

CHSSN Montreal Community Forum Mental Health and COVID-19

March 30-31, 2021



Secrétariat aux relations
avec les Québécois
d'expression anglaise
Québec 

MONTREAL COMMUNITY FORUM 2021

MENTAL HEALTH AND COVID-19

An online event bringing together government, the health sector, researchers, community, and lived/living experience leaders from across Montreal.

Tuesday March 30th 9:30AM – 12PM
Wednesday March 31st 10AM – 12PM

Please note this event will be in English



ACDPN
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COMMUNITARIAN
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Power Points found next to presenter’s names in AGENDA on [CHSSN EVENT WEB SITE](#):

DAY ONE:

KEYNOTE PANEL:

[Joanne Pocock, PhD: Mental Health and COVID-19 Quebec’s English-Speaking Communities](#)

[Thierry Lindor: Colors of Covid](#)

BREAKOUT ROOMS:

SENIORS

[Syeda Nayab Bukhari, PhD: Telehealth Intervention Program for Older Adults \(TIP-OA\)](#)

[Erica Botner, CHSSN: ACES Presentation](#)

YOUTH 13 – 18

[Karen Allen: Covid-19 and Youth Mental Health in Schools](#)

[Canadian Mental Health Association Montreal: Educational Activities to Promote Youth Mental Health](#)

YOUNG ADULTS

[Chrystal & Faye: Assee Young Adults and Mental Health](#)

EARLY YEARS – FAMILIES

[Dr. Tina Montreuil – McGill prof & C.A.R.E.: Mental Health and COVID-19: The Importance of Early Years and Families Handout](#)

[Anne-Marie Cech, CHSSN](#)

DAY TWO

KEYNOTE:

[Amanda Keller: Coping with Burnout Presentation](#)

BREAKOUT ROOMS:

[Argyle Institute Presentation](#)

Description

The Mental Health and COVID-19 Community Forum, organized by **Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN)** and the **Montreal Networking and Partnership Initiative (NPI) Collective**, explored the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the mental health of different demographic segments of the English-speaking population of Montreal. This report offers a summary of the discussions that took place in the forum, which was carried out on Zoom over the course of two mornings. The report also includes PDFs of the presentations and of the handouts that were shared throughout the forum as well as a list of resources and the biographies of the presenters.

The forum brought together representatives from the provincial government, the health sector, the community, various research initiatives, and leaders from across the Island of Montreal to discuss the effects of COVID-19 on mental health for English speakers living on the Island. The event also served as a platform for celebrating the successes of different mental health initiatives and for co-generating solutions to some of the most urgent problems facing mental health amongst English speakers in the context of COVID-19.

With the goal of deepening an understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on different demographic segments of the English-speaking population of Montreal, CHSSN invited speakers working with a wide range of populations and possessing diverse lived experiences of the

pandemic. The forum was designed to foster cross-sectoral and intersectional exchanges and to create a space for learning, discovery, consciousness-raising, resource-sharing, networking, and collaborating.

Day One of the forum featured speakers and breakout rooms organized according to sector.

Day Two focused on individual and team wellbeing for community and healthcare workers. It also included opportunities to ‘taste test’ workshops and activities designed to support the mental health and self-care literacy of individuals working in community and healthcare.

DAY ONE

Day 1	Description	
9:30AM – 9:45AM	WELCOME and OPENING REMARKS	
9:45AM – 10:40AM	KEYNOTE PANEL	Joanne Pocock, PhD Gustavo Turecki, MD PhD Thierry Lindor from "Colors of Covid" Tania Callender, ACDPN
10:40AM – 10:50AM	BREAK	
10:50AM – 11:00AM	PRESENTATION	James Carter, CHSSN Anne Usher
11:00AM – 11:55AM	BREAKOUT ROOMS SENIORS	Syeda Nayab Bukhari, PhD Erica Botner, CHSSN
	CAREGIVERS	Zelda Freitas Tony Alfonso, AMI-Québec
	YOUTH 13-18	Canadian Mental Health Association Montreal Karen Allen
	YOUNG ADULTS	Chrystal & Faye Assee David Robinson
	EARLY YEARS – FAMILIES	Dr. Tina Montreuil – McGill prof & C.A.R.E. Anne-Marie Cech, CHSSN
	SPECIAL NEEDS	Kristy Findlay, M.Sc. O(C) Dr. Guylaine Vaillancourt
11:55AM – 12:00PM	CLOSING REMARKS	

Day One, which had upwards of one hundred attendees, began with opening remarks from Jennifer Cooke, Montreal Development Officer for CHSSN and a member of the organizing committee for the forum. The forum started with a land acknowledgement that recognized Montreal as unceded traditional land and meeting ground for many First Nations, with the Kanien’kehá:ka Nation as the custodian of Montreal’s lands and waters. She then introduced Jennifer Johnson, Executive Director of CHSSN.

“...mental health issues affect the English-speaking population of Quebec at greater rates than its French-speaking counterpart.”

Jennifer Johnson offered an overview of why mental health has long been an important issue for the English-speaking community of Quebec and the organizations and institutions that serve this population. Jennifer cited research that shows that mental health issues affect the English-speaking population of Quebec at greater rates than its French-speaking counterpart and noted that this population faces extra challenges when trying to seek out mental health and social services in their mother tongue in the province of Quebec.

“... COVID-19 has exacerbated an already existing mental health crisis...”

The next speaker was **David Birnbaum, member of the National Assembly of Quebec** and the Official Opposition Critic for Mental Health. The topic of David’s talk was the current crisis in mental health in Quebec and challenges in accessing mental health services for English speakers in the province. David highlighted that we are living a unique experience with COVID-19, in which mental health issues have become increasingly pervasive and topical. David emphasized that, far from creating a new crisis in mental health, COVID-19 has exacerbated an already existing crisis. David highlighted the spike in domestic violence and femicide during COVID-19, during which seven women were murdered by their spouses over the span of seven weeks, as an example of the potentially tragic effects of neglecting the mental health crisis. He noted that 80% of young adults in the province have reported increased levels of anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. He also stated that English speakers in Quebec encounter additional issues related to mental health, including access to services. David noted that there are no extra resources allocated for mental health services for this population, even though research demonstrates that this Official Language Minority Community is more affected by mental health issues than the French-speaking majority. David highlighted the enormous role that community organizations have played in addressing mental health

problems in Quebec society, and that the Quebec Deputy Minister of Health, Lionel Carmant, is increasingly aware of the role these organizations play in addressing mental health. Noting that a focus on prevention is perhaps even more essential than a focus on care when it comes to mental health, David invited attendees to be in touch with him directly in the future with any questions or concerns.

