multiple nonprofit organizations during the course of this project, which has enhanced community capacity in relationships.”**  
— Community Grantee  
”

### The Importance of the Understory

The understory matters because it is the living bridge between the forest floor and the canopy. It is the layer where new growth is protected, nourished, and connected, making the entire system stronger. In the Forest of Mental Well-Being, the understory of shared learning, coordination, and integration ensures that every part of the Alliance is supported. It is in this space, where relationships grow, ideas cross-pollinate, and internal processes quietly adapt, that the forest becomes truly resilient and capable of sustaining well-being for the long term.



Stories of lived /living experience continue to inform program changes, transforming knowledge into empathy and action. One Community Grantee shared: “We have gained a better understanding of why grand families experience trauma... Better understanding now why we advocate [for] education, awareness and support.” This connection between brain science and lived/living experience supports trauma-informed care, advocacy, and practical program design.

Amid the leaf litter of listening, new growth emerges in the form of identified community trends. Cycle 5 Grantee projects focused on farm families and rural youth, while Cycle 4 Grantee projects addressed the needs of migrant workers and familial caregivers. These patterns show how funding remains agile, responding to hyperlocal and emerging needs. By reaching vulnerable populations, familial caregivers, migrant workers, individuals living with sight loss, and those with developmental disabilities, the Alliance demonstrates its commitment to nurturing the well-being of communities across PEI.

Flexibility and adaptation are hallmarks of this ground-level work. “One of the biggest successes I think you folks have hit with these grants is their adaptability,” shared a Community Grantee. “Whenever we reach out to the staff team for questions regarding our grant, they’re quick to respond and are really helpful through the process. We have had to adapt relatively frequently to respond to community needs, small changes in budget and the flexibility you folks have in place allows us to do that. I believe this has been instrumental in actually pinpointing the well-being needs of the community.” It was similar feedback that led to the Brain Science Training redesign, shifting from video-heavy content to more collaborative dialogue.

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**Stories from the forest floor inform practice, highlight emerging needs, and guide adaptive, trauma-informed solutions across PEI.**

“ Having an understanding of how children that live in crisis are impacted and how you can see deficits in their learning from a very young age, to really have a better understanding of how living in that crisis affects living in continuous crisis, and how that can impact and create precursors to addiction and mental health issues.  
— Brain Science Training participant ”



## Flexibility and adaptation are hallmarks of this ground-level work.

### The Importance of the Forest Floor

The forest floor is where regeneration begins. It is where fallen leaves become nutrients, where listening to lived /living experience keeps the Alliance grounded in reality, and where new growth is guided by community needs. By staying attentive to the voices, challenges, and emerging trends that collect here, the Alliance ensures that the Forest of Mental Well-Being continues to thrive, relevant, responsive, and ever rooted in the lives of those it serves.

# New Growth:

## Early Signs of Positive Impact

New growth in the Alliance’s work emerges like the first shoots in a regenerating forest, small but vibrant indicators that transformation is underway. These early developments reveal how knowledge, partnerships, and innovation are taking root to foster the well-being of communities.

Capacity building is one of the clearest signs of this new growth. Seventy-three percent of community grantees report gaining a deeper understanding of how to integrate brain science into their work, a knowledge shift that leads organizations to reimagine themselves. Many have reframed their missions to prioritize well-being as central to their purpose. As one Community Grantee shared, “Since engaging with the Alliance, we have completely reframed how we think about our organization. We’ve realized that well-being is central to what we do and have made sure to prioritize it in everything we do.” Another community grantee noted, “Funds have allowed us to promote upstream mental wellness through... capacity-building, and advocacy.” These skills and perspectives are the roots from which stronger, healthier organizations grow.

