RNAO and the Mental Health & Addiction Initiative

The Registered Nurses’ Association of Ontario (RNAO) is the professional association representing registered nurses, nurse practitioners and nursing students in Ontario, Canada.

The Mental Health and Addiction Initiative, a program within the International Affairs and Best Practice Guidelines Centre, focuses on the development and dissemination of guidelines, and capacity building, knowledge development and advocacy to achieve mental health and addiction system transformation.

Intersectoral Collaboration & the Public Health Nurse

Public Health is a respected partner within the community, school boards and local schools. Public health nurses:
- Support school health promotion and community development through their knowledge and expertise related to mental health and substance use
- Apply youth engagement principles when working with students in schools and the community
- Mobilize community resources to enhance collaboration
- Leverage existing connections, professional relationships and partnerships in local communities
- Support the delivery of various youth mental health and substance use initiatives within the school and community
- Advocate for children and youth to thrive in our communities

YMHAC Initiative Background and Objective

The RNAO Youth Mental Health and Addiction Champion (YMHAC) Initiative improves the health and well-being of children and youth. The YMHAC initiative objectives include:
- Raise awareness among children and youth about mental illness, mental health, and substance use
- Support overall well-being of children and youth
- Reduce stigma related to mental illness and substance use
- Develop the leadership and facilitation skills of children and youth

Components of the YMHAC Initiative

- Orientation training for youth and adult allies (public health nurses or other staff, school leaders, teachers and school board social workers)
- Foundational training for children and youth
- Development of a Youth Champion cohort within schools and communities
- Development of youth-led implementation projects in schools across the Province of Ontario
- Active promotion and communication regarding the Initiative
- Partnership activities focused on collaboration and networking to strengthen local supports and build school and community capacity

Implementation Toolkit

The YMHAC Toolkit supports youth and adult allies in implementing a youth-led transformation strategy in school and community settings
- Developed in collaboration with youth leaders as partners
- Provides interactive and user-friendly access to implementation ready tools and resources
- Web-based resource with option to print
- Available in English and French

ymhac.RNAO.ca

Impact of the YMHAC Initiative

- Creation of an accessible youth-friendly toolkit with resources to address local issues regarding mental health and illness, stigma reduction and substance use
- Leveraging thousands of Youth Champions within existing school programs
- Development of intersectoral partnerships between health, education and social services
- Acceptance of mental illness and substance use and reduction of stigma
- Integration of the YMHAC Initiative into existing curriculum in schools and in public health programs for long-term sustainability
- Increased reach of the YMHAC Initiative in Boards of Education (English and French) and public health units across the Province of Ontario

To learn more about RNAO’s IABPG Centre, please visit RNAO.ca/bpg
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