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The word Indigenous is used throughout this document and is intended to be inclusive of anyone who is Aboriginal, First Nations, Métis or Inuit in B.C.
Every day across B.C., individuals and families are dealing with the effects of mental health challenges and problematic substance use and, for too many, previous experiences with trauma and intergenerational trauma. These can be devastating problems, and my heart goes out to those who have lost loved ones.

The B.C. Government has been championing work to improve supports and treatments. In 2010 we set out a 10-year plan to better address mental health and substance use in B.C. that built on a decade of progress. We have continued to invest in education, personnel, infrastructure, programs, and services across sectors and cultures. Today, government spends about $1.5 billion per year to fund mental health and substance use programs and services, plus another $500 million on physician visits and medications for mental health and substance use concerns.

As we have worked collaboratively to refresh our strategy, it is clear that the demand for mental health and substance use services is growing. We need to do a better job of promoting mental wellness for all British Columbians and, wherever possible, a better job of preventing problems before they occur. We need to provide people of all ages with the tools to reach and maintain good mental health and prevent problematic substance use. We know that promoting mental wellness and providing preventive services can reduce the impact or even avoid some mental health and substance use problems.

When mental health or substance use problems are identified, support must be provided earlier when the first symptoms occur to help keep symptoms and impacts from worsening.

Despite best efforts at prevention and early intervention, a smaller number of us have to deal with more complex needs that require more specialized care. These services can be intensive and multi-faceted. They also require co-operation among many service providers across multiple sectors – from education to justice, from housing to health care. We will continue to provide and develop these services and supports while bringing about better co-ordination among the partners.

To that end, B.C.’s Mental Health and Substance Use Strategy builds from our existing system of supports by taking further steps to strengthen our mental health and substance use services. This is the next step in our work to shape a more comprehensive, integrated, and collaborative mental health and substance use system that is effective for individuals and families throughout British Columbia.
Over the coming years, multiple ministries and service agencies will be working closely together to better link our services to meet the needs of individuals and families. We recognize that a stronger cross-government approach is needed, working closely with clients, families, service partners, stakeholders and communities to incorporate their perspectives as we develop and improve our services and system – building on a strong foundation of cross-sectoral collaboration.

Together with our partners and stakeholders, we will leverage our resources, services and care practices to better meet the needs of people struggling with mental health and substance use issues and their families. Involving individuals, families and communities in decisions about services and care plans is critical to our ongoing efforts. Ensuring our services are responsive and culturally safe, and that individuals and their families are full partners in shaping and managing their care are key elements to further strengthening our services.

The refreshed *Mental Health and Substance Use Strategy*, building on the tenets outlined in *A Path Forward: BC First Nations and Aboriginal People’s Mental Wellness and Substance Use – 10 Year Plan*, emphasizes building stronger collaboration and integration among partners to ensure the best outcomes for children, youth, adults, their families and communities. It emphasizes the need for better access to services, better co-ordination of services, and improved continuity of care. It also underscores the need to continue to develop and offer services based on evidence and best practice.

Together, we can work to prevent mental illness and problematic substance use and better support those who face these challenges.


Honourable Terry Lake
Minister of Health
Mental Health and Substance Use Problems in Canada and B.C.

In any given year, mental health and substance use problems affect one in five Canadians directly, and almost everyone indirectly. This number holds true for British Columbians as well. Mental illness affects people of all ethnicities, backgrounds, genders and ages.
As many as 84,000 children and youth between the ages of four and 17 in B.C. experience one or more mental health disorders at any given time and only one-third receive specialized treatment. An even greater number of children and youth experience milder forms of distress and related impacts, which affect their ability to function to their fullest potential. While some of these children may receive support or intervention through school or a family doctor, it may not be the most appropriate treatment for them, and some others do not receive treatment at all. Actions in this strategy will improve our ability to meet the needs of our children when and where they need us.

Indigenous people have a rich history of wellness that extends back in time for many thousands of years. Health and wellness was disrupted through the process of colonization, creating a legacy of trauma and health and social inequities. Healing from intergenerational trauma is an ongoing need and priority of Indigenous people in British Columbia. As a result of the history of trauma, in some communities Indigenous children and youth are at higher risk for mental health and substance use challenges. Overall, Indigenous youth between the ages of 10 and 19 are four to five times more likely to take their own lives compared with non-Indigenous youth.