Keynote Panel:

Next on the agenda was the forum’s keynote panel, which featured presentations from, and a Q&A with: sociologist Dr. Johanne Pocock, who works as a consultant with CHSSN; Dr. Gustavo Turecki, Chair of the Department of Psychiatry at McGill University and Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in Major Depressive Disorder and Suicide; Tania Callender, of the African Canadian Development and Prevention Network (ACDPN); and tech entrepreneur Thierry Lindor, G20 YEA& UN Delegate and founder of the platform “Colors of COVID,” which collects race-based data and raises financial support for Canadian Entrepreneurs of African Descent.

“... COVID-19 has exacerbated already existing inequalities...”

Dr. Joanne Pocock, consultant with CHSSN shared quantitative and qualitative findings from research on the mental health issues faced by Quebec’s English-speaking Official Language Minority Community in the context of COVID-19. Key issues addressed by her talk included: mental health as a multidimensional problem

which requires multisectoral, collaborative, and local responses; COVID-19 as a phenomenon that has exacerbated already existing inequalities; and the rise of anxiety, stress, depression, and suicidal ideation during COVID-19. Key highlights of Joanne’s talk included:

- 37% of the adults surveyed aged 18-24 in Quebec reported symptoms of anxiety and depression.
- English speakers were twice as likely as French speakers to have symptoms of anxiety or depression.
- The people most affected by symptoms of anxiety and depression in Quebec were: men and young adults aged 18-24; English-speakers; residents of the Montreal area; and healthcare workers.

Joanne explained that the factors for mental health challenges amongst English speakers in Quebec prior to COVID-19 included a low socio-economic status, existing mental health issues, and language barriers, the latter of which resulted in a lack of access to services or information about available services. Out of the English speakers surveyed, 82% of them responded that being treated in English for mental health issues was extremely important. English-speakers also appear to be less likely to pursue a COVID-19 vaccination, possibly as a result of being misinformed about the pandemic. Significantly, COVID-19 significantly impacted economic security, and job loss has increased throughout the pandemic, with ethnocultural and visible minority members of the English-speaking community being particularly affected. 37.7% of the English-speaking visible minority population is currently living in poverty. Noting that CHSSN has been

tracking the social health determinants for the English-speaking population of Quebec for over 20 years, Joanne presented the following recommendations for improving the mental health status of this population:

- Using inclusive and participatory planning solutions that are locally-based and adapted to the contexts of local culture and language
- Using disaggregated data
- Combining short-term mitigation with long-term rebuilding
- Strengthening psychosocial protective factors like resilience, trust in authorities, a sense of belonging, and social support networks
- Considering the needs of people living in technology deserts (people who don’t have access to computers or the internet)

“... during the first wave, stress levels increased, but so did coping mechanisms...”

Dr. Gustavo Turecki, Chair of the Department of Psychiatry at McGill University and Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in Major Depressive Disorder and Suicide, presented on the relationship between different waves of the COVID-19 pandemic and the stress responses and coping mechanisms that could be observed in the population. Gustavo noted that while, during the first wave, stress levels increased, so did the coping mechanisms individuals adapted to manage their stress. The healthcare system saw a decrease in consultations and visits to the

emergency room, including at the Douglas Mental Health University Institute. A decrease in requests for services was also seen in child psychiatry and Montreal saw a decrease in suicide rates during the first wave. These findings suggest that increased stress does not necessarily result in an increase in mental disorders. Similar trends can be observed globally in periods of increased collective stress, such as wars. During the second wave of the pandemic, however, a return to normal in requests for consultations and services was observed. The Douglas saw an increase in stress during the second wave but has yet to identify a clear relationship between this spike in stress and mental disorders. However, the Douglas did see a significant increase in distress amongst its healthcare workers. The findings about stress, coping mechanisms, and mental disorders during COVID-19 might serve as an opportunity to think outside the box and to innovate new, adaptive responses in healthcare.

“... if governments, agencies, and organizations are going to be equitable, they require data.”

Tania Callender, of the African Canadian Development and Prevention Network (ACDPN), shared how mental health issues rose to the top of the list of priorities for the community with which she works during COVID-19. COVID-19 has been a context in which many people are struggling with aspects of mental health, and this has created a climate in which people are more open to talking about mental health as stigma around this topic is decreasing.

ACDPN has learned that the stronger a person's relationships are within their community, the more likely this person is to seek out help. Crucially, if governments, agencies, and organizations are going to be equitable, they require data. “Colors of COVID,” a project that Thierry Lindor presented after Tania's talk, plays an important role not only in serving communities, but also in collecting race-based data about health issues.

“... the “Colors of COVID” Project is a not-for-profit equity-tech space partnered with community organizations...”

Thierry Lindor, tech entrepreneur and G20 YEA & UN Delegate introduced the “Colors of COVID” Project, a not-for-profit equity-tech space partnered with community organizations, including ACDPN, that have the trust of their communities. The project has worked in collaboration with community organizations to collect race-based data about the experiences of Black, Brown, and white people and their experiences of COVID-19 in Côte-des-Neiges and beyond. This project was motivated by the disproportionately high mortality rates of Black and Brown people during COVID-19, and by a desire to understand the systemic issues that made these populations more vulnerable to COVID-related deaths.

“... COVID-19 might not see race, but it sees poverty...”

