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**CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

**Impacts of COVID-19 on the Mental Health and  
Well-Being of Children, Youth and Families -  
The RCYBC Perspective**

**Focus Disability  
March 12-2021**



# COVID Impacts on Mental Health

- Who is the RCY?
- What is our vantage point on mental health?
- Pre-COVID considerations
- What has COVID illuminated?
  - Rapid research reports
  - Left Out report



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# RCY: the Foundation

- Independent office - separate from government
- Representative reports to all-party committee: Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth
- Vision is to advocate for and influence fundamental and enduring positive change in the systems of care for children, youth and young adults.



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# The 6 Rs



## Children's Mental Health

- Social + emotional wellbeing
  - A resource for living + learning
  - Enables resilience in the face of adversity
  - Essential for all children to flourish + meet their potential
- Yet many children experience mental disorders
  - Causing distress, symptoms and impairment
  - Interfering with healthy development
  - Leading cause of childhood disability worldwide

# Pre-COVID State

RCY Reports on mental health and well-being

- 13 reports - 32 mental health recommendations

Ongoing legacy recommendations:

- availability of and funding for effective and responsive treatment and care including residential and support services
- policy and standards ensuring active oversight of and accountability in planning and delivery of services
- clinical consultation, training, and support to residential staff, social workers, and policy makers
- early identification and intervention for mental health and substance use (Education, MCFD, and Health)
- focus on Indigenous children and youth
- focus on parental mental health



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# RCY Active Reports/Recommendations

- Missing Pieces: Joshua's Story (2017)
- Time to Listen: Youth Voices on Substance Use (2018)
- A Parent's Duty: Government's Obligation to Youth Transitioning into Adulthood (2020)
- Detained: Rights of Children and Youth Under the Mental Health Act (2021)

# Common themes

- Voluntary system of mental health support, care and treatment is sorely lacking
- Current systems of mental health support, care and treatment are often not experienced by young people as culturally safe or attuned or as oriented towards healing
- Parental mental health is a key resource for child mental health and well-being
- Children and youth with co-occurring concerns e.g. CYSN and MH are left out



## Needs Were Already High Pre-COVID

| Disorder                                 | Prevalence (%) | Age (y)     | Estimated Population Affected (#) |                |
|--|----------------|-------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|
|  |                |             | BC                                | Canada         |
| Anxiety Disorders                        | 5.2            | 4–18        | 38,800                            | 317,800        |
| Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder | 3.7            | 4–18        | 27,600                            | 226,100        |
| Oppositional-Defiant Disorder            | 3.3            | 4–18        | 24,600                            | 201,700        |
| Substance Use Disorders                  | 2.3            | 12–18       | 8,200                             | 65,300         |
| Major Depressive Disorder                | 1.3            | 4–18        | 9,700                             | 79,400         |
| Conduct Disorder                         | 1.3            | 4–18        | 9,700                             | 79,400         |
| Autism Spectrum Disorder                 | 0.4            | 4–18        | 3,000                             | 24,400         |
| Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder            | 0.3            | 4–18        | 2,200                             | 18,300         |
| Bipolar Disorder                         | 0.3            | 12–18       | 1,100                             | 8,500          |
| Eating Disorders                         | 0.2            | 12–18       | 700                               | 5,700          |
| Posttraumatic Stress Disorder            | 0.1            | 4–18        | 700                               | 6,100          |
| Schizophrenia                            | 0.1            | 12–18       | 400                               | 2,800          |
| <b>Any Disorder</b>                      | <b>12.7</b>    | <b>4–18</b> | <b>94,800</b>                     | <b>776,100</b> |

Figure 11: Mental health concerns highlighted in Care Plans for First Nations children and youth in care



## Needs Were Already High Pre-COVID

- Only a minority of children with mental disorders receive any mental health help
- Effective services such as parent training and cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) remain in short supply
- Underlying causal problems also often go unaddressed, i.e., avoidable adversities such as socioeconomic disparities and child maltreatment

# COVID-19 = Loss for Children

- Daily activities
- School/daycare routines
- Relationships - family/peers
- Special events/  
celebrations
- Cultural events/  
ceremonies
- Parental employment
- Family members
- Sense of security/safety