Suicide remains the fourth highest overall cause of death among the Indigenous peoples. This strategy positions the mental health and wellness of Indigenous children, their families and communities, as a shared responsibility integral to the broader process of Reconciliation. In practical terms, we need to ensure services are culturally safe, trauma informed and rooted in culture and community. As such, a key area of focus will be to embed cultural safety through humility in all programs and services, and ensure care is informed by an understanding of the intergenerational trauma experienced by Indigenous people.

Almost 70 per cent of serious mental health issues emerge before the age of 25. Programs directed at children in schools are therefore very important, as are programs at the post-secondary level. While most problems begin before the mid-twenties, mental health and substance use issues can occur at any age. Programs for adults that promote wellness and provide help when symptoms begin are an important part of the strategy.

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A small proportion of adults and children have complex needs that require the assistance of multiple partners, including their families, to ensure the best services are delivered. People with problems associated with mental health and/or substance use are disproportionately represented in homeless shelters and correctional facilities. Enhanced co-ordination and appropriate information sharing will support people in these areas through smoother transitions from one service to another.

The current public health emergency related to opioids is a critical focus of our substance use system in British Columbia. At the time of this report, we are seeing drug overdoses in staggering numbers in this province. In response to the crisis, the Joint Task Force on Overdose Response is working with medical health officers, health authorities, emergency room staff, paramedics and other first responders, the BC Coroners Service, pharmacists, fire rescue first responders, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Ministry of Children and Family Development, police, the RCMP, community agencies and the federal government. Partners are enacting new or expanded initiatives such as data sharing; access to opioid substitution therapy; the Take Home Naloxone program; and safer opioid prescribing practices, and making opioid substitution treatment more readily available. Health authorities are working to open supervised consumption services and strengthen the capacity of the treatment system. Underpinning these initiatives is work to increase access to evidence-based services, and better integrate and co-ordinate substance use prevention, treatment and harm reduction services across our communities in British Columbia.

All British Columbians are aware of the human costs of mental health and substance use issues. Increased emphasis on promoting mental wellness, preventing mental disorders and substance use harms, and early intervention will reduce some of these human costs in the long-term. While we will continue to improve services, we must also look to promote wellness and prevent challenges before they develop.
Beyond the fact that prevention of mental health and substance use problems vastly improves the quality of life for people, their families and their communities, it also makes better financial sense. At present, the most expensive treatment services are specialized services for those who need complex care, and emergency and hospital-based services. While B.C. will always offer acute and specialized services, the areas of prevention and promotion remains a focus, recognizing the potential of upstream strategies to reduce costlier and potentially more intrusive interventions later.

We know this is possible because evidence has shown that health promotion, prevention, and early intervention targeted at children and families (such as through parent education and family support) results in the greatest long-term cost benefits. Improved outcomes are also seen across a person’s lifespan with respect to programs that help people access treatment early, stay out of hospital, or avoid the criminal justice system. This can also generate cost savings over time. Furthermore, improving how mental health issues are supported in the workplace, including prevention, and early action to combat stress and identify problems, could have an important impact in preventing lost productivity.3

Despite all of the good work being done in B.C., we know there are gaps in the system we can close and areas we can improve. In summary:

- Research tells us that doing a better job of promoting mental wellness, preventing mental illness and harmful substance use, and intervening at the beginning of illness, especially for our children and youth is a wise investment.
- People dealing with mental health and substance use challenges and their families tell us that they often struggle to find the right service when and where it’s needed and then frequently have difficulty accessing that service. Improved information and better access is needed.

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3 (2013) *Making the Case for Investing in Mental Health in Canada.* Mental Health Commission of Canada, p. 4
Services must be better co-ordinated. People with complex challenges have varying needs over time and are often supported by a number of service providers or move from one service to another. We know that service providers need to collaborate with one another more effectively to ensure that clients experience smooth, supported transitions from service to service. This applies across sectors (e.g. education, justice, health), as well as across cultures, most notably in a need to strengthen collaboration and co-ordination of services with Indigenous partners.

While building on and continuing our work to date, to better meet the mental health and problematic substance use needs of British Columbians, and to further close known gaps in the system, our Mental Health and Substance Use Strategy will provide a stronger focus on three areas: wellness; access; partnerships.
The Three Pillars of B.C.'s Mental Health and Substance Use Strategy

Wellness
Focus on wellness, prevention and intervening early

Individuals, families, communities and workplaces in B.C. will be equipped to support mental wellness. Those people who are vulnerable to or are experiencing mental health and substance use challenges will feel included in their community and receive supports earlier.