Thierry noted that the populations most vulnerable to COVID-19 are: poor people, Black people, women, nursing-home residents, and healthcare workers. He explained that, because most poverty in the G20 countries is racialized and feminized (Black, Brown, and Indigenous people and women are disproportionately affected by poverty), and because COVID-19 is more likely to affect people living in poverty, the systemic racism and sexism that results in racialized people and women being disproportionately affected by poverty also results in them being disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and COVID-19 mortalities. *“COVID-19 might not see race,” Thierry insisted, “but it sees poverty, and poverty is an even bigger pandemic than COVID-19.”* Because the current Quebec government has refused to collect race-based data concerning health issues, “Colors of Covid” was created by citizens and communities. The project collects race-based data on a volunteer basis; individuals can go online to fill out a short survey lasting between 34-90 seconds depending on the person’s ease with technology that collects data about their experiences of COVID-19 as well as their race/racialization. The project uses geo-positioning and very high levels of privacy and security to organize and protect the collected data. The ethics and research partner for “Colors of COVID” is Alicia Boatwain-Kyte from McGill University, who works with marginalized individuals and groups. Thierry emphasizes the importance of racialized people designing ethics, technology, and social justice programs

to reduce the potential of building racial biases into these programs. “Colors of COVID” is also partnering with Hoodstock in Montreal North, a community organization that provides resources for one of Montreal’s poorest and most racialized communities during COVID-19. “Colors of COVID” has also recently gained the Federal Government of Canada as a partner. The project is complementary to the work being done by Statistics Canada.

“... the community network model is becoming an effective model for affecting public policy and social change.”

Following the keynote panel, a presentation was given by **Anne Usher, a nurse, activist, and member of the steering committee of the Community Network Table and its Forums since 2006 and James Carter, the Program and Policy Advisor at the CHSSN.** Anne and James noted that CHSSN has been paying close attention to mental health issues for many years, and that the community sector is an incredibly resilient sector that has formed many loose voluntary networks of community support for decades. James emphasized mental health as well as community organizing as ongoing practices and processes rather than final destinations to be reached. Notably, James argued that *the community network model is becoming an effective model for affecting public policy and social change.*

Breakout Rooms:

The second half of **Day One** was organized into a set of breakout rooms, each focused on a different sector and mental health, which featured 2 specialist speakers each. The breakout room topics included: **mental health and caregivers; mental health and youth 13-18; mental health and young adults; mental health and early years/families; mental health and special needs; and mental health and seniors.** A short description of the discussions that took place in each breakout room can be found below.

Mental Health and Caregivers

Zelda Freitas, a social worker specialized in the delivery of psychosocial care to older adults in loss of autonomy, from the Centre for Research and Expertise in Social Gerontology, gave the first presentation. Zelda discussed how caregivers, who are typically family members and loved ones in positions to provide care and support, occupy a dual role as they carry out their own life in tandem with their caregiving life. Caregivers are a diverse mix of individuals rather than a homogeneous group, though most caregivers are women, who are socially expected to self-sacrifice. Most caregiving women are also employed and struggle with the challenge of balancing many, often competing, demands and the guilt that can come with not being able to meet all of these demands all of the time. Crucially, guilt can have a profound impact on mental health, and caregivers do not receive enough support for their labours and responsibilities and the psychological toll that accompanies these. Caregivers experience more

depression, anxiety, and burnout than the general population. In order to improve their mental health, caregivers can employ strategies of self-forgiveness and can try to identify the source of their guilt to better address it. **Tony Alfonso, an outreach coordinator at Action on Mental Illness Quebec (AMI-Quebec),** spoke next. Tony offered a robust set of resources for mental health and self-care including the COVID-19 Anxiety Workbook and provided a brief history of self-care as a practice within medical and Black activist practices. Tony gave attendees the homework of asking, “What can I do TODAY to move in the direction I need to go?” In the question period, attendees and presenters discussed the disproportionate amount of care work taken on by women as well as a societal lack of understanding regarding the labours, responsibilities, and mental health issues of care workers. AMI-Quebec noted that it gives presentations to workplaces and policy makers to enhance the understanding of managers regarding the challenges of care workers. Notably, 30% of full-time caregivers have given up their work in order to do usually unremunerated care work. This reality has a dramatic effect on the economic wellbeing of care workers. The lack of support given to care workers can begin to be addressed by advocating for respite for care workers in the evenings and on weekends. Quebec currently has 10 days a year that a caregiver can take from work.

Mental Health and Youth 13-18

Karen Allen, a full-time guidance counsellor for over 20 years at Westmount High School presented in this breakout room. Karen discussed the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of youth in schools and the roles of

guidance counsellors in assisting students in their struggles. Karen shared the ways in which guidance counsellors had to adapt their approaches to the new restrictions of COVID-19 during alternating periods of school closure and reopening to support students both in and outside of school. Throughout COVID-19, students have struggled with, amongst other things, increased anxiety, fear, struggles with motivation and focus, isolation, self-harming behaviors, suicidal ideation, panic attacks, drug use, and dependence on screens. Many students also lost important milestones, such as graduation events, and could not rely on extracurricular activities for distraction and to support their wellbeing. Students struggled with having little new or exciting to look forward to. There were also several unexpected gains, including extra time with family, a pause in the hectic pace of living, and extra time to take on new activities and hobbies. Karen broke down the issues students are struggling with according to their year of schooling in the following way:

Secondary one and two:

- increased anxiety
- struggles with motivation and engagement
- school avoidant behaviors
- increased dependence on video games and screenplay
- self-harming behaviors and suicidal thoughts

Secondary 3:

increased behavioral issues and acting out

- struggles with motivation and engagement
- increased anxiety
- school avoidant behaviors
- increased dependence on video games and screenplay
- self-harming behaviors suicidal ideations

Secondary four and five:

- a decrease in performance in the new climate of COVID-19
- pressure related to transcripts and grades
- an increase in independent learning
- an increase in crises and panic attacks
- suicidal ideations, attempts, and hospitalizations
- facing extremely long waiting lists when seeking professional help
- becoming lost and disconnected

In the discussion, attendees who normally work with and in schools, providing important social, recreational, and psychological services and resources to students, shared how difficult it has been for them and the students; they have not been able to enter schools during COVID-19, a time when students need them the most. While many organizations have adapted to provide online activities, services, and resources, these virtual solutions are not enough to meet the needs of students, and many students need extra help navigating the information and resources made available to them online. Karen concluded that there is currently a need to innovate to find new ways to connect with students and that students are also demonstrating resilience in their adaptations to the pandemic by developing new routines, becoming more in tune with their mental health, and developing new skill sets.

