

Against the Current Agenda



Logistical Updates

- French interpretation will be provided at sessions with this symbol: “♦”.
- There are three Breakout Sessions across the two days. We offer three or four breakout rooms for each of these sessions; each room is themed around two or three featured presentations. You will have the opportunity to choose which room you attend.

Day 1: Wednesday, November 15th Building Connections

Welcome and Opening♦

Start time: 10:00am PT, 11:00am MT, 12:00pm CT, 1:00pm ET, 2:00pm AT, 2:30pm NT

- Open with Ceremony with Grandmother Kathy Brant
- Welcome from Sharif Mahdy, CEO, The Students Commission of Canada

Youth Panel♦: The Realities of Wellbeing, Connection, and Upstream Prevention Today

Start time: 10:30am PT, 11:30am MT, 12:30pm CT, 1:30pm ET, 2:30pm AT, 3:00pm NT

This youth panel will ground the event in youth voice around Against the Currents' themes of wellbeing, connection, and upstream prevention.

- Moderator: Pallvi Sehijpaul

Breakout Session 1: Building Connection

Start time: 11:00am PT, 12:00pm MT, 1:00pm CT, 2:00pm ET, 3:00pm AT, 3:30pm NT

Main Room♦: Knowing Your Power

- *“Just like a tree, our soil determines how we grow” 4 Pillars 4 Directions Safer Spaces Framework and Anti-Oppressive Practices:* Megan Légaré and Nishad Khanna, Research Director (The Students Commission of Canada)

This presentation will showcase anti-oppressive practices (AOP) using the 4 Pillars 4 Directions Safer Spaces Framework. Our objective is to illustrate how intentionally practicing inclusive and justice-oriented values can be effective anti-oppressive youth engagement practice. Through storytelling, we will introduce the Indigenous concept of AOP as a Way of Life and introduce the SCC’s 4 Pillars™ and safer spaces framework. When practiced consistently, these frameworks create spaces that progressively become safer. We will explore how anti-oppressive practices value relationships with young people, generate safer spaces for diverse youth, reduce barriers and open new possibilities for young people and their communities. This presentation is based on a chapter for an AOP textbook for Child and Youth Care practitioners (publication date Spring 2025).

- *The Power of Youth Voice - Truth Leading to Reconciliation and All My Relations: Meeting Ground:* Chantelle Edwards, Peter Brant, Emma Cognet, and Nadia Hanif (The Students Commission of Canada)

This presentation showcases the impact youth have when given space to know and exercise their power. Some outcomes range from creating and facilitating workshops that spread awareness about Truth and Reconciliation to the collaboration between Indigenous and Newcomer youth to learn about each other’s stories and celebrate their cultures.

Breakout Room 1: Embracing Self, Embracing Others

- *Preventing Identity-Based Bullying & Teen Dating Violence at School: New Resources from PREVNet:* Deineria Exner-Cortens, PhD, MPH (University of Calgary)

Upstream prevention approaches are less plentiful at the middle and secondary school level than in elementary school settings. To address this gap, PREVNet – Canada’s healthy relationships hub – has created new teaching and learning resources focused on preventing the root causes of identity-based bullying and teen dating violence, including videos, discussion guides, adaptable slide decks, tip sheets, and healthy relationships posters designed by PREVNet’s National Youth Advisory Council. We will review these resources, as well as the foundational concept of equity literacy.

- *Be the Program & Next Steps into Online Teen Dating Violence Prevention:* Vic McLuckie (The Students Commission of Canada)

Using research from Be the Program, the Students Commission of Canada’s five-year Healthy Relationships program, this session explores capstone findings on dating and relationships in the age of online connections. We will be discussing what youth want to see

from programs about dating, relationships and intimate partner violence. Come find out what youth wish adults knew about the way their generation is using online spaces to foster connection and their main areas of concern for online safety!

Breakout Room 2: Building Bridges across Difference

- *Upstream Violence Prevention Approaches: Pallvi Sehijpaul (The Students Commission of Canada in partnership with the City of Vancouver, Social Policy and Projects Division)*

This presentation will discuss the partnership between the Student's Commission of Canada and the City of Vancouver's *Building Safer Communities Program's* development of a Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy. Through a comprehensive and intentional community engagement process, convening key stakeholders such as youth, public institutions and community organizations, the strategy sets out a plan to create safer spaces and empower young people and communities. Through the proposed Youth Safety and Violence Prevention Strategy, we can begin to understand how policy creation can be re-imagined by dissolving divides, building bridges and fostering collaboration.

