

Youth Mental Health Hubs

SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS-LED IMPLEMENTATION

Acknowledgements

PolicyWise for Children & Families (PolicyWise) would like to acknowledge that Youth Mental Health Hubs work is taking place in 13 communities across Treaty 6, 7, and 8 territories. We acknowledge the many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit whose footsteps have marked these lands for generations. It has been a privilege to work alongside and learn from Elders, youth, families, and partners in the following Indigenous communities and Indigenous post-secondary institution located in Treaty 6 territory: Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, Enoch Cree Nation, Samson Cree Nation, and Maskwacis Cultural College (which serves Samson Cree Nation, Ermineskin Cree Nation, Louis Bull Tribe, and Montana Cree Nation).



PolicyWise would like to thank *Elder Sharon Pasula*. As a person of Nehiyaw-Metis/Jewish ancestry, Sharon played a unique role in the project through ceremony, spiritual guidance, and consultation. We are grateful for her role modeling of traditional practices and for her commitment to building bridges through shared knowledge.

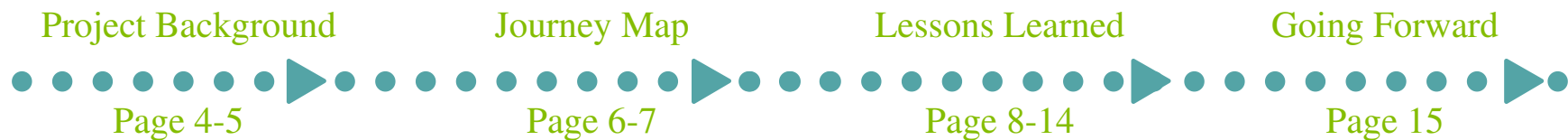
PolicyWise would also like to thank the *Mental Health Foundation* for the additional funding provided to support the implementation of community-based Youth Mental Health Hubs.



Mental Health Foundation

Overview

This journey map is written from the perspective of PolicyWise staff in consultation with their Indigenous communities and/or partner organizations located in Treaty 6 territory. The purpose of this journey map is to contextualize the implementation experience in Indigenous communities and/or partner organizations and share lessons learned to guide provincial support of Indigenous-based Youth Mental Health Hubs. We share these lessons in the spirit of continuous learning in hopes of fostering allyship between provincial ministries in supporting Indigenous-led Youth Mental Health Hubs.



To take best advantage of the graphics in this document and with the environment in consideration, we decided to make this a digital journey map that is best viewed in PDF. To zoom in to any specific graphic, hold the alt or option button and scroll up with your mouse.



Project Background

In 2017 PolicyWise was contracted by Alberta Health, a provincial government ministry, to support the development, implementation, and evaluation of community-based Youth Mental Health Hubs to address mental health needs of youth across Alberta. Early on, parameters, defined by current evidence and contextual needs, were outlined for the Youth Mental Health Hubs project.

The parameters included an emphasis on: small-to-medium population centres; shifting existing community resources to create locally-led solutions to better meet addiction and mental health needs of youth ages 11-24; integrated service delivery across health and social sectors; and, authentic engagement of youth and their families. The overarching goal of the project was, through integrated service delivery hubs, to: enhance youth engagement and empowerment in their care; promote early identification and intervention of mental health concerns; and improve service coordination and integration.

For the project, the Youth Mental Health Hubs were defined as a service delivery ‘entity’ that connects multiple, cross-sectoral community partners to increase access to mental health supports for youth ages 11-24. We worked in 13 different communities, which included three Indigenous communities and one Indigenous land base, spanning a geographic area of over 660,000 km².

