

IMPACT REPORT MENTAL HEALTH



Thank you for being a community that shows so much compassion for its kids, and for continuing the never-ending conversation around youth mental health. Every dollar donated to mental health programs and services at CHEO, and every effort donors make to show young people that they are not alone, changes lives. At CHEO, there is a consistent and significant year-over-year increase in demand for mental health services, spanning emergency, inpatient, outpatient, and community care.

Children who are mentally healthy tend to experience a higher quality of life and exhibit better functioning both at home, in educational settings and within their communities. Untreated mental health needs during childhood can have lifelong repercussions, impacting not only academic performance but also home life, personal growth, and development of essential life skills.

CHEO's diverse team of mental health experts works tirelessly to extend mental health support to a greater number of children and families in our region. The impacts featured in this report illustrate how your generous contributions have helped this team alleviate some of the pressures associated with high patient volumes, address the impact of the pandemic, improve patient safety and provide faster access to mental health care. Together we are giving hope to children, youth and families.

Addiction services for CHEO's children and youth

Having safe, productive and open conversations about substance use is important. Thanks to donor generosity, CHEO's patients and staff have access to an addiction counsellor from Ottawa's Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services. From training hospital staff on substance use issues and making resources available to them, to following up with patients discharged after having been admitted to CHEO because of a drug overdose – this community funded service has a major impact on the health and well-being of youth and their families. Access to an addiction counsellor can make long-term recovery a more realistic possibility. Counselling raises the chances of positive results, enhanced quality of life and lower relapse rates in youth. Furthermore, through counselling youth learn and adopt coping mechanisms, and have access to the resources they need for a successful recovery.

CHEO is the first pediatric hospital in Canada to universally screen for suicide

In 2023, CHEO nurses screened 874 children and youth for suicide and 78 received further follow-up risk assessments from mental health professionals. Parents and kids tell CHEO's experts that today's children and youth are facing higher risks for suicidal thinking and self-harm. Thanks to donor funding, one of CHEO's initiatives helps to address this. "Head to Toe at CHEO" is a program whereby health professionals ask all

kids 12 and older, who are admitted to CHEO for any reason, about any suicidal thoughts they might have now or have had in the past as a standard part of admission. If their responses indicate that they have had suicidal thoughts, further assessment gauges their risk for suicide and matches their level of risk with interventions ranging from mental health education to specialized psychiatric care. Just like a physical head to toe examination provides important physical information to CHEO's medical staff, mental health screening provides crucial insight into the child's overall well-being.

Thanks to donor funding, CHEO's screening team has recently expanded to include a second registered nurse in the Head-to-Toe Program. This gives CHEO **increased capacity to plan and implement more quality improvements** to the program and nurses will be able to see more patients in a timely manner. One of the quality improvement initiatives for this year is expanding the Head-to-Toe program to include screening of patients who speak a language other than English or French through the use of interpreter services.

Meet Eluin

Eluin has always struggled with anxiety. But that escalated dangerously in 2022. The stress of moving to Canada, bullying at school and the death of their beloved cat Skyler was too much to handle. This led to a mental health crisis. Referred to a network of professionals through 1Call1Click and care at CHEO, Eluin now has a mental health toolbox with a collection of coping strategies. An avid reader and dedicated ringette player with a passion for theatre, and with the love and support of a large family, they are hopeful for the future. [Watch to learn more about Eluin's mental health journey guided by dedicated experts at CHEO.](#)



Youth mental health promotion and intervention

YouthNet/RéseauAdo (YNRA) is a bilingual mental health promotion and intervention group. Through peer-to-peer discussions about mental health and participation in wholesome activities, young people are encouraged to combat stigma, adopt positive coping mechanisms, and seek support when needed. [Watch how CHEO's YouthNet program is working with teens to destigmatize mental illness.](#)

Dialectical Behaviour Therapy

CHEO's Emergency Department has seen a dramatic increase in children and youth presenting with suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. In response, CHEO has developed the donor funded Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) program to enhance care and service delivery for children at risk of, or in the early stages of, mental health challenges. The DBT program helps address the needs of adolescents who have difficulty regulating their emotions, resulting in chronic or repeated suicidal ideation, self-injury, family conflict and school problems.



A total of 71 patients were served by the program in 2023. In DBT, youth learn to accept themselves without judgment. At the same time, they are encouraged to find approaches to change problem behaviours in ways that bring them closer to their own ultimate goals. This therapy includes education for parents and family members. In DBT, youth learn many skills to help them handle their intense emotional reactions including mindfulness, interpersonal effectiveness, distress tolerance, and emotional regulation.

This past year, CHEO piloted a new DBT grad group for youth. The goal of the grad group was to inspire participants towards not only being service users but also being service contributors. Research suggests maintenance groups are a terrific way of promoting effective use of DBT skills for those actively in group DBT therapy as well as those who have completed the program.

“This was an absolutely amazing course, and we feel privileged that we were able to participate. The facilitators had such a profound impact on our family, giving us these important DBT skills and helping us to get through some difficult times. Because of this course my daughter has changed her career path to be a psychologist, at least for the time being.” – Caregiver of a CHEO DBT 2023 participant

Strengthening emergency mental health care

CHEO’s Emergency Department is the busiest pediatric hospital in all of Ontario, with 3,175 mental health visits in the last year. Staff at CHEO look for ways to help fill critical gaps in mental health care that government funding and private insurance plans do not cover. This includes the donor-funded 24/7 child and youth counsellor positions, which are part of the Mental Health Emergency Department team. They provide around-the-clock direct care and crisis de-escalation to patients and families, conduct Emergency Department mental health assessments and connect patients and families with other care teams in the mental health community. **Within the past year, 24/7 child and youth counsellors provided care to 1,102 Emergency Department visits.**

This 24/7 emergency mental health care was not always available at CHEO. The position of an overnight Emergency Department counsellor was created to fill a void recognized as a major issue. Some families coming to CHEO’s Emergency Department at night were waiting too long to see a counsellor. Often there was no one available until the next morning. **This position was made possible by the support of CHEO Foundation donors whose generosity covered the cost of this critical resource.**