Mental Health and Young Adults

Faye Assee, a mental health professional, and Chrystal Assee, a social worker, were the first speakers in this breakout room. The duo of sisters works with teenagers and young adults with mental health difficulties ranging from anxiety and depression to various crisis situations. During COVID-19, they offered a 6-month long free counseling service related to the

difficulties with the pandemic through their company Yogalogy, which uses psychology, mindfulness, meditation, and yoga to help clients deal with stress, anxiety, and depression. Faye and Chrystal have delivered 2400 hours of therapy sessions in 1 year. Chrystal stated that although young adults (youth) may not be suffering physically from the pandemic, they have suffered immensely mentally. Chrystal shared some statistics about the percentage by age group of people who have reached out for mental health support:

- 18-29: 45%
- 30-49: 36%
- 30-49: 36%
- 50-64: 31%

She confirmed that the youth age group was the highest in their pursuit of mental health support and suggested this was most likely because there isn't as great of a mental health stigma in the newer generations, whereas older generations are less likely to admit or address mental health challenges. Chrystal also shared that she has done a lot of grief counseling with the youth community. While we often associate grief with death, youth are dealing with grief associated with other kinds of losses, such as the loss of not being able to graduate with a real graduation ceremony or a real prom. There are other students who have not been able to complete their internships or to start CEGEP in person. Far from being trivial, all of these incidents are significant losses that have greatly impacted the wellbeing of youth. Faye insisted that another vulnerable community was the special needs community. She noted that there was a huge emergence in mental health issues within this population. Because families don't want to bring their children (youth) to hospitals during the pandemic, they are suffering more without their usual sources of support at times. Furthermore, Chrystal noted a great increase in prescription medication in this population for Mental Health. The duo broke down a general pattern of the

effects of different waves of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health in the suicide ideations and anxiety attacks in this age following way:

- First wave: COVID Stress
- Second wave: COVID Anxiety
- Third wave: COVID Depression
- Fourth wave: COVID Burnout

Some of the younger generations are still finding ways to connect with society through social media. They are learning to adapt to life as it is. Faye stated that a lot of first-year CEGEP and university students are struggling greatly with online learning. Many have had to drop classes and cancel internships, which will cause delays in the completion of their education. Chrystal said that they have seen an increase in self harm, group. She also noted that, although they have been severely impacted, youth are seeking out help; she called today's youth the 'hopeful generation'. Kathleen (participant) said that mental health workers have to work with this group using a highly sensitive approach because the youth of this generation is traumatized. Chrystal agreed that trauma-based therapy is necessary and that the loss of first graduations, first sexual encounters, and first internships are all very difficult situations that this generation is facing. Joanne (participant) said the psychosocial stages of development of this generation are very important, which means that socializing and connecting are also extremely important. Chrystal noted that there is a stigma that youth may be responsible for the spread of the virus and this is causing deep shame for many of them, because they don't want to disappoint their parents, teachers or employers who might think that they are the cause of the pandemic spread. **David Robinson, a community worker, and active listening volunteer at Vent Over Tea,** spoke next. David has facilitated workshops on loneliness and togetherness, and active listening, and hosts a monthly intergenerational conversation on death and dying using the Death

Cafe model. David introduced Vent over Tea as a free online platform through which you can book a session and speak with a volunteer within 24 hours by Zoom or by phone. The session is a minimum of 1 hour and serves as a time in which the client can speak freely without judgement to a volunteer who will listen without lecturing or giving advice. David noted that mental health professionals are not easily accessible, especially now due to high demand. He shared that he was told that there was a 10 month wait before he himself could have access to a psychologist. Vent over Tea is a service that can be accessed immediately until the client is able to access professional services. Vent over Tea also offers free intergenerational workshops such as Positive Toxicity and Death Cafe.

Mental Health and Early Years/Families

Anne-Marie Cech, Program Manager at the CHSSN for Early Childhood, Youth and Families spoke first. CHSSN's partners in this sector include Naître et Grandir, l'Association québécoise des CPEs, Collectif petite enfance, Priority Parents, Fédération québécoise des organismes communautaires famille, LEARN, and Regroupement pour la valorisation de la paternité. This network offers 23 Early childhood and youth programs, 28 parenting support programs, knowledge products and tools, including LEARN Québec's good night bags. Dr. Tina Montreuil, Assistant Professor in the department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and an Associate Member of the department of Psychiatry at McGill University, spoke next. She insisted that parents must 'put on their mask' before they can help their child put on theirs. Tina discussed the realities of COVID-fatigue for families, children, and caregivers, and noted the importance of finding self-compassion on the part of parents in this exceptional time. Talking with other parents about what they are going through can help to normalize challenges and difficult feelings.

Mental Health and Special Needs

Kristy Findlay, a speech-language pathologist who specializes in support for bilingual and multilingual families and co-founder of the Centre Mosaïque de Québec in Quebec City, spoke first. Kristy discussed how the necessity of social isolation has affected people with speech, auditory, cognitive, learning, and language disorders and other developmental challenges especially hard. Many of these people require their communities and the full and live physicality of social interactions to communicate. While online educational platforms have been adapted during COVID-19, many of these platforms have not prioritized the needs of students with special needs; these students have thus been put at risk of educational exclusion. The requirements of students and individuals with special needs have tended to be an afterthought rather than a priority when platforms adapted to the new realities of COVID-19 have been created. Notably, people with special needs have been disproportionately affected by interruptions in social services, and this has greatly affected their wellbeing and mental health. What is more, the demands placed on caregivers of people with special needs have increased dramatically, and yet caregivers have received no or little additional support. Unfortunately, there is currently no centralized data about people with special needs in Quebec. **Dr. Guylaine Vaillancourt, an Associate Professor in Music Therapy and Chair of the Department of Creative Arts Therapies at Concordia University,** spoke next. Guylaine discussed the importance of creativity for people with special needs in the realization of their full potential

including during COVID-19. Importantly, the arts have really helped people through the pandemic and have been a medium for creative expression and social connection. Some of the main takeaways from this session were: the importance of prioritizing vaccinating special needs children and their caregivers first as the isolation they are in currently is creating very severe mental health problems; the services these children access should be considered essential services and should be able to remain open; respite funding is inadequate to support caregivers, yet increasing respite funding in the short-term would save the government much money in the long-term; and English-speaking families face significant barriers to finding support for their children as there are limited service providers and a lack of a coordinated system.

