

2023-24
impact report



Infant and Early Mental
Health Promotion

SickKids[®]

Building a
***Brighter Future
Together***



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Opening Messages



Chaya Kulkarni

Director, Infant and Early Mental Health Promotion (IEMHP),
The Hospital for Sick Children

Every year the team at IEMHP prepares the annual Impact Report and we ourselves marvel at all we and our partners and collaborators have accomplished. This year is no different. Here are some of our many note-worthy highlights:

- Our training reached thousands of practitioners across Canada.
- We joined the world stage as we became an affiliate member of the World Association for Infant Mental Health.
- We successfully won the bid to host the World Congress on Infant Mental Health in 2026.
- We engaged with more communities nationwide to create pathways of care for infant and early mental health.
- Our partnership with Indigenous communities grows stronger as we reaffirm our commitment to implementing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action.

Collectively, our work influenced and impacted thousands of individuals and informed policies and practices across health, social services, education and other systems that directly support young children and their families in Canada. The key to all we can accomplish includes 3 key components:

- Strong community-based partnerships and collaborations.
- A commitment to our work by local, provincial and national agencies.
- A passionate team at IEMHP.

All this to say, wow – what a year. Existing initiatives continued to grow, new initiatives launched, and relationships and collaborations strengthened. As we head into 2024, we are inspired and reminded that supporting the well-being of Canada's youngest children and their families, as well as the work of those who assist them, profoundly influences the health of individuals, communities, provinces, and the nation as a whole.

Chaya Kulkarni



Kelly McMillen

Director, Learning Institute, The Hospital for Sick Children

We are delighted to celebrate the incredible accomplishments of our Infant and Early Mental Health Promotion team this past year. The team has much to be proud of! Highlights of the team's work can be found in this report and include working with communities to create pathways for infant and early mental health services and supports, training and coaching, as well as working with our Indigenous partners on the Nurturing the Seed and Natural Helpers programs.

The team continues to collaborate with partners across the country and internationally. We are deeply grateful for these relationships. The commitment, dedication, and enthusiasm of our partners is unwavering and inspiring. Together we will continue to impact the well-being of our children, their families, and those that care for them.

We are looking forward to the year ahead with excitement. In addition to our ongoing projects, planning is underway for the Expanding Horizons National Institute which will take place May 6-8, 2025. We hope to see you there! We will also be launching a Certificate Program, planning for the World Association of Infant Mental Health (WAIMH) World Congress 2026, and so much more!

With thanks,



Lennox Huang

Chief Medical Officer, Vice-President Education,
Medical and Academic Affairs, The Hospital for Sick Children

It is such a pleasure to recognize and celebrate the remarkable work of the SickKids IEMHP team. IEMHP's blend of advocacy, system work and education has impacted the lives of thousands locally and across our country.

Earlier this year, I had the privilege of accompanying Chaya (director for IEMHP) and Daryl Yates (SickKids executive director for mental health), on a visit with the Minister for Mental Health, Hon. Michael Tibollo. This experience highlighted just how vital the work being done in this field is, not only within the walls of SickKids but also at a broader systemic level. Prioritizing the mental health and well-being of our youngest children and their families has an outsized impact on their future and the health of society as a whole.

I'm looking forward to an exciting year ahead as planning begins for us hosting the World Congress and we build more connections to mental health systems work underway through the SickKids-CAMH Child and Youth Mental Health Collaborative. Congratulations again to the team for all of the work done to date.

What is Infant and Early Mental Health

Infant and early mental health, also referred to as social-emotional development, is the evolving capacity of a child, from infancy to the age of 6, to express and regulate their emotions, form close and secure relationships, and explore their environment. The early years are a period of profound brain development, with over 1 million neural connections being made each second. Experiences during this time influence these connections and, thus, shape our brains, our relationships, and the way we see the world. Notably, the relationship young children have with their caregivers is the most influential as it greatly impacts a child's development and their capacity to recover when faced with challenges.

Infant and early mental health practice refers to the promotion of optimal development and wellbeing in infants and young children, the prevention of difficulties, and appropriate intervention when children are at risk of or have identified problems. The goal of infant and early mental health services is to ensure equitable child outcomes in terms of a sense of security and self-esteem, and the ability to form satisfying relationships, to engage with the world, to learn, problem-solve and cope, and to continue positive development throughout life. Infant and early mental health practice also strives to promote stable and supportive families and communities.



