

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Report Reveals Teachers Ill-Equipped to Address Mental Health Issues in the Classroom

Canadians look to teachers to recognize students struggling with a mental health issue, but are concerned that they are inadequately prepared to help.

May 12, 2014, Ottawa ON – Today, Physical and Health Education Canada (PHE Canada) released two reports that highlight a wide gap between Canadians’ expectations of teachers and the preparation and education that new teachers receive when it comes to student mental health and resiliency.

The first report, *“Mental Health Education in Canada: An Analysis of Teacher Education and Provincial/Territorial Curricula”* is an analysis of teacher pre-service mental health courses in Canada, a review of provincial and territorial curricula on mental health, and findings of focus groups with teachers, principals, parents, and youth on mental health education. This report is accompanied by findings of a national survey of Canadians entitled, *“The Responsibility to Promote Resiliency: Public Perspectives on Mental Health Education and the Canadian School System.”*

“We are incredibly fortunate to have such high quality teachers and schools in Canada,” said Chris Jones, Executive Director and CEO of Physical and Health Education Canada. “Canadians look to teachers to provide support for those students who may be struggling with a mental health issue. But as this research indicates, teachers need to be equipped with mental health and wellness education during their early academic and in-service preparation so they are ready to better assist our children in the classroom.”

With one in five youth under the age of 18 suffering from at least one mental health issue, a teacher can expect to have at least four students in need of extra mental health supports in their classroom each year. But research released today shows that teachers receive little education on how to best support these students while also promoting the positive mental health of their classmates.

Mental Health in the Classroom

According to the findings of *“Mental Health Education in Canada: An Analysis of Teacher Education and Provincial/Territorial Curricula”*, teacher education programs in the country provide little by way of teacher introduction to positive mental health education or resiliency development for either themselves or students.

The research was led by Dr. Susan Rodger, Director of the School-Based Centre for Mental Health at Western University in London, Ontario.

“In Canada’s teacher education programs, we identified that of the 213 courses offering some form of positive mental health education, only two met each of four preferred criteria

determined by our researchers”, said Rodger. “This is creating a discrepancy between what is offered to teachers as education and what is required by them in the classroom.”

In follow up to these findings, the research team conducted focus groups with stakeholders in the education system, including teachers, parents and principals. Comments echoed the findings above, with teachers feeling not fully prepared during their pre-service education, a sense of job and boundary confusion, and stress as they struggle to help their students.

Canadians Look to Teachers to Help

Physical and Health Education Canada also released today a national survey by Ipsos Reid to better understand how Canadians perceive the mental health challenges facing children and youth, as well as teachers, principals and the education system.

A key revelation in this work shows that Canadians look to teachers almost as much as the family doctor to recognize when a student may be struggling with a mental health issue. While 86 per cent of Canadians believe family doctors are responsible for recognizing that a young person may be facing a mental health issue, 84 per cent of Canadians believe teachers have a responsibility as well.

Yet, while Canadians look to teachers to recognize a student struggling with a mental health issue, only 38 per cent of Canadians believe that teachers are adequately prepared to help. Similarly, when parents are asked whether their child’s school is doing enough when it comes to students’ mental health, only 45 per cent agree.

Working Together for a Solution

In light of these findings, Physical and Health Education Canada has developed five key recommendations:

1. All teacher candidates should be required to take at least one course that teaches skills and strategies to foster positive mental health and resiliency among students.
2. Ensure that classroom/behaviour management courses in teacher education address and reflect proactive resiliency-oriented strategies.
3. Provide mental health education in-service opportunities to ensure existing teachers are up-to-date on the latest strategies for promoting positive mental health and resiliency.
4. Provincial curricula should identify positive mental health and resiliency outcomes for health education.
5. Positive mental health and resiliency outcomes should be present in all grades from kindergarten to grade 12.

“We know that students are struggling and that teachers are struggling to support them,” said Jones. “That is why over the coming months we’re going to reach out to faculties of education, school boards, and ministries of education to find ways to better prepare teachers to foster positive mental health, receive the support they need as professionals, and continue to be a key pillar in the lives of children and youth.”

AstraZeneca Canada provided essential support for this independent research through the AstraZeneca Young Health Program, a global, community investment initiative that aims to

address the impact of non-communicable disease among youth around the world. Learn more about the Young Health Program at www.younghealth.ca.

Methodology

“Mental Health Education Canada: An Analysis of Teacher Education and Provincial/Territorial Curricula”

The research took place in three steps:

1. Environmental scans (from publicly available information)
 - a. all mental health–related courses present in Bachelor of Education programs across Canada
 - b. the K–12 mental health curriculum in each province and territory
2. Reviews of the relevant literature pertaining to mental health in Canada
 - a. Teacher education courses relating to mental health
 - b. Child and youth mental health curriculum
3. Focus groups and interviews featuring stakeholders relevant to these topics from various locations around Canada.

“The Responsibility to Promote Resiliency: Public Perspectives on Mental Health Education and the Canadian School System”

The methodology for the research involved a custom online survey drawing on members of the Ipsos Reid Online Panel. A total of 2,092 surveys were conducted from September 27th to October 4th, 2013 among a sample of Canadians 18 years and older, with an oversample for smaller provinces to allow for detailed regional analysis. We also included an oversample among parents with children 8 to 17 years old to achieve a total of n=540 surveys among this audience. The overall sample was weighted to be representative of the adult Canadian population according to the latest Statistics Canada Census data by region, age, gender and children at home.

Read the Reports

Both *Mental Health Education Canada: An Analysis of Teacher Education and Provincial/Territorial Curricula* and *The Responsibility to Promote Resiliency: Public Perspectives on Mental Health Education and the Canadian School System* can be found online at www.teachresiliency.ca.

About Physical and Health Education Canada

Physical Health and Education Canada (PHE Canada) is the national voice for physical and health education. They work with educators and on-the-ground professionals to develop the resources, understanding, and networks to ensure that all children have the opportunity to cultivate the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to lead healthy, physically active lives, now and in the future. The foundation of their work is advocating for strong health and physical education curriculum, and providing the support to ensure its delivery by qualified educators supported by engaged administrators. www.phecanada.ca

About the AstraZeneca Canada Young Health Program

The AstraZeneca Young Health Program is about helping young people in need around the world deal with the health issues they face, so that they can improve their chances of living a better life. In Canada, the AstraZeneca Young Health Program (YHP) is working in partnership with three leading Canadian charitable organizations to improve the mental and emotional wellbeing of youth ages 10-19. YHP supports the advocacy efforts of PHE Canada to ensure that teachers are equipped with the skills to project a positive mindset and to teach the skills that lead to positive mental health for Canadian youth. www.younghealth.ca.

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