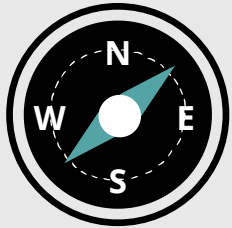
Project Approach

Developmental evaluation provides an examination of current emerging practices, while identifying potential areas where changes can be implemented. It is meant to promote the strengths of an initiative while identifying opportunities to develop greater capacity. Using developmental evaluation activities throughout the implementation process allowed PolicyWise to respond quickly to the needs of Indigenous communities and/or partner organizations. As with all communities that have been involved, the lessons learned throughout implementation have been reflected in the core elements of the provincial implementation and operational approach*. The direct focus of this document is to bring attention to specific considerations when supporting Indigenous communities and/or partner organizations to lead this work.



**For a detailed description of the provincial implementation and operational approach and evidence please contact PolicyWise.*

Journey Map

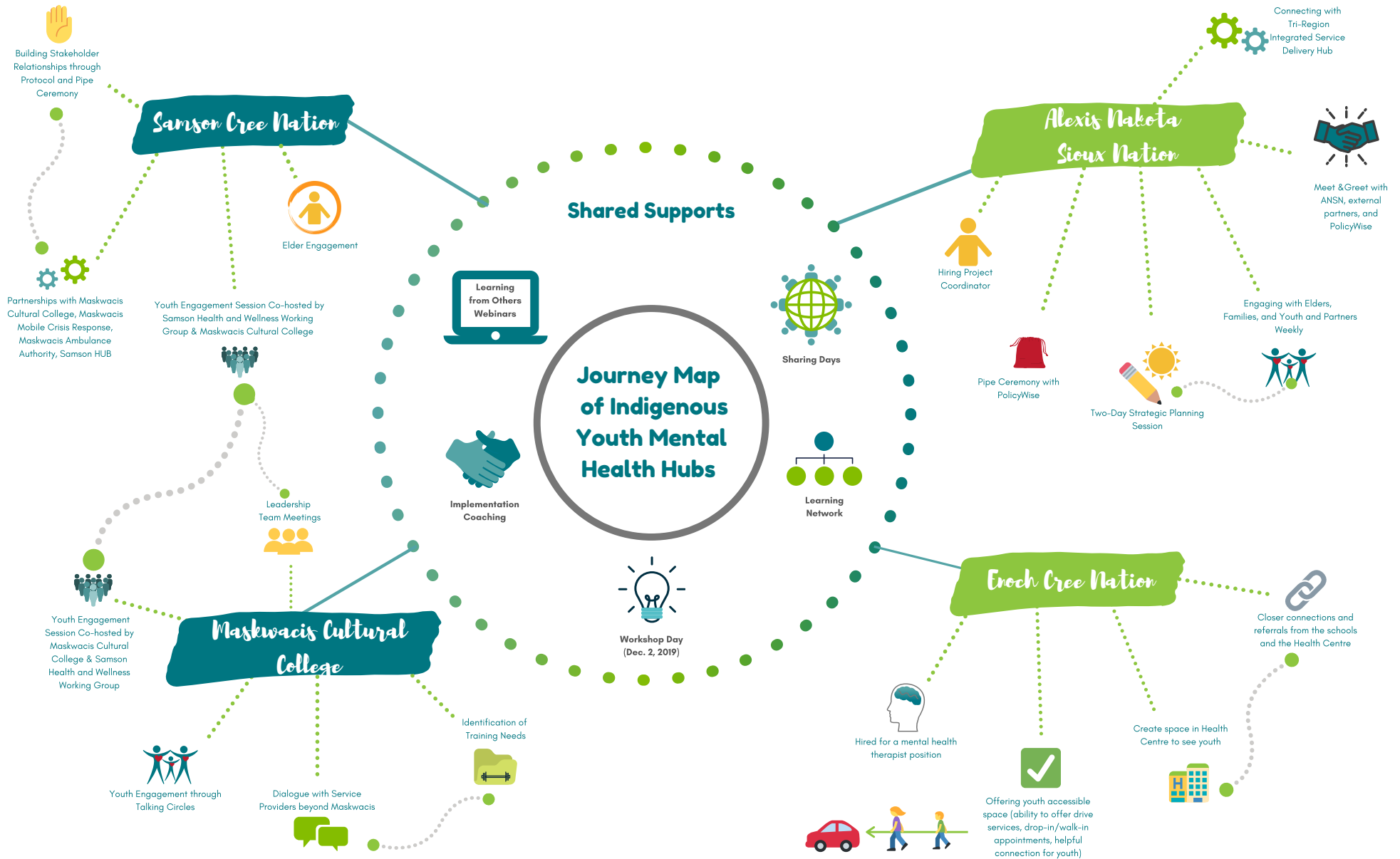


This journey map represents select milestones achieved from the start of the grant in May 2019 up until March 2020. PolicyWise supported the development of Indigenous Youth Mental Health Hubs through two types of grants to work through Phase 2: Capacity & Readiness or Phase 3: Plan & Prepare.

These grants facilitated momentum of work that was often already occurring in the Indigenous communities and/or partner organizations and offered a shared provincial approach that could be adapted to local context. The existing relationships and community practices enabled each Indigenous community and/or partner organization to apply the framework in ways that made sense to them to further promote accessibility and integration of youth services.

Please refer to the next page which illustrates highlights from the different Indigenous-led implementation experiences.





Legend:

Capacity & Readiness

Plan & Prepare

Lessons Learned

When supporting Indigenous-led implementation of Youth Mental Health Hubs:

1 Follow the lead of each Indigenous community and/or partner organization to ensure appropriate protocol and cultural practices are honoured.

2 Build meaningful relationships by getting to know each other.

3 Acknowledge the intergenerational historical trauma of residential schools and systemic barriers in order to begin reconciliation through collaborative dialogue.

4 Support the involvement of a cultural resource person to help bridge Indigenous and western practices.