Alongside individual growth, the forest floor of the Alliance’s ecosystem is sprouting with new connections and strengthened relationships. Eighty-seven percent of surveyed community grantees reported forming new collaborations through the grant program, while 79% deepened existing partnerships. These relationships are the pathways for future expansion and resilience. As Ashley Travis from the PEI Humane Society explained, “We’ve definitely spoken to a few other organizations that will form partnerships down the road.” These new linkages form the lattice on which a sustainable ecosystem of care can flourish.

the Alliance received applications from  
**34 new organizations.**



Fresh initiatives are the seedlings nurturing this wave of growth. During the 2024 Grant cycle, the Alliance received applications from 34 new organizations. Applications spanned from pilot ideas to fully scaled community programs, fostering an environment where creativity and evidence-based methods flourish together. Encouraging innovation ensures that the forest of mental well-being does not stagnate but continues to branch into new possibilities.

### New Collaborations and Strengthened Partnerships

# 87%

of surveyed community grantees reported forming new collaborations through the grant program, while

# 79%

deepened existing partnerships

These connections are the pathways for future growth, resilience, and a sustainable ecosystem of care across PEI.

“Since engaging with the Alliance, we have completely reframed how we think about our organization. We’ve realized that well-being is central to what we do and have made sure to prioritize it in everything we do.”  
— Community Grantee

Systemic change is also beginning to sprout. Brain Science Training participants, scoring an average of 4.1 out of 5 in confidence, can now explain core brain science principles to others, spreading the seeds of knowledge into broader policy and practice. One Community Grantee reflected, “Our experience being an Alliance Grantee has provided our organization with key opportunities to disseminate knowledge and move forward on policy change in a way that would not have been possible without their support.” In parallel, 97% of participants in one funded program reported feeling less isolated, and 80% of Brain Science Training participants intend to take new actions in their work, tangible signs that individual growth is translating into collective impact.

Community voices amplify the sense of hope that accompanies this new growth. A peer reviewer noted their ongoing commitment, saying they stayed involved because they believe the Alliance is “such an important project for PEI.” Another participant from Brain Science Training shared, “I gained a clearer understanding of the key metaphors and foundational language used to explain brain science in childhood development. This will be extremely useful in designing and implementing programs that are aligned with the Alliance’s framework.” These reflections show that early shoots of progress are already inspiring confidence and momentum throughout the ecosystem.



97%

of participants in one funded program reported feeling less isolated

80%

of Brain Science Training participants intend to take new actions in their work

## The Importance of New Growth

New growth is the sign that the Forest of Mental Well-Being is alive and regenerating. Each skill gained, partnership formed, project launched, and policy shift represents a sapling that will one day contribute to a thriving, resilient ecosystem. Though these shoots are small, they are meaningful indicators that the work is taking root and that a healthier, connected, and preventive approach to community well-being is beginning to flourish.

# Clearing the Path: Reflections and Recommendations

In the process of Clearing the Path, the Alliance takes a deliberate pause to step into the Forest of Mental Well-Being and assess where branches and brush may block the journey forward. This reflection is not about reshaping the forest itself but ensuring that the trail remains clear for those who journey through it next.

In Cycle 5, communication adjustments made along the trail led to a “noticeable reduction in process-related questions” from Grant applicants and Peer Reviewers. By improving how the path was marked, fewer travellers became confused. Peer Reviewers observed that certain scoring rubrics lacked clarity, leading to the reflection: “Some of the scoring questions might have been too broad or vague for me to assign a score with confidence.” Through these observations, the Alliance learned to better trim the undergrowth of uncertainty, turning lessons into immediate refinements for future cycles.

Staff experiences also revealed where fallen logs of capacity strain slowed progress. During the Cycle 5 grant application period, one team member reported working “50 hours a week for about two months”, an indicator of the heavy labour required to keep the path clear. The integrated model, though fertile and robust, is “not always easy to explain, within the staff team and also externally.” This recognition highlights the weight of managing a trail system that interconnects grants, training, and research, while balancing the ongoing demand for clear wayfinding and collaboration.