- *Hearing Unheard Moments: Drama and Comedy as Techniques for Puncturing Polarization: Priyank Mathur (Mythos Labs)*

How can comedy help fight violent extremism? How can drama be used to highlight and fight oppression? We believe the world's biggest problems require the world's most innovative solutions, finding connections between seemingly unrelated disciplines in order to create new approaches. Join this session to learn more!

- *How Belonging Can Prevent Youth Homelessness: Lessons from Research and Practice in Canada: Amanda Buchnea (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, York University)*

How do we move beyond reactive, crisis responses to youth homelessness toward supporting young people to thrive BEFORE they lose their housing, and ensuring that those experiencing homelessness don't become homeless again? In this presentation I unpack what we have learned through research and practice with young people about the central role that connection and belonging play in working upstream to prevent youth homelessness.

Breakout Room 3: Generativity and Leadership

- *Services, Supports, & Setbacks - Young Adult Research Project: Mike Wright (Ledge Leadership)*

Recently, Ledge Leadership finalized the Ledge Research Project, a year-long journey to gain insight into the needs of young adults and curate preventative services to respond to those needs. The research was led by a group of diverse young adults who organized events, focus groups, interviews, and an online survey of their peers. Our presentation will explore the

primary themes identified in the research and recommendations to organizations that want to increase their support for working with this age group.

- *Youth Generativity in Uncertain Times - Positive Development of Youth Engaged in Community Organizations*: Alexis Holmgren (The Students Commission of Canada) and Heather L. Lawford, PhD (Bishops University)

During COVID, youth-serving organizations developed numerous interventions and adapted their programming to continue to meet the needs of their youth. What happened to the young people who engaged in these programs? This presentation outlines a youth participatory mixed-methods research project examining mental and physical health outcomes of young people engaged in community programs post-COVID. Over 300 youth (ages 14 to 28 years old) across 32 different programs throughout Canada and from diverse micropopulations reported on their health, generativity, optimism and other factors while also discussing their experiences within their respective programs.

Break

Start time: 12:00pm PT, 1:00pm MT, 2:00pm CT, 3:00pm ET, 4:00pm AT, 4:30pm NT

Keynote Panel Presentation[♦]: Well-being, connection, and what it means to be upstream!

Start time: 12:15pm PT, 1:15pm MT, 2:15pm CT, 3:15pm ET, 4:15pm AT, 4:45pm NT

- Moderator: Linda Rose-Krasnor, PhD (Brock University Professor Emeritus and Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement)
- Panelists:
 - Deineria Exner-Cortens, PhD, MPH (University of Calgary)
 - Pytor Hodgson (CEO, Three Things Consulting)
 - Heather L. Lawford, PhD, Canada Research Chair in Youth Development (Bishops University and Co-Director of the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement)
 - Jennifer Markides, PhD (University of Calgary)

Closing[♦]

Start time: 1:15pm PT, 2:15pm MT, 3:15pm CT, 4:15pm ET, 5:15pm AT, 5:45pm NT



Day 2: Thursday, November 16

Health and Wellbeing through Safer Spaces

Welcome (Back!)♦

Start time: 10:00am PT, 11:00am MT, 12:00pm CT, 1:00pm ET, 2:00pm AT, 2:30pm NT

Youth Panel♦ : Over the Influence – Engaging Youth to Address the Opioid Crisis

Start time: 10:10am PT, 11:10am MT, 12:10pm CT, 1:10pm ET, 2:10pm AT, 2:40pm NT

This youth panel will highlight the experiences of members of the Students Commission of Canada's Over the Influence Youth Advisory Group, and will explore the themes of wellbeing, connection, and upstream prevention in relation to substance use and prevention-related programming.

- Moderator: Lauren Wengle (The Students Commission of Canada)

Breakout Room Session 2: Health Promotion

Start time: 11:10am PT, 12:10pm MT, 1:10pm CT, 2:10pm ET, 3:10pm AT, 3:40pm NT

Main Room♦: Safer Spaces in Schools

- *Play for All: Emotionally Safer and Inclusive Spaces in Physical Activity at School:* Andrea Haefele (Ophea)

Physical and emotional safety is a precondition for meaningful learning in Health and Physical Education (HPE). Ophea believes that safe and inclusive physical activity means creating meaningful learning opportunities within supportive school environments where every student feels like they belong. An increased sense of belonging can positively impact students' overall well-being and learning. It is critical that educators provide a physically and emotionally safe environment for learning and participating in HPE, and other physical activity opportunities across the school day.