Access
Support navigation and expand service reach

Individuals and families will easily find the right information and services they need. These services will be increased and delivered in flexible ways.

Partnerships
Co-ordinate services beyond boundaries

Individuals, families, communities and professionals will work together to deliver more integrated supports and services that are focused on the person, acknowledging the individual’s family, community and cultural connections, as well as their history.
Building on significant work already underway, these pillars allow us to refocus our efforts on wellness and prevention; to improve the ability of individuals and families to find the services they need with increased accessibility and responsiveness; and to move from siloed services to increased co-ordination and integration of services. Together, we will create a more integrated, easily-navigated mental health and substance use system with flexibly-delivered services to better meet the needs of the people of British Columbia.

**Wellness**

Promoting mental wellness means providing resources and programs to help children, youth, adults and families strengthen their social and emotional health and resilience and develop the skills they need to cope with the daily challenges of life and adverse experiences. It also means creating supportive environments where individual and community strengths are fostered, community action is strengthened, stigma is reduced and healthy choices are the easy choices.

Healthy families and communities, including efforts to address the broader social determinants of health, promote mental wellness. All sectors of society need to work together to create supportive environments that help strengthen positive mental health.
Prevention focuses on opportunities to reduce risk factors for mental health and substance use problems, and increase the protective influences that support wellness. In particular, we know children and youth need nurturing and protecting from avoidable adversities. Preventive approaches to care can be implemented across multiple settings, for groups or individuals. Examples of effective prevention strategies include programs that support vulnerable new mothers, school-based resiliency programs (such as the FRIENDS program) and supporting skills-development for parents.

Prevention can be particularly effective when focused on supporting populations of people that face increased risk of mental health challenges or harm from substance use. Historical, cultural and socioeconomic factors play a role in the development of mental health and substance use problems. Studies in B.C. and across Canada indicate some groups – notably Indigenous peoples, youth in care, refugees (particularly from countries of conflict), sexual and gender minorities, individuals with special needs, and children with a parent(s) that has a mental health and/or substance use problem – are at higher risk. An effective system of care needs to ensure easy access to supports and services for people in these groups in order to prevent problems, and to intervene early if problems develop.

In addition to prevention, early detection, intervention and treatment are key. Connecting people with services and programs that can identify mild signs and symptoms of mental health and substance use problems, and then provide support before the symptoms worsen, should be a key goal. For those individuals and their families who are struggling with chronic or recurring mental illness or problematic substance use, the belief that recovery is possible is critical. Programs and services will reflect best practices in approaches to supporting a recovery-oriented approach to care.

Even the most common mental health disorders for adults, if left untreated, can result in significant costs to individuals, families, communities and our economy. These individuals may not seek services until they are in a mental-health crisis, walking through the hospital emergency room doors because they did not receive the supports they needed earlier.

4 Waddell pp. 2 & 3
Supports and services need to be easier to access, not just in health care environments, but in places like schools (from kindergarten through post-secondary), workplaces and community centres. Increased knowledge about mental health and substance use can benefit everyone, and can build the collective capacity to support the mental well-being of others. Schools must continue to foster resilience in children. They can do this through supportive environments and through daily lessons with skill-building exercises for younger students and their teachers in order to build resiliency and ensure students are connected to supportive adults. Work places can offer early and effective support to their employees.

Wellness also refers to ensuring people have the resources to care for themselves and their families. The Government of B.C. is investing $65 million to provide housing for people with mental-health or substance-use challenges. A mix of new housing will be developed to meet the needs of a wide variety of people in communities throughout the province. This funding is in addition to the $855 million committed to support the purchase, construction or renovation of affordable housing rental units throughout the province. With this new investment, government has committed a total of $920 million to support 5,280 housing units provincewide.