From the perspective of the wider community, some travellers along the path desired more tools for their own journey. Community Grantees expressed appreciation for workshops but also felt a tug-of-war between event participation and fulfilling grant commitments: “It’s been nice to see they’ve done a lot of workshops, but sometimes the pressure to participate in the events has been high, when we have been focused on fulfilling our grant activities.” Others noted the need for “more specific professional development on the impact of ACEs,” signalling where new trail markers and supports are needed for smoother travel.

To fully clear the path, the Alliance compiled concrete recommendations that act like trail maintenance plans. These include recruiting more peer reviewers to share the workload, implementing nuanced coaching to guide grant applicants efficiently, and developing a single organization-wide CRM to act as a digital “Stewardship Centre” for mapping every step of the journey. This system will track engagement across multiple cycles, documenting the growth of the Alliance’s network and the ways communities connect to the Forest of Mental Well-Being.

Strategic clarifications also form part of this clearing work. In the Brain Science Training program, the Alliance recognized the need to move beyond individual learning toward systemic impact. Questions arose: How to guide participants after a single session? Which groupings spark local collaboration? Should the canopy of the training extend to policymakers and funders? By answering these, the trail will not only be clear but purposefully directed toward systemic change.

Establishing a Community of Practice Stewards table is another step in tending the path, ensuring that shared goals, community norms, and governance structures keep the trail sustainable. Similarly, refreshing research advisory mandates allows future steps to be taken with evidence in hand, strengthening community-based research partnerships. These combined efforts ensure that funds invested in 63 upstream prevention-focused projects can transform from individual footprints into a well-trodden route toward system-level change. As one Brain Science participant reflected, My biggest takeaway was understanding the science behind it.”

**\$9M**

was invested in

**63**

projects

“These combined efforts ensure that funds invested in 63 upstream prevention-focused projects can transform from individual footprints into a well-trodden route toward system-level change.”

## The Importance of Clearing the Path

Clearing the Path is vital because it ensures that the Forest of Mental Well-Being remains accessible and passable. By identifying obstacles, lightening the load on those who maintain the trail, and sharpening the clarity of each wayfinding sign, the Alliance creates a shared route where future travellers can walk with confidence. Without this ongoing clearing, lessons learned could become lost under layers of leaves, and opportunities for systemic growth could stall in the underbrush. In tending to the path, the Alliance not only reflects but also ensures that the forest continues to thrive for all who enter.



# The Forest as a Whole: A Living System of Care

Through the lens of the forest as a whole, the story of the Alliance emerges as a living ecosystem of mental well-being across PEI. What began as scattered roots, individual programs, disconnected ideas, and isolated efforts, has transformed into an integrated forest where each branch and pathway strengthens the others. The forest thrives because every program, partner, and strategy now contributes to a larger, cohesive system.

Integration is the nutrient-rich soil of this forest. Each component, grants, training, research, and convenings, feeds the others, creating a self-sustaining cycle of growth. For example, Cohort 7 of Brain Science Training was intentionally composed of community grantees, connecting theory to practice and embedding funded projects deeply within the system. This intentional integration creates synergy, ensuring that resilience is not a standalone tree but a canopy of support across the Island.

The forest's growth is evident in the numbers. The Alliance has provided nearly \$9,000,000 to 63 projects focused on upstream prevention, seeding long-term cultural and policy change. These investments are already fostering cross-sector alignment, shifting how communities talk about and act on mental well-being. As one community grantee reflected, "Our experience being an Alliance Grantee has provided our

organization with key opportunities to disseminate knowledge and move forward on policy change." The Alliance's consistent modelling of evidence-based language is like the shared root network of this forest, allowing insights to travel, take root, and nourish collective impact.

The experience of community members shows the forest in action. At Milton Community Hall, accessible and inclusive spaces support individuals to build relationships, develop life skills, and access support in a non-stigmatizing environment. Workshops, social events, and community meals, offer up opportunities for people of all ages to develop key life skills—such as self-regulation, planning, and adaptability—while building meaningful connections.