About IEMHP

> Vision

All children, prenatal to age 6, have the opportunity to enhance their mental health and wellbeing.

> Mission

Enhancing infant and early mental health across Canada and around the world.

> Values



Collaboration – We recognize it takes a village to bring about change, and we place partnerships at the centre of all that we do.



Inclusion, Diversity & Equity – We strive to embody the diversity of the people in Canada into our work so that it supports all in a meaningful way.



Integrity – We are trustworthy and transparent. We act responsibly to ensure we are a dependable and respectful service and partner.



Quality & Innovation – We have a culture of continuous learning which allows us to think outside the box to ensure our evidence-based work is as effective as it can be and meets the highest standards of excellence.



Sustainability – Our approach ensures that the work we undertake can be sustained beyond any short-term funding or partnership.

Infant and Early Mental Health Promotion (IEMHP) is a program of The Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto which offers a relationship-based, evidence-informed approach to strengthening best practices in infant and early mental health, for practitioners and decision makers. We work across Canada with service providers to enhance knowledge and programs in support of infants, young children and their families. IEMHP has trained thousands of practitioners from across the country and around the world, equipping them with tools to help embed the science of infant and early mental health into their work. We also engage in cultivating relationships with community-level, national and international experts, leaders, and governing bodies.

Numerous studies describe the significant impact early experiences have on physical health, mental wellbeing, and life opportunities. However, regardless of the growing knowledge surrounding these crucial years, and of the evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of early prevention and intervention efforts, infant and early mental health has been notably absent from conversations regarding child health in Canada. Since its inception, IEMHP has challenged this narrative and grown to become Canada's leading voice on infant and early mental health, influencing practice and policy through training and research.



Training & Education

IEMHP engages service providers with the science and supports them in exploring how they can apply it to strengthen their knowledge and practice.

Resources & Tools

IEMHP offers tools, discussion guides, community supports, family-friendly resources, materials to inform policy, and more.

Research & Innovation

IEMHP adds to the science and translates it to meaningfully inform practice, policy, and research.



What We Accomplished in 2023-24

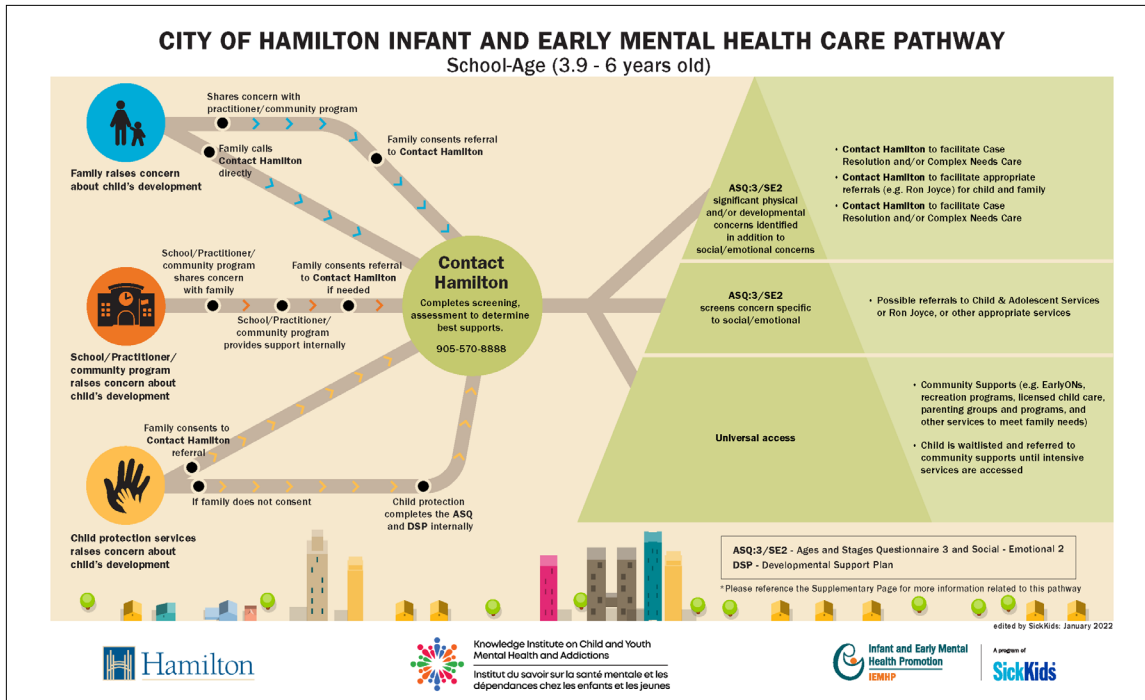
Working with Communities to Create Pathways for Infant and Early Mental Healthcare Services and Supports

Guided by implementation science, the Infant and Early Mental Health Care Pathways initiative aims to create navigable systems of care pathways for IEMH in Canada. Through training opportunities and creation of pathways that identify clear access to, through, and out of services, we enhance the capacity of all our community partners to provide timely support for infant and early mental health services.