5 Recognize that Indigenous people are always connected to their nation, regardless of where they reside.

6 Understand that youth are nested in circles of holistic support based on kinship practices.

Please refer to the next six pages to read about what each of these lessons look like in practice and how the lesson is reflected in the core elements of the provincial implementation and operational approach.



Lessons Learned

1 Follow the lead of each Indigenous community and/or partner organization to ensure appropriate protocol and cultural practices are honoured.

All Indigenous communities and/or partner organizations shared with us the importance of Elder protocol. When an Elder is present in Indigenous work, a tobacco offering is made along with the request to open a meeting. Agenda items are presented to the Elder with the knowledge that their guidance will get the group to where they need to be, regardless of whether the agenda items are discussed or not. Once this request is made and tobacco is accepted, the Elder will offer their presence and may share teachings they carry to support or guide meeting outcomes. This lead must be followed out of respect and recognition of the wisdom Elders hold in their community.

Beyond engaging with Elders, each Indigenous community and/or partner organization may have different protocols and expectations that will guide the ways of working and communicating with external organizations. While a signed contract is the norm for western practices, some Indigenous communities and/or partner organizations may want to signify the start of the work by holding a pipe ceremony. For example, some Indigenous communities and/or partner organizations pray and smudge at the start of each meeting while others do not. Indigenous communities and/or partner organizations may also use a mix of western and Indigenous practices such as an agenda and sharing circles. The interactions PolicyWise had with each Indigenous community and/or partner organization were different and we learned quickly not to assume that a protocol followed in one meeting would happen at the next because the context could be different. This meant that PolicyWise checked in with primary contacts from each Indigenous community and/or partner organization regularly when developing support activities and followed their lead.



In-person Learning Network events such as Sharing Days open with prayer and smudge by an Elder. These practices are optional to participate in to demonstrate respect for the culture differences among Indigenous communities and/or partner organizations.