The stigma associated with mental health challenges and problematic substance use can make many people reluctant to seek support or treatment. It can also influence the beliefs and behaviours of friends, family and care providers. It is therefore vitally important that we continue to work to eradicate the stigma surrounding mental illness and substance use challenges.
Building on the significant work underway in the area of prevention and early intervention, key investments will be made to increase access to prevention and early intervention services for children and young people:

- For preschool children the provincial government will:
  - Continue to support the Nurse-Family Partnership program. This intensive public health nursing program supports young, vulnerable first-time mothers and their children in order to reduce child maltreatment, improve child mental and physical health, improve maternal health and economic self-sufficiency, and reduce mental health problems and related challenges as infants grow into adolescents and young adults.
  - Support access to evidence-based parenting skills supports and resources by making them available to B.C. families through a range of flexible formats in order to enhance early social/emotional development for young children and prevent future mental health and substance use problems.
  - Increase access to Confident Parents, Thriving Kids. This is an evidence-based early intervention program for parents of children aged 3-12 years with behavioural challenges. The program is delivered free of charge to parents and/or caregivers via telephone in the comfort and privacy of their own homes at times convenient to them and without lengthy waits. It offers flexibility to accommodate the reality of busy work and school schedules for most families. New investment will allow support for nearly 3,000 families each year, up from 800.
In schools from kindergarten through to post secondary the Province will:

- Continue to support access to the FRIENDS provincial program, an evidence-based, anxiety-prevention and resiliency-building program delivered in schools.
- Support integrated health and wellness school-based services and support programs, in recognition of the fact that school settings could serve as hubs for a variety of integrated health and wellness services that support overall well-being, and mental health and wellness.
- Support targeted mental health services for post-secondary students. New investments of $5 million over three years will support the development of mental health initiatives for the post-secondary systems. Details are to be confirmed.

Access

Access means providing better navigation so people can find services and expanding the reach of current services by:

- Increasing capacity to deal with unmet demand.
- Expanding service offerings to new areas of the province.
- Targeting delivery to populations of people facing unique or additional access barriers.
For the province’s most vulnerable populations, access means bridging service gaps and better integrating specialized services. This pillar will support a system where everyone who confronts a mental health problem or illness, or a challenge with problematic substance use, is able to count on more consistent access to support, treatment and services across the province.

The first key action we will be taking is to better help people find the services they need through the introduction of a new digital mental health and substance use hub. People looking for support for themselves or a loved one will be better served with all the information, self-help reference materials and information on services in one, easy-to-search trusted online resource. We have heard very clearly that people needing support often struggle to find the information they need when looking for services. When looking online, people often find services that are outside of B.C., or they find irrelevant or out-dated information for example, and are not sure what information to trust or where to search next. To help, government has aggregated information from over 450 organizations representing over 6,000 official services that are delivered throughout the province. This simplified search function allows people to find the service they need by category, geography or keyword search. To find out more, visit: [gov.bc.ca/mentalhealth](http://gov.bc.ca/mentalhealth). It should be noted that this hub is still under development and further improvements will be made over time.

Government will work with communities to better link and standardize crisis and information and support lines, so B.C. residents will have consistent, reliable, effective, 24/7 access to information and support services through one phone number. The Ministry of Health is also refreshing and expanding HealthLink BC, one of Canada’s most comprehensive non-emergency health information services, to play a larger role in supporting individuals with mental health or substance use challenges. It provides B.C. residents with access to trusted, evidence-based health information and advice, educates the public on self-care, diverts callers from acute health-care resources to self-care where appropriate, and assists health care professionals where
required. The organization delivers information via telephone and web. Callers to 8-1-1 may speak with health services navigators and registered nurses 24 hours per day. Registered dietitians are available 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday, and licensed pharmacists are available 5pm to 9am seven days per week.

These actions will provide improved access to support and information, improved connection to local services and better support for people in crisis or struggling with suicidal thoughts.

Making information about services more visible to increase ease of access may also contribute to normalizing mental health issues and problematic substance use. The more services are in the public spotlight, the more they shine a light on stigma and help erode this barrier that stops some people from asking for help.

Not only must services be easier to find, they must be easier to access.

Expanding access to appropriate services for children and youth is a key need. Over the coming years, the provincial government will expand access to community-based mental health and substance use services for children and youth.

In addition, people in rural or remote communities should be better served through more flexible outreach services. To improve accessibility, the Province will expand access to services for youth and adults conducted over the phone or by videoconference, teleconference, and online.

Taking concrete action in these areas will ensure that children, youth, adults and families have greater and timelier access to resources and community services. Easier access to services, along with farther reach and more flexible delivery of services, will help close existing service gaps.