Research reinforces the fact that early mental health experiences impact all aspects of life throughout the lifespan. As a novel initiative, Infant and Early Mental Health Care Pathways focuses on mental health and wellbeing in the early years (0-6 yrs) and addresses developmental concerns long before they become lifelong physical and/or mental health challenges.

Through successful funding, from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and community funding, IEMHP has significantly expanded its Infant and Early Mental Health Care Pathways work across Ontario, encompassing seven communities. Our initial pilot communities, Hamilton, Simcoe County, and Hastings Prince Edward County have trained over 450 practitioners on infant and early mental health across various sectors that include public health, education, child protection, and children's mental health. All pilot communities are currently in Phase Four of a Five-Phase approach, developing communication and sustainability plans to share their Infant and Early Mental Health Care Pathways with their communities. On the next page is an example of one of the IEMH Care Pathways for the City of Hamilton.





Recently joining the initiative are Kingston, Frontenac, and Lennox & Addington (KFL&A), York Region, Simcoe County Indigenous Community, and Moosonee and Moose Factory. The KFL&A community and York Region are both committed to developing and implementing the Infant and Early Mental Health Care Pathways initiative to better serve the children and families in their communities. In phase three, each community had their community champions conduct a service mapping activity to identify and better understand the current services, strengths, and challenges as well as begin forming their aspirational pathways. In March 2024, York Region hosted a community-wide symposium, attended by over 160 practitioners, to highlight the importance of IEMH and promote the Infant and Early Mental Health Care Pathways in their community. As for Moosonee and Moose Factory, and Simcoe County Indigenous Community, they are currently identifying key partners and community champions to be a part of this initiative. They will begin planning and developing their pathways in the upcoming year.

You can learn more about this important work through the IEMH Care Pathways Brief or by visiting our website page Infant and Early Mental Health Care Pathways (imhpromotion.ca).

To ensure the initiative is successful in each community, the initiative is evaluated through survey and focus groups at 4 timepoints: pre-training, and 3-months, 6-months, and 9-months post-training. During 2023-2024, surveys were implemented for Hastings Prince Edward County (HPEC) at pre-training and at three months.



Survey Results

Hastings Prince Edward County (HPEC) Pre-Training Survey

67 participants completed the Pathways Pre-Training Survey between November 2023 and March 2024

38.8%

strongly agreed

37.3%

agreed that their organization collaborates well with other organizations in their community.

When asked 'in which ways is your organization collaborating with other organizations? (Select all that apply)'

70.1% selected 'referrals to/from other organizations'

28.3% strongly agreed and **43.3%** agreed that they have observed changes regarding their personal practice.

When asked, 'why is your organization not collaborating well with other organizations?'

50% selected 'lack of time'

100% selected 'lack of resources'

50% selected 'unsure of who to reach out to'

When asked 'what changes regarding your personal practice have you observed? (Select all that apply)'

26.9% selected 'my confidence has improved'

22.4% selected 'I am better able to support families'

20.9% strongly agreed and **46.2%** agreed that they have observed new policies being introduced in their practice/organization.

When asked 'what do the new policies address? (Select all that apply)'

26.8% selected 'referrals'

23.8% selected 'collaborations'

20.9% selected 'early intervention'

When asked 'what changes regarding care to families have you observed? (Select all that apply)'

26.9% selected 'families are better supported'

16.4% strongly agreed and **40.3%** agreed that they have observed changes regarding care provided to families in their practice/organization.

HPEC 3-Month Follow-Up Survey

15 participants were eligible for the 3-month follow-up survey.
13 participants completed the 3-month follow-up survey.

23.1%

strongly agreed that their organization collaborates well with other organizations in their community.

38.5%

strongly agreed that their organization collaborates well with other organizations in their community.