Mental Health and Seniors

Syeda Nayab Bukhari, PhD, co-leader and coordinator of the Telehealth Intervention Program for Older Adults (TIP-OA), spoke first. Syeda discussed the toll of isolation for seniors during COVID-19 and presented the TIP-OA Telehealth Intervention, which began in April 2020 at the Jewish General Hospital and offered free telephone conversations to older adults in Montreal. The goals of the intervention were to: provide social connection and support; ensure that the caller's basic needs were being met; and develop long term community partnerships to better serve this population. Through this program, over 550 older adults have received at least 1 call per week from over 200 volunteers. Syeda then discussed the preliminary findings of this project, available in the PowerPoint presentation attached as an appendix to this document. **Erica Botner, founder of Recreotherapy, a social enterprise that provides innovative approaches to Therapeutic**

Recreation, spoke next. She discussed the ACES Project (Stay Active, Connected, Engaged, and Stimulated), a 10-week pilot project which created a series of free online programs and workshops as well as online and telephone sessions offered by Concordia's therapeutic

recreation students as part of their internships for older adults during COVID-19. The program sought to enhance physical activity (move), cognitive stimulation (learn), creative expression (create), social connection (connect), and stress management (recharge). Erica then discussed the preliminary findings of this project, available in the presentation attached as an appendix to this document. Two questions that emerged during this session were: How can we connect to seniors who have access to technology but don't want to join online groups? And how can we transfer this research to sustainable funding for community organizations?

Day Two

Day 2	Description	
10:00AM – 10:05AM	WELCOME	
10:05AM – 10:25AM	KEYNOTE “Recognising signs of burnout”	Amanda Keller
10:25AM – 10:40AM	ENERGISER	Crystal Baran
10:40AM – 10:45AM	BREAK	
10:45AM – 11:00AM	BREAKOUT ROOMS Taste Test Workshop	Argyle Institute, INBO, SAQ, TIP-OA
11:00AM – 11:15AM	BREAKOUT ROOMS Taste Test Workshops	Argyle Institute, INBO, SAQ, TIP-OA
11:15AM – 11:20AM	BREAK	
11:20AM – 11:35AM	BREAKOUT ROOMS Taste Test Workshops	Argyle Institute, INBO, SAQ, TIP-OA
11:35AM – 11:50AM	BREAKOUT ROOMS Taste Test Workshops	Argyle Institute, INBO, SAQ, TIP-OA
11:50AM – 12:00PM	CLOSING REMARKS	

Day two, which had upwards of 60 attendees, was organized around the mental health, self-care abilities, and wellness of workers in the community sector. The day began with opening remarks from Jennifer Johnson, Executive Director of CHSSN. Jennifer welcomed the attendees and introduced the day’s first speaker, Amanda Keller, PhD, activist and researcher fighting for transformative changes in child welfare services.

“... 16 critical risk factors for burnout, including high turnover at work and low opportunities for professional training and advancement.”

“... 30-40 percent of professionals are experiencing burnout at any given time.”

Amanda Keller’s talk focused on work-related burnout and ways in which to prevent and address it on both individual and organizational levels. Amanda offered an overview of some of the reasons workplace burnout can be so challenging to talk about, including existing stigma around it and fears on the part of employees that discussing their burnout openly might negatively impact their career. However, burnout is a widespread problem in Canada, with 30-40 percent of professionals experiencing burnout at any given time. Amanda spoke from her personal experience with burnout and from existing research on the subject. She outlined 16 critical risk factors for burnout, including high turnover at work and

low opportunities for professional training and advancement. She also offered an overview of warning signs that can be observed in a colleague's or employee's mood, physicality, and attitude. Amanda noted that in order to recover from burnout a person may need to temporarily or permanently remove themselves from their work environment. Amanda shared the steps she took to recover from her own burnout and outlined strategies people can use at an individual level to cope with burnout. These strategies include: doing less; pursuing social connections; reconnecting to hobbies; exercising; practicing self-care; and pursuing self-acceptance therapy to address perfectionism and the sources of perfectionism. Amanda then shared strategies organizations can use to work against burnout in the workplace. These things include: stopping rewarding overworking; providing additional support to staff with higher work and stress loads; offering additional support to staff going through hardships; offering mind-body workshops at work; having peer-support round tables; and covering the cost of therapy for staff. Amanda emphasized the need for reimagining burnout prevention by: offering more time off to staff with higher work and stress loads; making it easy for staff to switch roles; and offering 3-4 day work schedules (ideally with full pay) to caregiving staff.

The next speaker was **Crystal Baran, an integrative health and wellness coach**. Crystal offered a small energizing workshop focused on breathwork and visualization for all attendees present, which also served as a model for the

kinds of mind-body workshops organizations might consider providing for their staff.

“Participants spent 15 minutes in four different breakout rooms so they could sample mind-body workshops available in the community they can bring back to their organizations.”

The next part of Day Two featured a selection of four small mind-body workshops offered by the **Argyle Institute, Seniors Action Quebec (SAQ), INBO, and TIP-OA**, respectively. Participants spent 15 minutes in four different breakout rooms so they could sample mind-body workshops available in the community they can bring back to their organizations. The workshops were led by **Johanne Larouche** (Argyle Institute) **Mirella Castrechini** (Seniors Action Quebec) **Jess Malz** (INBO), and **Syeda Nayab Bukhari** (TIP-OA).