Brain Science Training participants also describe the value of shared learning: "It just helps that now everyone that I work with or most people that I work with have this knowledge, so it's easier to talk about it in a way that we'll understand because we kind of have the same terminology."

– Brain Science Training Participant.

This shared knowledge acts like sunlight filtering through the canopy, reaching every branch and leaf.



**Grants span sectors including Education, Agriculture, Health, Recreation, and Arts/Culture, supporting small organizations and vulnerable populations.**

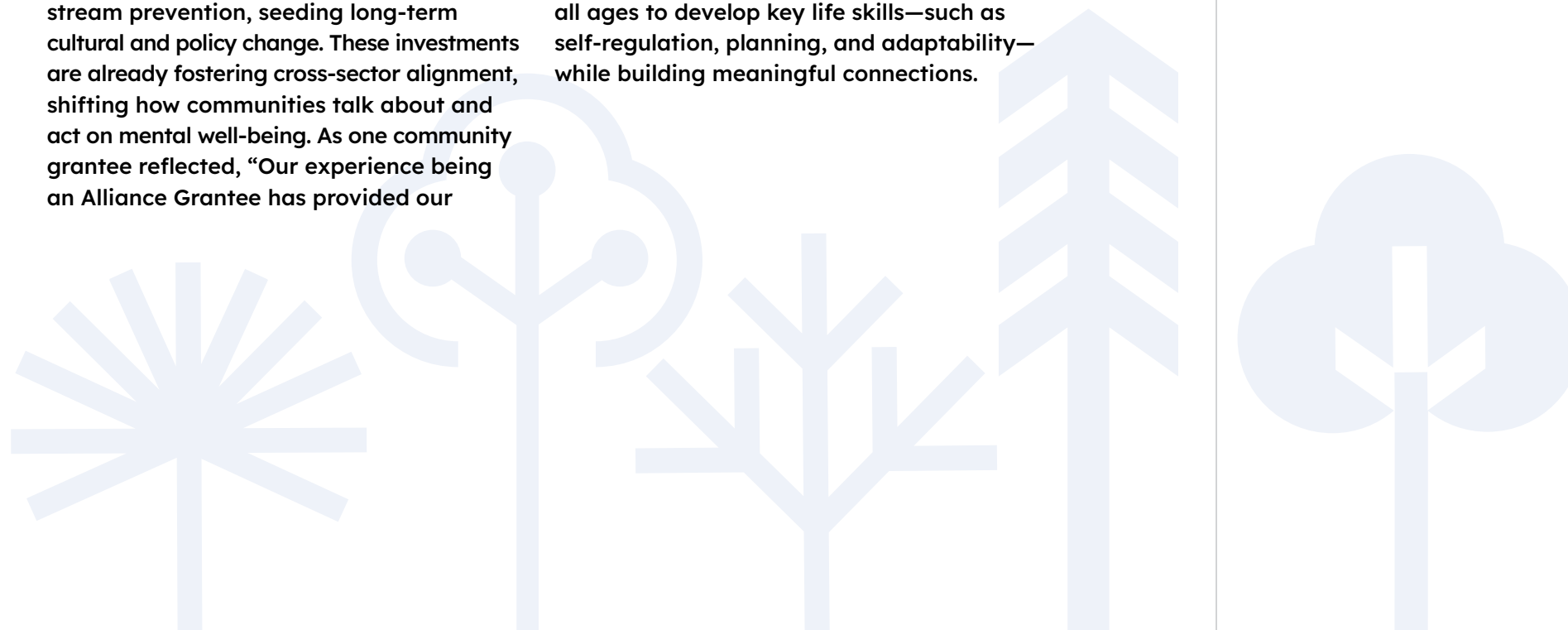


### The Value of Shared Learning

"It just helps that now everyone I work with... have the same terminology, so it's easier to talk about it in a way we'll understand."