- *Stories and Benefits of SIFT in Schools: A Menu of Mental Health Program Options:* Jocelyn Gallant (The Students Commission of Canada) and Kristine Divall (Golden Youth Engagement Network)

A presentation highlighting insights into the world of SIFT: an upstream mental health promotion program in schools. Learn about how to start and sustain youth programs and safer spaces in schools.

- *The Pillars of a Safer Classroom:* Brynn Morton (Brock University)

This presentation will be about the implementation of the SCC concept of the 4 Pillars within the classroom environment, and how this can create a safer and more authentic space for youth and students.

Breakout Room 1: Indigenous Ways of Healing and Sharing

- *How to Fix & Fill Your Power Bowl:* Warren Hooley

If you ask someone: "Is bullying harmful?". What do you think the most common answer is? I mean, it's obvious right? We all know its "bad" and have been told this since we were on the playground. And yet, bullying seems to persist and run rampant throughout the world. For the past 10 years I've tried to figure out why this is and if there is there anything we can do about it. In this presentation I will show you the metaphor of the power bowl and some of the best techniques I found to truly inspire others to make sincere changes when it comes to world of bullying.

- *The Power of Storytelling:* Dale Apeis (English River First Nation)

Through the power of story, teachings and solutions can be found by shared experiences, problem solving, and meaningful engagement. Storytelling is a generational practice and custom of Indigenous peoples to pass down knowledge, teachings, and build relations. Through the power of story, participants can exchange dialogue, language, and promote positive change.

Breakout Room 2: Addressing Substance Use

- *Participatory Strategies to Examine Outdoor Learning Experiences and the Implications for Substance Use Prevention:* Tanya Halsall, PhD (Carleton University, University of Ottawa IMHR) & Laurel Donison (Brock University)

This presentation will describe the multi-level participatory strategies used within a study designed to capture the experiences of educators and students who were learning outdoors during the pandemic. The objective of the research was to apply the findings to identify new opportunities to implement successful practices more broadly and increase equitable access.

- *Listening to Youth Voices with Planet Youth:* Rebecca Shams, BSc (Leeds, Grenville & Lanark District Health Unit)

An overview of the process and outcomes to date of youth engagement with the Planet Youth Lanark County project. How youth voices shape the narrative and expand the survey data to help make effective initiatives.

- *Youth Opioids Awareness Program:* Hilary Dagg, MSc (YMCA's National Youth Opioid Awareness Program)

This presentation will be showcasing the Youth Opioids Awareness program's content and goals.

Break

Start time: 12:10pm PT, 1:10pm MT, 2:10pm CT, 3:10pm ET, 4:10pm AT, 4:40pm NT

Breakout Room Session 3: Mental Health

Start time: 12:20pm PT, 1:20pm MT, 2:20pm CT, 3:20pm ET, 4:20pm AT, 4:50pm NT

Main Room ♦ : Safer Spaces and Mental Health

- *Eco-paralysis: Its causes and how to overcome it:* Stefania Maggi, PhD (Carleton University and Mochi4ThePlanet)

Eco-paralysis is a significant contributor to our collective inability to intensify efforts to adequately intervene to mitigate and adapt to the climate crisis. Eco-paralysis is the apathy that sometimes comes in response to eco-anxiety - a profound emotional state comprising of several feelings (e.g., anxiety, grief, anger), often elicited by knowing about the present and future catastrophic impacts of climate change - while at the same time holding the belief that climate change is too big for one person alone to resolve. In this presentation, the causes of individual and collective eco-paralysis will be discussed, followed by an overview of effective approaches for overcoming this ineffective coping strategy.

- *SIFT Your Way to Empowering Youth: Building Safer Spaces Rooted in Belonging, Wellbeing, and Positive Social Identities:* Kaitlin Power, Janica Maya, and Tara Switenky (The Students Commission of Canada)

SIFT is a multi-year initiative at Students Commission of Canada, funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada. Currently offered at six sites across Canada, Sift has proven to be a flexible and effective framework with a customizable menu of services, foundational curriculum and complementary services. Intended to create authentic and responsive spaces where youth can develop a greater understanding of their social identity, mental health, capacity for contribution and skill development, whilst also building a community of allyship with other youth, adult partners and agencies of support. Join us as we highlight some of the findings from 3 of our sites (Toronto, ON; Prince Albert, SK; and virtual program), each with stories unique to their program delivery, as well as over-arching themes encompassing all participants.