When asked 'in which ways is your organization collaborating with other organizations? (Select all that apply)'

87.5% selected 'referrals to/from other organizations'

62.5% selected 'frequent sharing between organizations'

61.5% were neutral regarding the statement that they have observed new policies in their practice/organization.

When asked 'what do the new policies address? (Select all that apply)'

50% selected 'referrals'

50% selected 'developmental screening'

50% selected 'early intervention'

76.9% were neutral regarding the statement that they have observed changes regarding care provided to families in their practice/organization.

When asked 'what changes regarding care to families have you observed? (Select all that apply)'

50% selected 'families are better supported'

15.4% strongly agreed and **69.2%** agreed that they have observed changes regarding their personal practice.

When asked 'what changes regarding your personal practice have you observed? (Select all that apply)'

60% selected 'my confidence has improved'

50% selected 'I feel more knowledgeable regarding service processes'

40% selected 'my personal capacity has improved'

30% selected 'my interactions with families have improved'

40% selected 'I am better able to support families'

IEMH Competencies Checklist

IEMHP led attendees at a York Region Symposium in the IEMH Competencies Checklist activity which asks service providers to self-assess their level of knowledge and skills on topics relevant to their role. These topics included child development, risk and protective factors, attachment and relationships, family centered approaches, and more. The survey's goal was to learn about infant and early mental health knowledge and skills across sectors, to ultimately gain a better understanding of service provider's areas of strengths, and areas that may require extra support, training, or professional development. The results were collected and shared with the group via this presentation: [IEMH Competencies Checklist Results for York Region Symposium](#).

126 of 146
Attendees

Completed the IEMH Care Competencies activity

48%
Respondents

Reported having low skill in assessment formulation and diagnosis (e.g., determining caregiver's readiness to participate in services and treatment, engaging and collaborating with other professionals who can augment treatment plan, etc.)

61.6%
Respondents

Reported high knowledge in developmental vulnerability (e.g., understanding the importance of collaborating with other services, knowing the strengths and limitations of screening and assessment tools, etc.)

Training & Coaching

This year, we saw a significant increase in participants accessing at least one of IEMHP's training offerings. Notably, the training team found themselves traveling all over Canada – Moose Factory, Christian Island, Nanaimo, Oxford County, Prince George and Yellowknife to name a few! We delivered more in-person training of our Developmental Screening and Strategies for Support offering, while also making this training available virtually, where in-person training was not possible.

We are particularly encouraged by the positive feedback about all of our learning opportunities. Our free, Introduction to Infant and Early Mental Health webinars continue to be a good reminder of the importance of relational health in the early years, and upwards of 85% of participants noted that this series supported a better understanding of child development, brain development, attachment and relationships, as well as the factors that derail development, such as adverse life experiences. An increase in our pre-knowledge survey tells us that more and more participants are coming to the Introduction to Infant and Early Mental Health series with greater knowledge of infant and early mental health, and this is something we celebrate! It means that the knowledge of this field is growing and that is good news that we can all, collectively, be proud of!

Developmental Screening and Strategies for Support (DSSS) training has also received positive feedback, noting that 90% of participants left the training feeling more confident in their ability to identify risk for developmental delays, have sensitive conversations about a child’s development with caregivers, and to put a plan in place to support that child’s development while on the waitlist for more intensive services. Subsequent Coaching Connect sessions revealed that practitioners are finding that the tools in this training have broadened their capacity to provide more effective support to families, and supported the complexity of their workloads. DSSS training is available virtually and in-person. It is also offered twice a year as an “open-call” training, where individuals can register, as well as offered as a customized training to agencies with 10 or more participants. Contact us at iemhp.learning@sickkids.ca to learn more!

 **3,000**
Total participants across Canada
A 159% increase from the previous fiscal year.



We have also expanded our reach from about 5% to almost 14% across the Globe.

41.8% Trainees from **Early Learning and Care**

16.2% Trainees from **Children Mental Health**

8.8% Trainees from **Public Health**

6.0% Trainees from **Education**

The remainder were evenly distributed (1.6 to 4.5%) across remaining sectors.

Youth and Adult Mental Health sector increased this past fiscal from its usual 1% to 8%.



An increase in knowledge assessment

73.4% of correct answers prior to the Intro training and 80.6% after the training.



An increase in perceived IEMH knowledge

Assessed 1 for weak to 5 for very good was significantly increased from 3.3 to 4.1 points.