A number of key actions will be taken over the coming years:

- For children and youth, the Province will:
  - Significantly expand the number of community based child and youth mental health clinicians across the province – adding up to 120 net new positions to existing services over three years, which will increase access for up to 7,000 children and youth each year
on top of the 27,000 who are currently being served. The new staff will include specialized clinical practitioners, and community support and outreach workers. They will help Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and youth and their families address their mental-health challenges.

- Expand the network of Foundry Youth Service Centres throughout British Columbia. The Foundry sites provide a one-stop shop for services that support the health and well-being of youth and young adults. They provide primary care and social services, as well as early intervention and specialized mental health and substance use services. Each site serves 1,200 to 2,500 youth each year.

- Expand access to the FamilySmart program (formerly the F.O.R.C.E. Society for Kids - Mental Health). The program offers peer support, education, mentorship and assistance to young people, families and caregivers who are navigating child and youth mental health services in British Columbia.

- Implement a Youth Online Counselling program (E-Mental Health) for youth with mild to moderate depression. Delivered online and via phone coaching, it will be available for up to 3,000 youth per year.

- Establish up to 28 highly specialized treatment beds for youth who are struggling with severe substance use disorders. The beds will be distributed across the regional health authorities. They will provide the most highly specialized level of residential substance-use treatment for up to 84 young people aged 17 years and under each year.

For adults, the Province will:

- Continue to support the work of the Joint Task Force on Overdose Response in B.C. for measures addressing the overdose crisis since the public-health emergency was announced in April 2016, including new investments that will support:
  - Additional residential substance use treatment beds.
  - Expanded, rapid access to opioid substitution treatment.
  - Additional supervised consumption services.
  - Continued expansion of access to naloxone.
  - Better mental and emotional support for people who work on the front lines.
  - Public awareness.
Continued support for the Adult Bounce Back program, a physician-referred program providing services for up to 5,000 adults per year experiencing symptoms of mild to moderate depression, which includes coaching and self-directed therapy delivered online and via phone coaching.

Support access to group cognitive behavioural therapy in collaboration with health authorities and the Divisions of Family Practice.

Support E-Mental Health online counselling and peer support services.

In partnership with the First Nations Health Authority, provide increased supports for First Nation communities such as:

- Augmentation of existing community-driven mental wellness promotion and suicide prevention, intervention and post-vention supports in First Nations communities.
- Enhance land-based and culturally-safe healing and substance-use treatment for First Nations communities. This will expand access to innovative treatment services that take place on the land, are rooted in ceremony, and include traditional land-based activities such as hunting and fishing. Program activities may include culturally based assessment, detox, case management, treatment services with appropriate follow up/referrals, aftercare, and ongoing monitoring.
Provide support for non-profit organizations providing housing services for vulnerable populations with mental health and substance use issues.

Provide mental health and substance use service supports to emergency shelters to better support transitions and continuity of service from emergency shelters to supportive housing.

Improve outcomes for people with mental health and/or substance use issues involved with the criminal justice system through better crisis response co-ordination between mental health and criminal justice services, including measures to reduce discrimination, and the timely and appropriate sharing and use of information.

Provide complex care co-ordination services for individuals with mental health and/or substance use issues as they transition from correctional facilities back into the community – including stable housing with integrated services and skills-based developmental supports to increase self-sufficiency and help ensure success.

Support integrated community safety initiatives that work in collaboration with other human service providers to address developing or existing community problems before they become larger community issues. In most cases, the goal is to strengthen collaboration amongst justice, health, and social service partners to better address the root causes of existing and emergent issues, such as crime and mental health, in the identified community.
Establish and sustain the B.C. Centre on Substance Use. This centre will increase the health system’s capacity to identify and treat substance use issues by creating a hub of expertise to provide provincial support to health professionals in evidence-based clinical care guidance. The centre will provide additional training and will research and develop innovative addiction treatment modalities as scientific research finding are translated into clinical settings.

For children, youth and adults, the Province will:

- Support the integration of specialized mental health and substance use services into the primary care system. In partnership with health authorities and community agencies, primary care practices will provide assessment, care and medication monitoring for individuals suffering from mental health and substance use challenges.

- Provide individuals with more severe mental health and substance use challenges with **better co-ordinated specialized services**, comprised of inter-professional teams working with primary care providers to ensure the best support for individuals throughout their journey.

- Continue support for health authority programs that assist adults and youth with mental health issues to reach their employment or educational goals.

**Partnerships**

A focus on partnerships underscores the need to better work across organizational boundaries to deliver integrated and well-coordinated services for individuals and families. Services must be organized around people, rather than around the organizations that deliver the services. Under this pillar, government is committed to strengthening links both across government and with our service partners outside the public sector.