- *Retention, Check-ins, Connection: How Youth Program Leaders Hurdled Pandemic Pressures:* Maddison Fiorino (Bishops University)

We interviewed 25 youth programs from across Canada as part of a larger study to understand how youth programs adapted during the pandemic. This presentation includes strategies and adaptations on how youth program leads kept youth engaged, made their mental health a priority and maximized opportunities for connections.

Breakout Room 2: Addressing Systems for Mental Health Outcomes

- *It Doesn't Get More Upstream than Education: Research and Practice for Societal Wellbeing:* Jennifer Markides, PhD (University of Calgary)

Research projects often target deficits and needs, then offer reactionary suggestions to support existing issues rather than addressing the underlying causes to larger societal problems. In schools, low graduation rates and poor attendance become the focus of

funding. Education is rarely seen as a place to make change, because transformation change takes time— even generations. Research and informed practices to address the goals, needs, interests, and dreams of youth in schools have the potential to affect the social determinants of wellbeing towards healthier individuals, families, and communities.

- *Systems Thinking and Mapping for Social Change*: Jessica Machado (Toronto Metropolitan University)

We can be overwhelmed with questions when considering how to become involved in advocacy or activist efforts. Where do I start? What do I need to learn and what role can I take on? Who's involved and where should I direct my energy? Systems thinking offers a learning pathway to asking critical questions to understand the complex interconnectedness and relationality of deep societal issues. And, it can aid in identifying opportunities for transformative change. Participants attending this presentation will learn about systems thinking and systems mapping, and will be equipped with tools to guide and advance their learning and involvement in social justice.

- *Enhancing Youth Engagement in Research: Survey, Incentives and Branding Strategies*: Valentina Castillo Cifuentes (Youth & Innovation Project at University of Waterloo)

Drawing on findings from the RBC Future Launch Pilot Study, this presentation offers recommendations to youth-serving organizations and researchers to better engage young people in research studies. To address the issues that affect young people the most, we need reliable data. Our research advises on increasing response rates, incentive strategies, survey design, as well as branding and marketing approaches that enhance youth's participation in research.

Breakout Room 3: Supporting Mental Health and Life Promotion

- *Miyo-wichetowin: Land-making, human-nature relations, and resilience and health among urban Indigenous youth*: Kelley-Bird Naytowhow; Darrien Morton, BA (honours); Andrew Hatala, PhD (University of Manitoba)

Relationships to land and nature have long been recognized globally as a central Indigenous determinant of health. As more Indigenous peoples live in or migrate to larger urban centres, it is crucial to better understand how these relationships are maintained and function within urban spaces. The session details 54 interviews with 36 youth that were partially drawn from two CBPR projects exploring Indigenous youth wellness within a mid-sized Canadian metropolitan city, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Findings demonstrate that young people re-conceptualize the boundedness of place, identity, and nature in porous and idiosyncratic ways to support their health, resilience, and wellness. Through the Cree concept of miyo-wichetowin, which is described as “having or possessing good relations”, photo-narratives produced by youth suggest that nature is more than an instrumental resource for consumption that exists ‘elsewhere’ from cities and ‘out there’ in rural areas, such as reserves, northern and remote territories, and ancestral homelands. Instead,

notions of reciprocity, spirituality, Indigenous knowledge, and sentience come to characterize youth encounters with nature through processes of land-making, environmental repossession, and wellness 'here' in cities.

- *Engaging Youth in Mental Health Innovation for a Brighter Tomorrow:* Madeleine Curry & Kaylea Walsh (Kids Help Phone)

This presentation will adapt the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation framework (Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, Empower) to discuss specific examples of youth engagement across Kids Help Phone. Examples include evaluation surveys to consult youth service users, youth feedback sessions for prototyping, dedicated youth advisors on redesign projects, youth-led content generation, and a National Youth Council to provide leadership, and directly influence decision-making and strategy organization-wide.

- *Embracing Conversation: How to talk about Suicide:* Brandi Bell (First Nations & Northern Relations and the Embracing Life Secretariat)

Suicide awareness and prevention is all about taking things back to conversation. This presentation will show why we created the Embracing Life app, what youth told us, what adults told us and what we need to do to move forward to support those around us.

Closing Ceremonies ♦

Start time: 1:20pm PT, 2:20pm MT, 3:20pm CT, 4:20pm ET, 5:20pm AT, 5:50pm NT

- Closing in ceremony with Grandmother Kathy Brant