## **Supporting Children — By Supporting Practitioners and Families During COVID-19 and Beyond**

Rapid Research Review on  
Effective Approaches for Reducing Childhood Anxiety

June 2020



Christine Schwartz  
Donna Yung  
Jen Barican  
Daphne Gray-Grant  
Charlotte Waddell



Children's  
Health Policy  
Centre

SFU  
FACULTY OF  
HEALTH SCIENCES



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## **COVID-19 and the Impact on Children's Mental Health**

A Research Report

November 2020



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Christine Schwartz  
Jen Barican  
Donna Yung  
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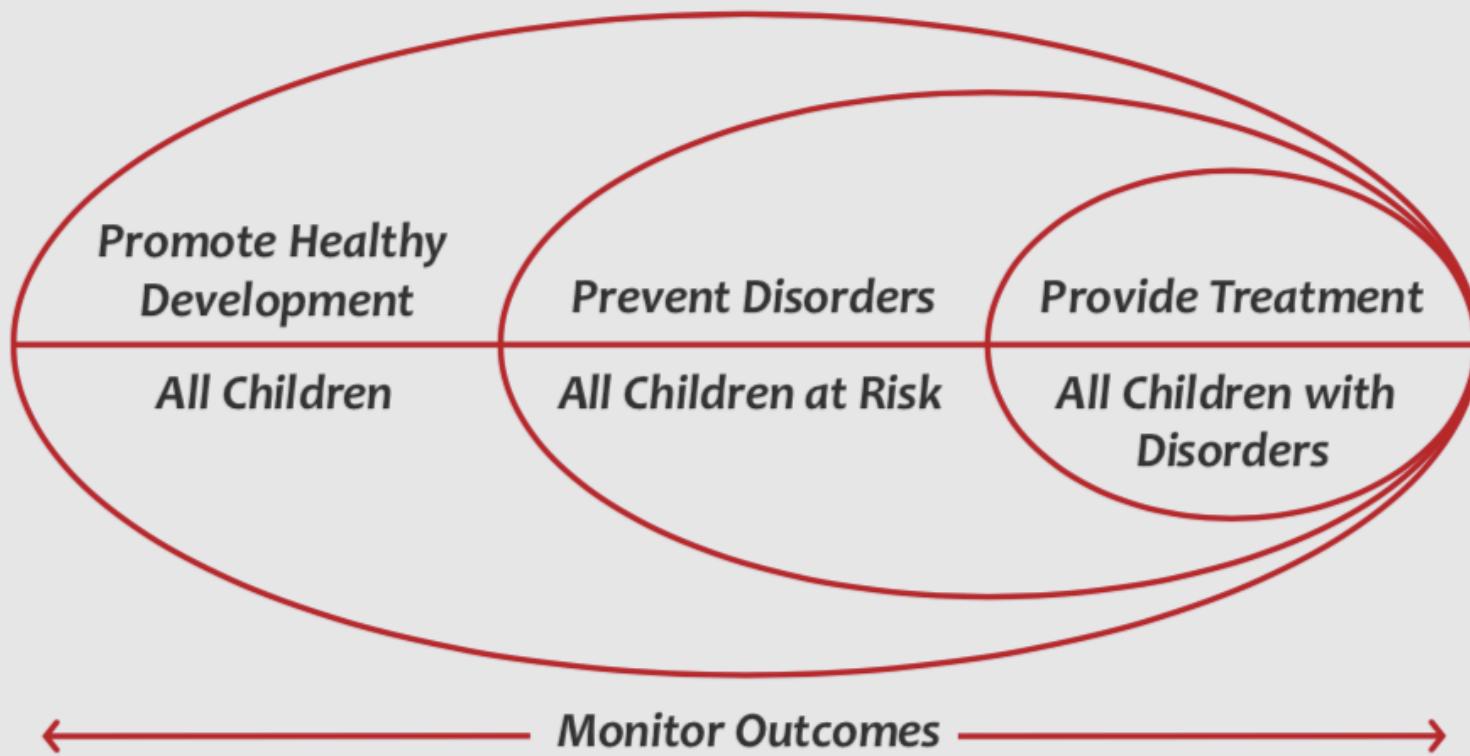