Key to partnerships will be the inclusion of individuals and families dealing with mental health and/or substance use challenges. Person-centred care will be a key principle as we move forward in further strengthening and shaping the province’s
mental health and substance use service system. In addition, families are also a critical partner in care in most instances. Family-centred practices recognize that the interconnectedness, capability and inherent strengths of families can be a core asset in supporting people with mental health and substance use challenges. When appropriate for the person, families in all their diversity (including parents, grandparents, friends, spouses, partners, etc.) should be at the centre of service system cultures and responses. Families must be involved at all levels of care. They must not only be informed about care (based on informed patient consent), but consulted for their opinion and, where necessary, offered support of their own. So far, the benefits to this approach are many, and include:

- Decreased risk of secondary mental health and substance use problems for current and future family members;
- Decreased family/caregiver stress and related problems;
- Faster recovery from mental health and substance use challenges;
- Increased family/caregiver employment;
- Increased stability of living situation;
- Greater educational attainment for children and youth; and
- Lowered risk of mortality from substance dependence and suicide.

Linked to individual and family inclusion in service delivery is the need to deliver culturally safe services. Cultural safety articulates an approach to service planning, organization and delivery that supports an environment free of racism and discrimination where people feel safe receiving health care. It is also an approach to care that develops and maintains respectful relationships based on humility and mutual trust by reflecting on personal and systemic biases. Key elements include:

- Recognizing the role of history and society and past traumatic experiences, and their impacts in shaping health, wellness and health care experiences.
- Health-care professionals’ self-reflection on their own assumptions and positions of influence within the health-care system.
- Humbly acknowledging oneself as a lifelong learner when it comes to understanding another person’s experience.
Understanding that we cannot assume we know about another person’s cultural experience, including that culture is an important part of a person’s identity or important to discuss in relation to health care.

Health-care professionals are constantly aware of how their own cultural experience shapes their own perspective and they recognize that every person is the expert on their own unique experience.5

Linked in turn to culturally-safe services are trauma-informed practices. Trauma-informed practices recognize the experiences of trauma arising from childhood abuse, neglect and witnessing violence, as well as other traumatic life events that are out of one’s control. Trauma-informed practices are not about treating and healing experiences of trauma. Instead, they focus on creating environments where the potential for further traumatization or re-traumatization (events that reflect earlier experiences of powerlessness and loss of control) is mitigated and where service users can learn and grow at a pace that feels safe. Trauma-informed practices and culturally-safe services will be important building blocks on which to further strengthen mental health and substance use services.

5 Waddell p. 43
They will also play an important role in better integrating First Nations perspectives on health and wellness into the provincial mental health and substance use system of services and child and youth mental health to support healthy, self-determining and vibrant First Nations children, families and communities provincewide.

Greater collaboration requires greater leadership and clarity around responsibilities and roles in relation to the delivery of mental health and substance use services. To this end, government will be leading several actions, including:

- Developing and enhancing joint planning structures to improve co-ordination across social ministries, increasing integrated service delivery and simplifying service system pathways for individuals and families dealing with mental health and substance use issues as well as closing service gaps.

- In partnership with Indigenous stakeholders, aligning the implementation of the *Mental Health and Substance Use Strategy* with the vision and principles set out in *A Path Forward*.

- Establishing shared cross-ministry policy that puts person-centred care and partnership firmly at the heart of service delivery. In addition, policy will be reviewed and developed to appropriately support family-centred practices as well as embed cultural safety and humility, and trauma-informed care in service design and delivery.

- Building from the experience of the Child and Youth Mental Health and Substance Use Collaborative, to ensure engagement, consultation and communication that brings in the perspectives of clients, families, Indigenous and mental health and substance use service providers and other key partners into shaping a client- and family-centred mental health and substance use system of care.

- Establishing policy and processes for effective data sharing across care teams and effective communication with family and caregivers while ensuring the privacy of patients.

- Developing and implementing a public reporting framework on key service and outcome indicators linked to a service evaluation process.

- Maintaining and updating best practice resources and service information for ministries and service providers.