– Brain Science Training Participant

Shared knowledge acts like sunlight through the canopy, reaching every branch and leaf of communities across PEI.



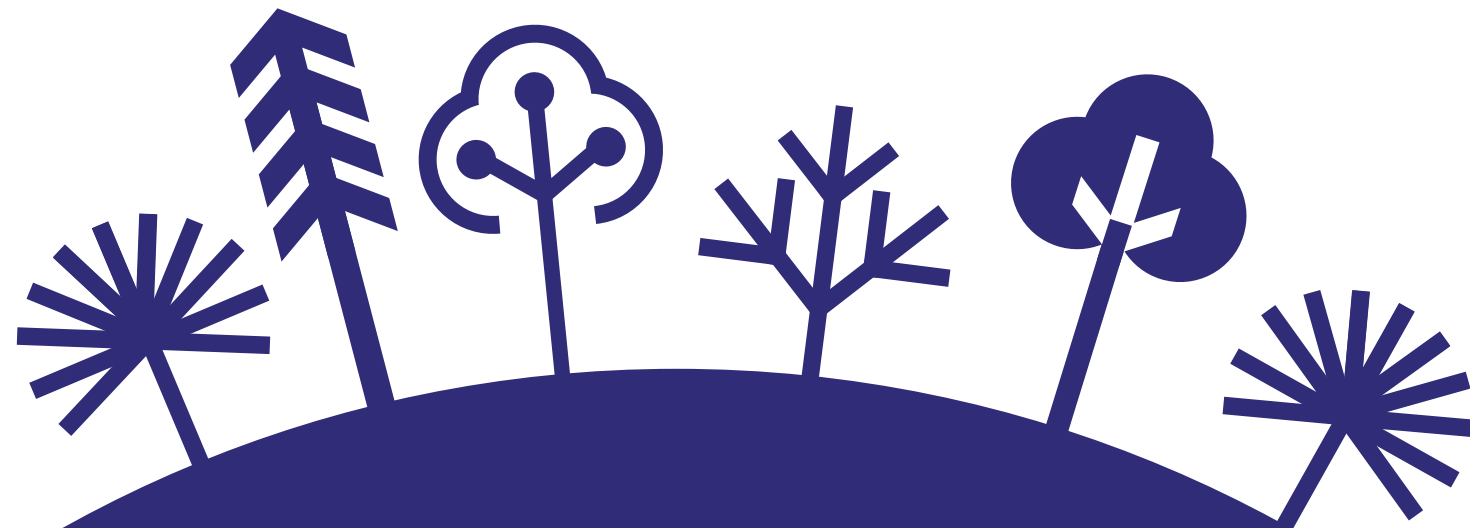
## WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

Looking ahead, the forest is poised to mature into a complex, self-sustaining ecosystem over the next 5 to 10 years. Its vision is clear: strong partnerships for collective impact, a unified strategy for mental well-being in PEI, and the breaking of intergenerational trauma cycles. “The Alliance’s approach moves beyond traditional grant-making to a model of active partnership and capacity-building. The Alliance isn’t just about giving out grants; it’s about walking alongside organizations.”

– *Community Grantee.*

This is a forest where culture is shifting toward prevention, rigor, and interconnected care. Peer Reviewers in Cycle 5 demonstrated this commitment, advancing only 6 applications to prioritize quality over quantity, ensuring that every new growth strengthens the whole system. These choices, like strategic pruning, allow the forest to channel its energy where it will flourish most.

“  
**This is a forest  
where culture is shifting  
toward prevention,  
rigor, and interconnected  
care.**  
”



## The Importance of the Forest as a Whole

A forest cannot thrive if we only focus on individual trees. Considering the forest as a whole ensures that the Alliance’s efforts nurture an ecosystem where shared knowledge, trusted relationships, and collective impact interweave into lasting change. In the Forest of Mental Well-Being, true resilience grows not from isolated programs, but from the living, breathing system they create together.

