

Implementing Foundry: Regional and virtual expansion to improve youth access to integrated services

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Introduction

Youth in Canada have high rates of mental health and substance use concerns compared to youth in similar high-income countries. In British Columbia, Canada, an integrated youth services organization called Foundry provides services through a Primary Youth Health Care Model. After the pilot phase involving 6 centres, Foundry expanded to 11 physical centres and launched a virtual service.

Objectives

The study objectives were to evaluate 1) the demographics of Foundry clients, 2) the outcomes of service utilization, and 3) the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, all during the Foundry Phase 2 expansion.

Approach/Methods

Data were analyzed using R for all youth clients accessing both in-person (April 27th, 2018-March 31st, 2021) and virtual services (May 1st, 2020-March 31st, 2021). Cohorts containing all clients from before (April 27th, 2018-March 16th, 2020) and during (March 17th, 2020-March 31st, 2021) the COVID-19 pandemic were also examined.

Results/Policy Implications

23,749 unique youth received 110,145 services at Foundry during the three year period. For all services, the mean client age was 19.54 years (SD = 3.45) and clients most commonly identified as female (62%). Over 60% of youth scored "high" or "very high" for distress and 29% had a self-rated mental health of "poor," with similar percentages seen for all services and virtual services. These ratings stayed consistent before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, although more data were missing during the COVID-19 pandemic due to changes in data collection processes.

Conclusion

Overall, Foundry has continued to reach the target age group of 12-24 years, with a 65% increase in number of clients during the study period compared to the pilot stage. The high levels of distress and self-rated mental health, and the lack of change during the COVID-19 pandemic, suggest there is a significant need for Foundry services in British Columbia and justifies continued expansion. Foundry is continuing to expand both physical

centres and virtual services in British Columbia due to ongoing need. Foundry is also working to implement new anti-racist and outreach programs to better reach socially marginalized youth throughout the province.



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