Lessons Learned

2 Build meaningful relationships by getting to know each other.

Relationships take time to build. As an organization external to the Indigenous community and/or partner organization, do not assume that you will be trusted. PolicyWise needed to slow the implementation process down to allow for building relationship. This was best accomplished by meeting in-person with the primary project contact over coffee or lunch to learn about each other's backgrounds, extending the professional relationship into a more personal one. Building rapport with a primary contact from each Indigenous community and/or partner organization resulted in an extension of trust within the community as PolicyWise could then be vouched for.

When building the relationship with Indigenous community and/or partner organization, it is important to take introductions beyond the typical statement about your profession. Begin by stating where you are from, where you grew up, who your parents and even grandparents are, and acknowledge your role as a settler if you are one. If possible, learn a greeting in their Indigenous language and ask for help with pronunciation. At each subsequent gathering, spend time talking without an agenda. These are often where the greatest moments of understanding will be revealed to create shared understanding. During the process mistakes will be made but by expressing humility, acknowledging what we do not know, and making the best effort to do what is right, mutual trust will form.



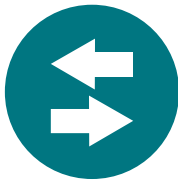
Implementation coaches are supported to do as much in-person work with Indigenous communities and/or partner organizations as possible, especially when initially beginning the work. There are no timelines imposed for any of the implementation phases to allow time for meaningful relationship building.

Lessons Learned

3 Acknowledge the historical intergenerational trauma of residential schools and systemic barriers in order to begin reconciliation through collaborative dialogue.

Implementation of Youth Mental Health Hubs is complex and this complexity is compounded in Indigenous communities and/or partner organizations by the intergenerational historical trauma of residential schools and systemic barriers. While communities are expected to knit together existing services, many Indigenous communities and/or partner organizations do not have sufficient funding for services to begin with. These inequities were often shared with PolicyWise through the safe spaces of talking circles during in-person sharing days.

Hosting regular, in-person sharing days was a large benefit to bring each Indigenous community and/or partner organization closer together as well as closer with PolicyWise. Talking circles created a safe space for everyone to discuss historical trauma and systemic barriers and begin thinking about ways to move forward with implementation of integrated service delivery hubs as an act of reconciliation. It is the responsibility of non-Indigenous stakeholders to become better allies and advocates through self-directed education. PolicyWise staff did this through familiarization with United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), Truth and Reconciliation Commission documents, and seeking out Indigenous-designed learning opportunities such as the University of Alberta's Indigenous Canada massive open online course (MOOC).



Indigenous sharing days are part of the Learning Network to provide a format for collaborative dialogue and deeper understanding of historical traumas that shape current realities. To protect against perpetuating barriers, the Evaluation Framework is adaptable to Indigenous methods of data collection and follows the principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP) to ensure raw and analyzed data are shared in full with Indigenous communities and/or partner organizations.

Lessons Learned

Support the involvement of a cultural resource person to bridge Indigenous and western practices.

It is important to find someone with Indigenous background who can lend support to the project. This person may be an Elder, cultural resource person, or knowledge keeper. Elder Sharon Pasula was recommended to PolicyWise for her ability to develop meaningful relationships through finding parallels that bridge Indigenous and western practices. This looked like adapting in person activities to use methods like sharing circles and working through how to respectfully adapt a sharing circle to allow for open discussion. A cultural resource person observes, offers guidance, insights, and suggestions to improve relationships and ways of working. It is understood that there is a spiritual component to all of the work. While PolicyWise worked under the best of intentions, we made mistakes along the way and were given genuine feedback from our cultural resource person that we responded to seriously. As an external organization, it was our responsibility to be accountable and work towards decolonizing practices in our role of facilitator and of learner.

Beyond bridging Indigenous and western practices, cultural resource persons help to build relationships within and across Indigenous communities. When working to find common ways of working across Indigenous communities and all Youth Mental Health Hubs communities in Alberta, the purpose of a cultural resource person is significant. Elder Sharon helped to acknowledge individual practices among nations and sought to create an environment of acknowledging Creator at all times.