## FAREWELL MESSAGE

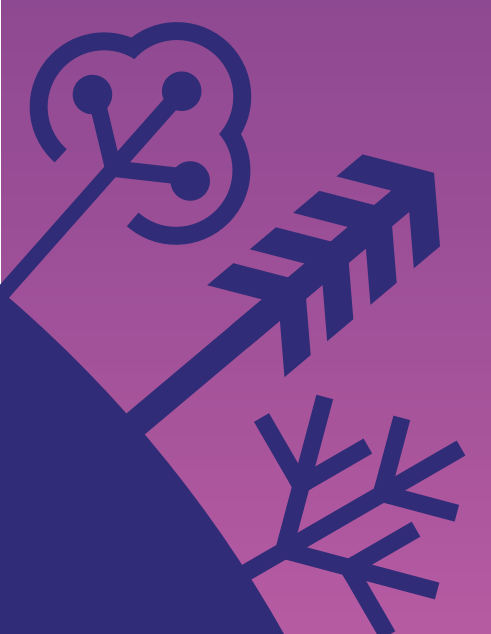
As we draw this journey to a close, let us pause to acknowledge the path we have taken together. This space has held our reflections, our intentions, and our shared commitment to growth. Through each thought, note, and insight, we have explored the landscapes of our own well-being, discovering strength in vulnerability and hope in connection.

Our collective work does not end here... it continues by working to create the conditions for meaningful transformation in communities that support mental well-being for everyone who calls Prince Edward Island home.

Guided by our Mission, Vision, and Purpose, we are united in the belief that every individual deserves support, understanding, and the opportunity to thrive. Through collaboration, we embrace our values as the tools that will allow us to bring these ideals to life, working side by side to cultivate resilience, foster inclusion, and nurture a culture of care.

Though this chapter concludes, its echoes will guide us forward, reminding us that the work of nurturing mental well-being is both individual and shared. The roots we have planted here will continue to grow, supporting us as we face new challenges with courage and compassion, and as we strive together to realize our shared vision for a healthier, more connected Prince Edward Island.

Let us keep moving through  
the Forest of Mental Well-Being... together.



# WITH THANKS

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## RESEARCH ADVISORY TABLE MEMBERS, 2024-2025

**Bill Montelpare (Co-Chair)**

Health Centered Research Network, UPEI

**Megan MacKenzie (Co-Chair)**

Alliance For Mental Well-Being

**Nicole Peters**

Mental Health & Addictions, Health PEI

**Amanda Hudson**

Mental Health & Addictions, Health PEI

**Shamara Baidooonso**

Chief Public Health Office

**Mary-Ann Standing**

Centre for Health & Community Research,  
UPEI

- **Kate Kelly**
- Centre for Health & Community Research,  
UPEI
- **Michael McIsaac**
- Faculty of Mathematical & Computer  
Science, UPEI
- **Emily Cook-McDonald**
- Literacy Outreach Project, UPEI
- **Rebecca Mok**
- Office of Commercialization, Industry,  
& Innovation, UPEI
- **Sarah Visser**
- Alliance For Mental Well-Being

## PEER REVIEW COMMITTEE

Our Peer Review Committee is responsible for evaluating grant program applications against specific and clear criteria and making recommendations to the Board for funding approval. Our formalized Peer Review adjudication process ensures an independent review of applications; supports management of real and perceived conflict of interest; and facilitates diverse representation of the PEI context in the grant decision-making process. Peer Reviewers dedicate a considerable amount of time to this process, and we truly value and appreciate their investment.

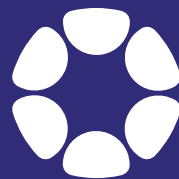
## FUNDERS

Thank you to our funders for supporting our work.



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