

Knowledge Synthesis of Relevant Spheres of Action for Promoting the Mental Health of Young Adults

SUMMARY

June 2017

Marie-Claude Roberge and Florence Déplanche

A large body of work has suggested that mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders, even though they are correlated. Fostering and preserving mental health therefore become goals worth pursuing, independently of the objectives of reducing mental disorders.

It is in this context that the Institut national de santé publique du Québec has been mandated to prepare a knowledge synthesis for the Direction générale de la santé publique of the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux on 1) reference points that can serve to frame actions to promote the mental health, 2) life situations encountered during the passage to adulthood and the resources that can have a positive effect on the mental health, and 3) the most relevant spheres of action to promote mental health of young adults.

To do this, a literature review from scientific literature (meta-analyses, systematic reviews and reviews) and from grey literature (expert opinions from researchers and practitioners or guidance documents) was conducted. In total, 141 documents were selected and analyzed.

Reference points to support action on mental health

Four reference points, taken from the literature, make up the framing for determining the relevance of actions to promote positive mental health.

- **Looking at mental health as a concept distinct from mental disorders**

It is possible and advisable to consider mental health and mental disorders as distinct concepts. Fostering and preserving mental health are goals in themselves, distinct from the goal of reducing mental disorders. In addition, fostering and preserving mental health contributes to the reduction of mental disorders.

- **Helping everyone to thrive**

Actions aimed at positive development of individuals and their settings of daily life have various beneficial impacts and a broader scope than those aimed at reducing deficits and fixing problems.

- **Acting on the determinants of mental health and their distribution**

The determinants are interconnected and unequally distributed. Addressing societal determinants (e.g., opportunities for education, access to housing) increases and equalizes the opportunities available to youth. Action plans that focus on determinants at the level of settings of daily life (e.g., presence of social support, working conditions) or at the individual level (e.g., early childhood experiences, personal and social competencies) can alter the exposure of some groups to risk and protective factors, to directly intervene to reduce the vulnerability of socially and economically disadvantaged people or mitigate the consequences of poor mental health.

- **Adopting a life-course perspective**

Life-long permanent and complex interaction among individuals, their settings of daily life and the global context influences their family, educational, occupational or civic trajectories, and creates both physical and mental health.

Passage to adulthood

The work reviewed shows that while young adults are called upon to make individual choices and decisions about their life course, the directions taken are significantly influenced by the opportunities afforded by the structures and institutions around them. Young peoples' life courses involve the interplay among multiple trajectories and transitions during which they may face challenges that influence mental health.

Trajectory to autonomy

Young adults become autonomous. They distance themselves from the family unit, while the parents remain a significant source of support. Their social network changes and their identity is forged through friendships and romantic relationships. They learn to manage their finances and keep up a routine that enhances a healthy lifestyle.

Education and employment trajectory

Young adults make choices about education and work. When continuing their education, they must adapt to a new school environment, strive for work/family/academic balance, and make career decisions. As young workers, they must manage their ability to integrate into a job that is dependent on their level of qualification, adapt to the realities of the labour market and cope with a level of decisional latitude and experience that makes them vulnerable.

Civic trajectory

Young adults become citizens. They develop their sense of belonging to a community, their concerns about social issues and their civic engagement develop.

Spheres of action

The review of the spheres of action shows that Fostering and preserving the mental health of young adults involve a series of coordinated actions, at various levels, targeting the general population of young people, while taking into account their various needs. These actions must allow youth to have better control over their lives, to have access to material and social resources in their settings of daily life, and to be able to participate in economic and social life without facing discrimination or violence.

Societal level: policies that positively influence life trajectories

Policies that support families, education, employment integration, social inclusion, and access to high-quality mental health services which focus on well-being serve to equalize youth opportunities. They provide them with the resources they need to face various life situations and, as a result, promote and protect their mental health.

Context and settings of daily life: environments favouring to the passage to adulthood

Coordinated initiatives in the various settings of daily life and actors sensitive to the realities of youth create environments in which they can thrive, be successful and engaged. Examples of these would include creating community initiatives to reduce exposure to violence, promote healthy lifestyles, reinforce social ties and encourage youth participation; implementing a holistic approach to health in post-secondary settings; and

implementing initiatives to protect and support young workers.

Individual level: competent youth capable of meeting challenges

Individual-level interventions should target developing youths' personal and social competencies, rather than simply providing them with information. These interventions will only have an impact if they are combined with actions that promote access to material, physical and social conditions in the various settings of daily life that allow youth to use their personal and social competencies.

Key findings and recommendations

This knowledge synthesis shows that, as with physical health, mental health is the result of the dynamic interplay, at all stages of the life course, between individuals, groups, settings characteristics and the broader socioeconomic context. Several key findings and recommendations emerge from this synthesis:

1. Young adults have issues distinct from other age groups which must be reflected in policies, interventions and research.
2. Promoting mental health in young adults requires adopting a holistic perspective based on their strengths and assets.
3. Comprehensive approaches in young adults' various daily settings must be supported to promote their mental health.
4. Having youth participate in developing and implementing actions aimed at them must be encouraged.
5. The development of competencies of professionals and managers that encourage a perspective of promoting young adults' mental health must be supported
6. Many interventions likely to affect mental health and reduce social inequalities in mental health should be the subject to a health impact assessment.
7. Measuring positive mental health and the related factors is an emerging sphere of knowledge, whose development should be continued.

To sum up, fostering and preserving the mental health of young adults require a series of coordinated actions. These actions must lead to an improvement in living conditions, the implementation of standards and regulations that reduce social inequalities in mental health, better access to resources and services in the various communities and greater youth participation in economic and social life. These actions will only be possible through increased collaboration among public health actors and actors from other sectors.

Knowledge Synthesis of the Relevant Spheres of Action for Promoting the Mental Health of Young Adults

AUTHORS

Marie-Claude Roberge, Mental Health Promotion Expert
Florence Déplanche, Scientific Advisor
Direction du développement des individus et des communautés

UNDER THE SCIENTIFIC COORDINATION OF

Sonia Côté, Scientific Unit Chief
Direction du développement des individus et des communautés

WITH THE COLLABORATION OF

Maud Emmanuelle Labesse, Scientific Advisor
Direction de la santé environnementale et de la toxicologie
Vicky Tessier, Librarian
Vice-présidence à la valorisation scientifique et aux communications
Caroline Alix, Scientific Advisor
Jérôme Martinez, Scientific Unit Chief
Bureau d'information et d'études en santé des populations

LAYOUT

Sophie Michel, Administrative officer
Direction du développement des individus et des communautés

TRANSLATION

Christine Mooij
CMOI MedTra

LINGUISTIC REVISION

Michael Keeling, National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy

The translation of this publication was made possible with funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada.

This document is available in its entirety in electronic format (PDF) on the Institut national de santé publique du Québec Web site at: <http://www.inspq.qc.ca>.

Reproductions for private study or research purposes are authorized by virtue of Article 29 of the Copyright Act. Any other use must be authorized by the Government of Québec, which holds the exclusive intellectual property rights for this document. Authorization may be obtained by submitting a request to the central clearing house of the Service de la gestion des droits d'auteur of Les Publications du Québec, using the online form at <http://www.droitauteur.gouv.qc.ca/en/autorisation.php> or by sending an e-mail to droit.auteur@cspq.gouv.qc.ca.

Information contained in the document may be cited provided that the source is mentioned.

© Gouvernement du Québec (2017)

Publication N°: 2286-Summary

**Institut national
de santé publique**

Québec 