- Facilitating cross-sector information sharing and learning.
Conclusion

This refreshed *Mental Health and Substance Use Strategy* continues to support the current programs and services we have developed. It builds on progress we have made and refocuses our efforts to:

- support mental health promotion, mental illness prevention and intervening earlier when problems occur;
- better help people find the services they need;
- better link, co-ordinate, and integrate our services in a way that makes sense to individuals and families needing those services; and
- continue to expand services and make new investments based on best research evidence and analysis, with input from people who are dealing with mental health and substance use issues, their families, as well as the professionals who work with them.

Government’s recent investments will support significant expansion of services to better meet the needs of individuals and families dealing with mental health and substance use issues.

Together, we can work to prevent mental illness and problematic substance use and better support those who face these challenges.
Appendix: Background to B.C.’s Mental Health and Substance Use Strategy

B.C.’s new Mental Health and Substance Use Strategy is built on a strong foundation of work. In 2003, B.C. released Canada’s first comprehensive child and youth mental health plan. Implementation of this five-year plan led to a doubling of annualized funding for children’s mental health and to enhancements in the continuum of available supports and services.

The creation of the Premier’s Task Force on Homelessness, Mental Health and Addictions in 2004 emphasized the need for specialized supports attached to housing for people with mental health and substance use issues. This need to better support our most vulnerable citizens was the cornerstone of the provincial housing strategy Housing Matters BC released in 2006. The refresh of the strategy in 2014 reinforced B.C.’s innovative supportive housing model and launched the Homeless Prevention program which tied housing in the private market to wrap-around services that support individuals with mental health and substance use issues.

In 2010, government released Healthy Minds, Healthy People. This plan covered a range of mental health and substance use issues throughout peoples’ lives, as well as services across ministries and service providers.

In addition, in 2012, we implemented the Expect Respect and A Safe Education (ERASE) Bullying strategy in schools with the help of school staff, students and community partners. The ERASE strategy focuses on fostering school connectedness, creating inclusive learning environments, promoting physical, social, emotional and mental well-being, and preventing bullying, violence and other harmful behaviors.

In 2013, the First Nations Health Authority, the Ministry of Health and health Canada jointly released A Path Forward: BC First Nations and Aboriginal People’s Mental Wellness and Substance Use – 10 Year Plan. Initiatives in A Path Forward are working toward ensuring that all Indigenous people in B.C. are supported in a manner that respects their customs, values, and beliefs in order to achieve and maintain mental wellness and positive, healthy living regardless of where they live.

Beyond these plans, Healthy Minds, Healthy People was also aligned with successful initiatives like StrongStart BC Centres, ActNow BC, measures to reduce impaired driving, millions of dollars in investment in research capacity at universities and specialized centres throughout the province, and millions of dollars in investment for new facilities and programs.

The new strategy represents a shift from a largely fragmented model for service delivery to a cohesive system with a more seamless client experience. It builds on the significant and positive work already underway to address mental health and substance use challenges in British Columbia, through an integrated, cross-system strategy that addresses key gaps in the current system and supports individuals and families before they reach crisis. It also aims to significantly improve the client experience, leading to measurable improvements in health outcomes.

This strategy also takes into account previous consultations with clients, families and Indigenous and mental health stakeholders, and incorporates:

- Synthesis of the research literature.
- Consultations with researchers in the field.
- Discussions with other jurisdictions.
- Recommendations from recent relevant reports.
- Work across ministries involving subject matter experts, including work linked to the July 2015 ministry mandate letters directing child-serving ministries to review child and youth mental health supports and services.
- Alignment with *Housing Matters BC*.
- Alignment with *A Path Forward: BC First Nations and Aboriginal People’s Mental Wellness and Substance Use – 10 Year Plan*, which is being implemented through the First Nations Health Authority in collaboration with local communities.
- Recommendations from the Child and Youth Mental Health and Substance Use Collaborative partnership between Doctors of BC, and the ministries of Health, Children and Family Development, and Education.

This strategy also considers recommendations from a few key reports, including:

- *Concrete Actions for Systemic Change: Child and Youth Mental Health in B.C.* (2016). Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth.
Today, the Government of B.C. currently invests approximately $2 billion per year to fund mental health and substance use programs and services across several ministries, including physician services and drug treatment services. The majority of funding is currently directed at services for those experiencing moderate to severe symptoms. These services vary depending on the type and severity of a person’s problem(s). In general, B.C.’s mental health and substance use system provides a range of programs and services including mental health promotion strategies, targeted prevention and risk/harm reduction strategies, community-based services, crisis response and inpatient care.