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## Needs Will Increase During COVID and Beyond

- Certain disorders are predicted to increase markedly
  - Anxiety, behaviour disorders, depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as well as problematic substance use
  - Potential tenfold increases for those most severely affected (convenience samples)
- Some children will be disproportionately affected
  - Those experiencing serious socioeconomic or health or developmental adversities — now exacerbated by increased parent/family stresses and reduced/disrupted services including schools

## Population Strategy for Children's Mental Health



## Preventable Childhood Mental Disorders

| Disorder                                 | Prevalence (%) | Age (y) | Estimated Population Affected (#) |         |
|--|----------------|---------|-----------------------------------|---------|
|  |                |         | BC                                | Canada  |
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| Posttraumatic Stress Disorder            | 0.1            | 4–18    | 700                               | 6,100   |
| Schizophrenia                            | 0.1            | 12–18   | 400                               | 2,800   |
| Any Disorder                             | 12.7           | 4–18    | 94,800                            | 776,100 |

## Treatable Childhood Mental Disorders

| Disorder                                 | Prevalence (%) | Age (y) | Estimated Population Affected (#) |         |
|--|----------------|---------|-----------------------------------|---------|
|  |                |         | BC                                | Canada  |
| Anxiety Disorders                        | 5.2            | 4–18    | 38,800                            | 317,800 |
| Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder | 3.7            | 4–18    | 27,600                            | 226,100 |
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## Improving Children's Mental Health in BC

- View children's mental health challenges and opportunities across the whole-of-government
- Sustain and expand effective prevention programs with “long-wave” impact, e.g., Nurse-Family Partnership
- Improve on pre-pandemic children's mental health treatment service reach — by expanding services
  - Need to reach all children with disorders
- Ensure that effective services are offered

# Left Out: Children and youth with special needs in the pandemic

December 2020



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# Collaborative Approach

## With Community Partners and Families

Aboriginal Infant Development Programs  
Aboriginal Supported Child Development  
ACT - Autism Community Training  
BCED Access  
BC Association for Child Development and Intervention  
BC Parents of Complex Kids  
Family Support Institute of BC  
First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition  
Federation of Community Social Services of BC  
Inclusion BC

PLUS 10 families from throughout B.C. who shared their stories and experiences

We extend our deep gratitude to all the Community Partners and families.



# Five Revelations

- Pandemic is amplifying the inadequacies of the CYSN system and has worsened gaps, shortfalls and failures
- Equitable support for children and youth with special needs and their families does not meet international standards as reflected in the UNCRC and UNCRPD

# Five Revelations

- Transparent and consistent plan is critical to ensure families receive supports and benefits made available in extraordinary times
- Especially during the pandemic, CYSN families need flexible strategies
- Failure to provide adequate and consistent needs-based support for CYSN families is causing long-term harm

# Representative's Call to Action

Government:  
immediately re-engage  
with Community  
Partners on the design,  
development and  
implementation  
strategy for the new  
CYSN framework



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# Sustaining attention

Research at SFU, UBC, UofO

- Fong, V., Birmingham, E., & Iarocci, G. (2020). Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on families of autistic children in British Columbia [Report]. Simon Fraser University.
- Baumbusch, Jennifer; Lamden-Bennett, Shawna R.; Lloyd, Jennifer E. V. 2020. The Impact of COVID- 19 on British Columbia's Children with Medical Complexity and their Families.
- BC Children's Hospital Personal Impacts of COVID-19 Survey (PICS): Early Results (PI's: Hasina Samji & Evelyn Stewart)
- What we know so far: Impact of school closures on the health and well-being of children and their teachers (PI: Magdalena Janus)
- The Childhood Experiences Questionnaire: Parent perspectives during a global pandemic (PI: Alisa Almas)

Next RCY Report: FASD (March 2021)

**Website: [www.rcybc.ca](http://www.rcybc.ca)**



**BC's Representative for Children and Youth *and*  
RCYBC Youth**



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**Rep4Youth**



**@rcybcyouth**