Moving Forward: Responses and Recommendations

The Mental Health and COVID-19 Montreal Community Forum created a dynamic and generative space for conversations, questions, skill-sharing, collaboration, consciousness-raising, networking, and reflections around the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of different demographic segments of the English-speaking community of Montreal. It successfully engaged over one hundred individuals working in healthcare and the community sector serving a diverse range of populations and communities. It offered participants vital resources for improving their ability to continue to serve their communities while also maximizing their individual and organizational wellbeing. It also gave attendees an opportunity to share their own experiences and ask questions tailored to their unique contexts, challenges, and priorities. **46 attendees** responded to a survey sent out by CHSSN about their experience of the forum. Of these attendees, **over 65%** responded that they found the forum very informative and **86%** responded 4/5 or 5/5 for their satisfaction level with the breakout sessions, with 5/5 signaling very satisfied and 1/5 signaling very unsatisfied. **Only 2%** of respondents said that they would not recommend the forum to a colleague, organization, or partner. Several respondents shared that they wished to have more time for networking and one-on-one conversation in the forum. Respondents mentioned the following topics they would like to see explored in future events:

- Health coverage for people living in Canada, Quebec, and Montreal with no status or with precarious work
- Grant opportunities
- New demographic statistics as they become available from the 2021 census
- Youth and trauma
- Networking events
- More about mental health and wellness
- More about special needs
- More about older youth/young adults
- Economic development
- Building community resilience and pre-crisis interventions
- How existing mental health organizations can better support and respond to the needs of BIPOC communities.
- English services for children with developmental difficulties
- More about mental health in the workplace
- More about “Colors of COVID”
- Supporting Visible minorities
- Legal/citizen rights
- Navigating the Quebec Health Care System
- Resources for mental health support
- More about creative arts therapies
- More about seniors

Since attendees expressed much interest in continuing the conversations that took place in the forum and in having more networking and discussion opportunities, CHSSN might choose to curate further networking events, talks, and workshops around a selection of the topics listed above. Most respondents felt like the time devoted to the forum was adequate without being overly taxing on their time and energy, and many noted that they appreciated the energizing mind-body workshops offered on Day Two. CHSSN might

consider pursuing a Montreal Community Forum series that continues to explore different aspects of mental health, beyond COVID-19, as it pertains to distinct subsections of the English-speaking population of Montreal.

Resources

AMI QUEBEC

https://amiquebec.org/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_term=mental%20illness&utm_content=%21acq%21v3%2121467864803_kwd-129018844_80723361283_g_c_&utm_campaign=amique%20basic

Concordia University, Department of Creative Arts Therapies

<https://www.concordia.ca/finearts/creative-arts-therapies.html>

Center for the Arts in Human Development

<https://www.concordia.ca/finearts/research/cahd.html>

COVID-19 Anxiety Workbook

<https://cmhamiddlesex.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Coronavirus-Anxiety-Workbook.pdf>

Vent over Tea

<https://ventovertea.com/>

LEARN QUEBEC'S GOOD NIGHT BAGS

<HTTP://GOODNIGHTBAG.LEARNQUEBEC.CA>.

ArtWill Studio

<https://artwill.ca/artwill-studio/>

Collective Community Resources

<https://ccs-montreal.org/>

Artists Inspire Grants

<https://artistsinspire.ca/>

Portage Drug Addiction Rehabilitation Centres

<https://portage.ca/en/>

Intergenerational Virtual Studio

<https://alliance2030.ca/projects/virtual-tv-studio-youth-community-intergen-video-project/>

Argyle Institute

<https://argyleinstitute.org/>

INBO Online School and Experimental Laboratory

<https://www.inbo.ca/inbo-academy>

Seniors Action Quebec

<https://www.seniorsactionquebec.ca/>

Telehealth Intervention Program for Older Adults (TIP-OA)

<http://www.telehealthmontreal.ca/index.html>

Canadian Mental Health Association: Activities to Promote Youth Mental Health

https://web.acsmmontreal.qc.ca/en/adapt-booklets?utm_source=Forum%20CHSSN%20-%20Adap.t&utm_medium=email_presentation&utm_campaign=Forum%20CHSSN%20-%20Adap.t&utm_content=Forum%20CHSSN%20-%20Adap.t%20EN%20-%20mars%202021

SPEAKER BIOS

Karen Allen

Karen Allen has been a full-time guidance counsellor for over 20 years at Westmount High School. She has worked with the adolescent population in both the education and health sectors and has supported students dealing with a variety of mental health issues for her entire career. She has witnessed the impact of the pandemic first-hand on the mental health of her students and will provide case examples and concerning trends which she and her fellow guidance counsellors are dealing with during this unique year.

Tony Alfonso

Tony Alfonso is the outreach coordinator at AMI Quebec. He has a Masters in Youth Work and focus on getting as many people talking about mental health as possible through presentations, workshops and conversations to reduce stigma.

Chrystal & Faye Assee

Both Faye and Chrystal Assee work with teenagers and young adults with mental health difficulties ranging from anxiety to depression and various crisis situations. During COVID-19, they offered a 6-month long free counseling service related to the difficulties with the pandemic. Many of the difficulties had to do with anticipatory anxiety, stress, and social-relational difficulties related to lockdown measures. These measures really impacted this cohort that has a very high need for socialization, this increased distress, loneliness, and depression for many of the young adult population we serve. All of our services have been streamlined to online services which did not negatively impact access to services, in fact, it increased access to receiving counseling and mental health support. Our organization uses psychology, mindfulness, meditation, and yoga to help all clients deal with stress, anxiety, and depression. Chrystal is a mental health professional and has been working in the field of mental health for 20 years, having worked with various populations and agencies after 15 years she decided with her

identical twin sister to open their own company called Yogalogy. Faye is a Social Worker and has been working in the field for 20 years, having worked with various populations and agencies. Chrystal is also a trained yoga teacher, and therapist as well as a meditation teacher combining all these modalities into clinical practice to help clients with mental health difficulties. Faye is also a trained yoga teacher, and therapist, combining all these modalities into clinical practice to help clients with mental health difficulties.