Implementation coaches and Indigenous communities and/or partner organizations are supported in building relationship through consultation with a cultural resource person. Recommendations are made in the collaborative governance structure to include the cultural and spiritual guidance of Elders for oversight of ongoing provincial implementation and operation of integrated service delivery hubs in Alberta.

Lessons Learned

5 Recognize that Indigenous people are always connected to their nation, regardless of where they reside.

While many Youth Mental Health Hubs are place-based, those that are Indigenous-led will serve an extended outreach focus to ensure supports for their people regardless of where they are located. This was not something that PolicyWise was aware of prior to beginning the project as eligible communities and/or land base areas were initially defined through parameters of small to medium population centres. For example, an Indigenous community may only have 500 people living on reserve, but their membership may actually put them in the category of a small population centre with over 1,000 people.

Whether a youth is urban or on reserve, they are always part of their nation and have rights to service access that fits their cultural and spiritual needs. This has implications for accessibility which must take into account the need for provincial level promotion of all integrated service delivery hubs through a common website and service directories so that communities who serve Indigenous youth are aware of cultural and spiritual supports through Indigenous-led Youth Mental Health Hubs.



The Implementation Framework emphasizes a variety of delivery modalities for Youth Mental Health Hubs which do not need to be place-based and can extend service reach through network, pop-up event, or mobile supports.

Lessons Learned

6 Understand that Indigenous youth are nested in circles of holistic support based on kinship practices.

In working with Indigenous communities and/or partner organizations, many expressed that the initial Youth Mental Health Hubs age parameters of 11-24 did not fit with their care practices. Indigenous care is holistic and involves complex kinship networks that extend throughout the whole community. Western concepts of mental health do not always fit with this understanding. Many of the Indigenous language words used to describe kinship and care practices also do not adequately translate into English. This can result in tensions when trying to reach shared understanding of how to support Indigenous youth who live between traditional and western worlds.

The involvement of youth within Indigenous communities and/or partner organizations right from the start has provided clarity on this tension. Youth have made it clear that the inclusion of Elders and family support is crucial to their well-being as well as to the health of the community. Youth want greater family connection and awareness of mental health concerns, and this requires supporting family members across a spectrum of ages.



The 11-24 age parameter is not included as a required component of integrated service delivery hubs to reflect that it may be an arbitrary distinction in Indigenous communities and/or partner organizations. The language used in the Implementation Framework became less clinical and better represents holistic approaches to prevention and early intervention to support broader concepts of mental wellness.

Going Forward

We recognized through our collaborative work with Indigenous communities and/or partner organizations that intergenerational trauma, entrenched racism, systemic barriers, and local history have an impact on the implementation of integrated service delivery hubs. Each Indigenous community and/or partner organization takes a different approach to implementation of integrated service delivery hubs that works well within their context and continues to adapt their approaches accordingly. Throughout the project, PolicyWise has witnessed a tremendous amount of effort by all communities and/or partner organizations across the province to embrace Youth Mental Health Hubs while maintaining local and cultural context.

These lessons emerged through hundreds of hours of communication with Elders, youth and Indigenous partners over the course of one year. As integrated service delivery hubs continue to evolve, more lessons will be learned based on continued co-development of implementation and operational practices.

PolicyWise is honoured to have built meaningful relationships with the Indigenous communities and/or partner organizations throughout the integrated service delivery hub project. We have learned much from our Indigenous partners and hope to impart what we have taken away from the experience for continued implementation of Youth Mental Health Hubs that is Indigenous-led and provincially supported.



Primary Contributors

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Project Sponsor

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Sharing Guidelines

It is the hope of all those who contributed to this project that these findings are shared and used to benefit others and inform policy and practice to improve relationships between Indigenous communities and/or partner organizations as well as stakeholders involved in integrated service delivery hubs in Alberta. All third party and general public communications relating to this journey map or Indigenous-led Youth Mental Health Hubs requires pre-approval from respective participants via PolicyWise for Children & Families.

