

FRAYME PRESS RELEASE

CONTACT: Tamir Virani, Senior
Marketing and Communications Lead

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COMPANY: Frayme

PHONE: 613-220-3022

EMAIL: Tamir.Virani@theroyal.ca

WEB: Frayme.ca

Pan-Canadian initiative to evaluate and scale virtual innovations in youth mental health amidst COVID-19

Frayme to support and fund 8 virtual youth mental health and substance use service innovations across Canada to increase access to care

OTTAWA, CANADA, OCTOBER 22 — It is estimated that 10-20% of Canadian youth are affected by a mental illness or disorder, however only 1 in 5 children who need mental health services receive them. Virtual mental health services and supports have the potential to rapidly expand access to care for those who need it most.

The Canadian youth mental health and substance use (YMHSU) system has moved rapidly over the past year to develop, accelerate and implement virtual responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in order to meet the needs of youth and their families. Frayme launched the [Virtual Innovations in Care \(VIC\) Grant](#) program to support learning and understanding about the process of implementing effective virtual services. A total of 8 evidence generating and innovative virtual solutions were chosen through an open call to receive funding and partner with Frayme to support the scale up, implementation, and evaluation of these innovations.

Pockets of innovation in virtual service delivery are happening across Canada, however these initiatives are siloed or taking place in isolation. [The VIC Grant Program](#) will support the dissemination of key learnings from the development of virtual services more widely so that collective knowledge around effective virtual system development and service implementation is strengthened in the sector. The virtual innovations chosen for VIC funding include:

Atlantic Wellness - Circle of Care Program: At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Atlantic Wellness worked to develop and implement virtual mental health services to ensure there was very little impact to youth during this crucial time. With funding from VIC, this project will not only continue to provide virtual services, but will also capture data to identify how the change in service delivery is affecting counselling therapists, clients, and their families.

Crossroads Children's Mental Health Centre - Kids Come First: In response to COVID-19, Kids Come First partners are collaborating to deliver virtual mental health groups for children, youth and families, pooling together knowledge and resources to increase access to care. This project will allow for the informed development of virtual mental health groups by drawing upon the emerging, situated learnings of those providing and receiving services.

Foundry - Foundry Virtual Care: Foundry launched drop-in counselling services via chat, voice or video calls in April due to COVID-19, followed by online peer support and workshops. Foundry's team will focus on the experience of youth accessing Foundry's virtual services, including health outcomes, and how shifting to virtual service delivery has impacted both youth and service providers.

Saskatchewan Health Authority - Evaluation of Virtual Care in Youth Mental Health & Addiction Services: Youth Mental Health & Addiction Services provides therapy and outreach services to youth and their families. Due to the pandemic, services are currently being offered virtually. The virtual care evaluation will use surveys and interviews to allow clients to voice the benefits, challenges, and experiences of virtual care so that learnings can be shared out.

Shibogama First Nations Council - Payahtakenemowin Youth Well-Being Program: The Payahtakenemowin ("Peace of Mind") Youth Well-Being Program is a mental wellness program that is developing a virtual service framework for youth living in northern

communities in the Shibogama Tribal Council Area in Treaty 9 Territory in Northwestern Ontario. This includes virtual cultural teachings from local Knowledge Keepers, live streamed traditional land-based experiences, and online safe spaces for social interaction with peers. The program also offers online therapy sessions with counsellors, including specialized services in expressive arts therapy.

Stella's Place - *Bean Bag Chat (BBC)*: BBC is a technology that offers text-based mental health support. The platform consists of a mobile app and an operator web portal. The app is available for service users to download for free on their iOS or Android device and allows young adults living in Toronto to engage in secure 1:1 chat sessions with Peer Support workers.

The Students Commission of Canada - *New Paths through COVID-19*: This project will provide an in-depth look at the wide range of services provided by New Path Child and Youth Services in Simcoe County, Ontario and how it transitioned all of its services except for residential, to telephone and virtual delivery. The research will also look at several other collaborations in Prince Edward County and Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington Counties in Ontario, and in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

Wood's Homes - *An Assessment of the Implementation, Provision and Impact of Virtual Services*: Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual service delivery supplemented the vast majority of in-person services provided by Wood's Homes youth mental health programs. Virtual technology became the primary method of service delivery as of March 20, 2020. This project will assess and evaluate these innovations as they continue to be needed by communities.

To see a full list and summary of the 8 VIC recipients and their respective virtual innovations please [click here](#).

COVID-19 has shifted healthcare in Canada to a place in which in-person services are no longer an option in many jurisdictions and contexts. The Government of Canada launched a new mental health and substance use support portal, [Wellness Together Canada](#), which provides an entire suite of free resources and supports for mental health and substance use issues. The valuable insights through this initiative as well as, the community learnings through the VIC program will help the system better understand the nuances of virtual services. Frayme will work with VIC recipients during the next year to help support knowledge mobilization efforts so that these virtual services can be

expanded across jurisdictions and so that more youth and families can access the right care, in the right place at the right time.

QUOTES FRAYME AND SUPPORTING PARTNERS

“The youth mental health and substance use system has collectively prioritized virtual care. We are at the precipice of being able to understand how to support youth and their families through technology and if there are ways we can address geographic constraints, accessibility constraints and resource constraints,” **said Shauna MacEachern, Executive Director, Frayme.** “As we design these services we must ensure that we are evaluating and implementing them with feedback from youth and families. Through VIC, Frayme is uniquely positioned to ensure that evaluation not only takes place, but that learnings are mobilized across the country so that effective virtual services can be scaled widely.”

“We recognize the importance of mental well-being on a young person’s ability to achieve success and their successes directly impact the strength of our workplaces, schools and communities,” **said Mark Beckles, Senior Director, Youth Strategy and Innovation, RBC.** “Through our partnerships with organizations such as Frayme, [RBC Future Launch](#) will help address the barriers often faced by young people when trying to access the mental well-being supports and services they need. Effective virtual services will help to remove or lower some of those barriers.”

“The [Graham Boeckh Foundation](#) is pleased to see that Frayme has prioritized supporting research and evaluation in virtual care,” **said Elana Ludman, Vice President Youth Mental Health, Graham Boeckh Foundation.** “With more and more services being offered in virtual contexts, we need to better understand what impact these services are having on youth and their families. We hope that these grants will further add to the evidence base, help create more integrated models of mental health and substance use care, and share lessons learned with other communities across Canada.”

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONS

Frayme

Frayme is a national knowledge mobilization organization designed to advance integrated youth mental health and addiction practices and make a significant impact on youth well-being in Canada. Currently a network of over 400+ partner organizations including youth and family members, clinicians, researchers, policy makers and service providers, Frayme works to ensure collaboration and knowledge sharing among

organizations working to transform youth mental health services and systems. Frayme is funded by Health Canada, the Graham Boeckh Foundation and the Networks of Centres of Excellence. It is hosted at the Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre's Institute of Mental Health Research (IMHR).