Erica Botner

Erica is the founder of Recreotherapy, a social enterprise that provides innovative approaches to Therapeutic Recreation service delivery highlighting the impact of meaningful and purposeful activities and experiences for optimal living and aging. We design, implement, and evaluate programs, services, events, and products. We provide education and training, collaborate in applied research, and coach and consult with health care teams to integrate principles of therapeutic recreation into their regular practice. Our social mission is to enhance optimal living and aging, advocate for the profession of therapeutic recreation, provide student learning opportunities and jobs for new professionals, and ultimately, to change the narrative of disability, aging, dementia and caregiving.

Syeda Nayab Bukhari

Syeda Nayab Bukhari earned her doctorate from the Department of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies, Simon Fraser University, BC. Currently, she is pursuing a Postdoctoral Fellowship at McGill University. She is also co-leading and coordinating the Telehealth Intervention Program for Older Adults (TIP-OA). Having expertise in research, project management, knowledge translation, and networking for community-based programs for older adults and other groups, she has worked in Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia. Her

areas of interest include race, class, and gender relations, immigration studies, ethnic media, and community-based program development for disadvantaged groups. Syeda has published single-authored- as well as co-authored articles, reports, and book chapters in her areas of interest.

Tania Callender

While she studied business administration and economics and started her career in the corporate sector, Tania Callender has been involved in the community and nonprofit sector for the last eight years. She began as a volunteer and worked as the Administrator until 2015 when she became the Executive Director of The African Canadian Development and Prevention Network (ACDPN). ACDPN fosters solidarity and inter-organizational collaboration across sectors that influence the health and wellness of the Black community in Montreal. Given the double minority status of the English-speaking Black Community (ESBC), we advocate for access to health, social and educational programs that are adapted both linguistically and culturally. She is the mother of two young boys and is inspired to advocate for changes in the system that will have a positive impact not only for the community today but for future generations as well.

James Carter

James Carter is the Program and Policy Advisor at the CHSSN. He has been with the organization since its founding in 2000. His main role is to support the CHSSN staff team in program design and implementation. He also provides advice on the management of CHSSN's program relationships with the Quebec and Federal Governments.

Kristina (Kristy) Findlay, M.Sc.O(C)

Kristy Findlay is a speech-language pathologist who specializes in support for bilingual and multilingual families. She is the co-founder of the Centre Mosaïque de Québec in Quebec City. The clinic was founded with a mandate to connect with community organizations to ensure that anglophone and multilingual families receive the

support and resources they need concerning communication disorders. Ms. Findlay has extended that mandate across the eastern regions of the province, providing services to English speaking and first nations communities in Gaspésie, Baie des Chaleurs, and Sept Îles. She strongly believes in empowering local providers by providing them with knowledge and tools to support the families in their communities. In addition to her passionate drive to support multilingualism, Ms. Findlay has been active in research since 2008, including several publications and presentations in national and international conferences.

Zelda Freitas

Zelda Freitas is a Social Worker with extensive experience in the delivery of psychosocial care to older adults in loss of autonomy. As a research-practitioner and coordinator of the area of expertise in caregiving at the Centre for Research and Expertise in Social Gerontology (CREGÉS), she engages in the research, development, knowledge transfer and implementation of evidence-based practices related to psychosocial and interdisciplinary intervention in caregiving, palliative care, and bereavement.

Thierry Lindor

Thierry Lindor is a young entrepreneur, Canadian G20 YEA & UN Delegate; he's won numerous awards through the success of his latest ventures, Influence ORB & Mindful, which included collaborations with Nobel peace prize laureates, Malala & Vice President Al Gore, to name a few. In 2018, he won the Black Tech Matters "Innovative Entrepreneur of the Year" award in Washington DC. He was recently recognized at the United Nations as one of the Global Top 100 under 40 most Influential people of African Descent, an honor he shared with Naomi Osaka, Drake & Meghan Markle to name a few. Today, he launched a "Canadian Civil rights movement" by creating a platform called "Colors Of COVID" which collects race-based data while helping to raise \$221M with the Federal Government and the private sector to

support Canadian Entrepreneurs of African descent.

Tina Montreuil, PhD

Dr. Tina Montreuil is an Assistant Professor in the department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and an Associate Member of the department of Psychiatry at McGill University. She is also a Regular Investigator of the Research Unit of Children's Psychosocial Maladjustment (GRIP) at McGill. As a licensed member of the Quebec Order of Psychologists and a credentialed member of the Canadian Association of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapies, she practices privately with children and family, focusing on cognitive-behavioral and mindfulness approaches. She has published in several peer-reviewed journals and has been a lecturer at several international conferences. In 2013, Dr. Montreuil was awarded the title of "Champion" in Mental Health in the "Research" category from the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health and was more recently included in the top 150 Leading Canadians for Mental Health by CAMH Difference Makers. Dr. Montreuil's current research focuses on investigating the role of emotion regulation, attitudes, and beliefs on the development and intergenerational transmission of psychopathology and how symptoms of mental health problems might interfere with self-regulated learning in a group context and ultimately, educational achievement. Mediators and moderators of emotion regulation and resiliency such as the role of parental socialization of emotions on the use of emotion regulation strategies in children are also investigated. In addition to the universal emotion regulation school-based program called Healthy Minds, Healthy Schools, C.A.R.E. Research Group has developed a complementary parenting program called Parenting C.A.R.E. In addition to promoting mental health literacy, much of Dr. Montreuil's Research Group activities focus on advocating for the implementation of School-Based Mental Health practices and philosophies. She is currently a member of a number of regional and

provincial working groups whose primary aim is to define how to implement and promote mental health and well-being in schools.

Joanne Pocock, PhD

Dr. Joanne Pocock is a sociologist with expertise in policy analysis, evaluation and multi-method research techniques who has devoted much of her academic and research career to the study of Quebec's English-speaking minority communities. Her efforts have contributed to a body of knowledge supporting organizations serving the interests of minority language communities in various sectors and at national, provincial and regional levels. As a research consultant, Dr. Pocock supports CHSSN by studying the socio-demographic characteristics of English-speaking Quebec as well as health and social service access as a key social determinant of health and well-being.

David Robinson

David Robinson (he/him) is a community worker, and an active listening volunteer at Vent Over Tea. He has facilitated workshops on loneliness and togetherness, active listening, and hosts a monthly intergenerational conversation on death and dying using the Death Cafe model.

Gustavo Turecki, MD PhD

Gustavo Turecki MD PhD is a clinician scientist whose work focuses on understanding brain molecular changes that occur in major depression and molecular processes that explain treatment response. In addition, his work aims to elucidate the neurobiological basis of the suicidal brain. Dr. Turecki is Full Professor and Chair of the Department of Psychiatry at McGill University and holds a Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in Major Depressive Disorder and Suicide. He is the Scientific Director of the Douglas Institute and the Director of the McGill Group for Suicide Studies, a multidisciplinary suicide research group that comprises the Douglas Bell-Canada Brain Bank. Dr. Turecki has conducted pioneering research which has led to our understanding of how traumatic life experiences impacts brain gene function and increases long-

term risk for suicide by epigenetically regulating critical genes involved in stress responses and behavioral development. He has authored over 500 publications, including research articles in leading peer-reviewed journals such as Nature Neuroscience, Nature Medicine, and Lancet. His work has been cited over 40,000 times (h-index 102) and he is among the 2020 most highly cited scientists in his field. Dr. Turecki's contributions to the field have also been recognized through more than 30 awards. He serves, or has served, in the advisory boards of several scientific journals, and international scientific institutes. Dr. Turecki is also an engaged clinician and heads the Depressive Disorders Program at the Douglas Mental Health University Institute, where he treats patients with refractory major depressive disorder.

Guylaine Vaillancourt

Dr. Guylaine Vaillancourt is an Associate Professor in Music Therapy and Chair of the Department of Creative Arts Therapies at Concordia University. She holds a Masters degree from New York University and a PhD in Leadership and Change in the Professions from Antioch University. Music therapist for the last 30 years, she has worked in mental health, palliative care, and oncology. She is a fellow and primary trainer of *The Bonny Method of Guided Imagery of Music*.

Anne Usher

Anne is a nurse by profession and a longtime activist in community development in Notre Dame de Grace district of Montreal and beyond. She has been part of the steering committee of the Community Network Table and its Forums since 2006.

Crystal Baran

Crystal is a Certified Integrative Nutrition Health Coach and Naturotherapist, specializing in stress and burnout. Crystal helps her clients to overcome the overwhelm, regain the confidence that they have deep inside and overall stressless. She believes that we all have the ability to heal ourselves if only given the opportunity to

tap into that healing power. Having overcome depression and corporate burnout herself, she now lives her authentic life by helping others light their paths to wellness.

Amanda Keller

Amanda Keller is an entrepreneur, activist, researcher, former clinician and Ph.D. student. Through her advocacy work she is recognized as one of the most prominent voices in Quebec fighting for transformative change to child welfare services. She is the founder of CARE Jeunesse, a grassroots peer support organization for alumni of foster care. She has ten years of clinical experience working with youth suffering from complex difficulties such as addiction and mental health issues. She combines her personal, professional and academic knowledge to lead meaningful change.

Argyle Institute

The core mission of the Argyle is to continue to offer excellence in psychotherapy & training at affordable rates. They offer a wide range of services: individual therapy, couple counselling, family therapy, counselling services for groups, training and supervision for professionals as well as community agencies, and the business world. The institute's programs are constantly monitored for quality assurance and evolve to meet the needs of those we serve.

INBO, Jess Malz

Jess Malz, INBO's founder, was an enterprising child who started creating business plans for fun at the age of 5. But at school, they were disengaged—and led to believe they were the problem. But Jess was always in love with learning, and during university, it dawned on them that learning is a lifetime endeavor—and that adults need support too. Inbo aims to provide that support by creating connection and play online, through engaging learning experiences that elevate the voices and address the needs of every person in the room.

SAQ, Mirella Castrechini, M SC, PPCC

Resilience Training Program is a Seniors Action Quebec project sponsored by Canadian Heritage. It is a training program intended to bring new perspectives to the many challenges faced by community outreach workers, volunteer leaders, stakeholders, social workers and other roles that offer support to seniors seeking help. Although it may seem counter-intuitive to suggest resilience training to help seniors, it can be very helpful at this stage in their life. After all, they have faced many obstacles and overcome many of life's challenges, begging the question: What is left for them to learn and how will resilience training be beneficial to them? The short answer is that as a trainer, you will have the ability to train others to help seniors confront issues more efficiently. The aim of this program is two-fold First, to provide a program that can help seniors build resilience skills that will empower them to self-advocate, build social networks and nurture community involvement and second, to inspire community leaders to develop programs or activities that can provide the support for seniors to remain engaged and contribute to their quality of life. This is a 6-part series covering Resilience competencies such as, Self-Awareness, Character Strengths, Coping Control.

TIP-OA

In response to COVID-19, a team at the Jewish General Hospital program has developed a large-scale, multi-lingual Telehealth Intervention Program for Older Adults (TIP-OA) with a preventative focus offering friendly phone calls 1-2 times/week to older adults by trained volunteers. Currently, this program is only being offered across the island of Montreal but will soon be available for other parts of the province. This is an open community initiative, offered to all older adults 60+. This service is not limited to only clients who face mental health issues acute isolation in the face of the pandemic – but to any older adult who could benefit from social connection and conversation with a volunteer. Since April 2020 we have trained 200+ volunteers and served more than 600 clients in

Montreal. Within a short span of time, TIP-OA has turned into an official platform for training a large army of student volunteers within the health sciences (e.g. Medicine, Social Work, Occupational Therapy, Nursing, Psychology, Psychiatry, etc.) TIP-OA has also become a hub for community organizations serving older adults by offering 1) service to their clients 2) help building their capacity through training and knowledge sharing 3) involving them in research and evaluation processes. TIP-OA is improving a sense of social connection, mental and overall health, and working towards ultimately reducing strain on the healthcare system. The program is also improving intergenerational connections by promoting a caring, compassionate sense of community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This initiative is funded by the CHSSN through Health Canada's Official Languages Health Contribution Program 2018-2023



The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of Health Canada.

The Mental Health and COVID-19 Community Forum is financed by the **Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise**.

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