Generated Discussions and/or Reflection:

- 87% of Intro participants agree that the training **really opened their eyes** to the importance of the early years for lifelong improved outcomes. 98% of LS2022 participants were also confronted/ reminded of that fact.
- For 91% of LS2022 attendees, The LS2022 series **prompted interesting conversations** around IEMH (91% attendees) and made them reevaluate the importance that the science of IEMH should have in their practice (89%).
- 96% of LS2022 attendees feel **more motivated to advocate for IEMH** after watching the series.

Changed IEMH Practice:

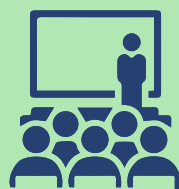
- 95% of Intro trainees plan to use the strategies presented in their work.
- LS2022 also changed the way the trainees listen to (90% trainees) and/or interact with (88%) children and their families.
- DSSS trainees left the training feeling properly equipped to administer developmental screenings (90%) and develop support plans (92%). Following the subsequent coaching sessions, participants felt confident in engaging families (94%), administering developmental screenings (90.7%), developing support plans (86%), and supporting families journey through IEMH services (95%).



Left Photo: IEMHP visited Moose Factory to deliver NTS training. Participants were trained on ASQ's and DSP's, and introduced to the NTS app. *Top and bottom right:* IEMHP visited Yellowknife, Yukon to deliver training. Participants can be seen here playing the "brain game".

Lecture Series

The popularity of *Lecture Series 2022: Laying the Path for Lifelong Wellness* continues to grow across the globe. First launched in 2022, this series was developed in partnership between IEMHP and the World Association of Infant Mental Health (WAIMH), and includes a wide range of topics from pioneers and experts in infant and early mental health from around the world. Currently available in English and French, we anticipate being able to offer options to purchase individual webinars within the series in the coming year. For more information, please visit our site [here](#).



3,273 Total participants

1,000 new practitioners joined in 2023-24.



15.4% Participants who accessed from outside of Canada

Particularly the Netherlands (51.1%) and Australia (34.5%) but also the United States, New Zealand, Sweden, and South Africa.



48.7% Participants from the Early Learning and Care sector

Remaining participants distributed between all other sectors such as Children Mental Health (19.5%), Public Health (12.7%), Education (6.1%), and Maternal Mental Health (3.8%).

94.1%

Motivated them to promote IEMH

94.1%

Prompted interesting conversations

90.1%

Re-evaluated the importance of the science of IEMH

91.7%

Changed the way they listen to children and families

90.3%

Changed the way they interact to children and families



92%

Recommend this series to others and cannot wait for the next series

“I just want to say thank you so much for sharing their knowledge on this lecture with us. It has been very helpful for the job with do every day with children. This lecture will help to encourage us to do more with the children and understand them too.”

“[This series] was very informative and engaging, and I gained valuable insights and skills that I can apply to my work and personal life.”

“I was very pleased to be given this opportunity to take this course. I found the content very educational, informative, relative and imperative to the many roles in my life. Very easy to understand, and truly thought provoking. Thank you.”



The World Association for Infant Mental Health (WAIMH) and Infant and Early Mental Health Promotion (IEMHP) have collaborated successfully in creating the webinar series “Laying the Path for Lifelong Wellness”. In WAIMH’s experience, the collaboration has been very productive, easygoing, and served the aims of both organizations in increasing awareness and knowledge on infant and early childhood mental health globally. The team at IEMHP has provided excellent organizational and technical skills in this collaboration, while WAIMH has been able to provide access to its network of international experts in the field. The end result has been a unique webinar series which has reached professionals from all parts of the world. The WAIMH Board has acknowledged the value of this collaboration and expressed its interest in future collaborations with IEMHP.

Kaija Puura

Executive Director, WAIMH Central Office
Professor of Child Psychiatry, Tampere University, Finland
Chief Physician, Department of Child Psychiatry, Tampere University Hospital

Nurturing the Seed (NTS)

When concerns arise about a child's early development, it can be difficult to find the right services and/or there are often long waitlists. Nurturing the Seed (NTS) addresses this issue by using the science of infant and early mental health together with developmental tools and resources to provide support as soon as a concern is raised. This initiative is being implemented in partnership with multiple Indigenous communities across the country, and in collaboration with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and Queen's University.

NTS is an intervention and tool designed to promote infant and early mental health, mitigate vulnerabilities and/or prevent further risks for children under 6 years of age. It does so by supporting service providers in building a [Developmental Support Plan \(DSP\)](#) tailored to young children and their families, that guide parents/caregivers in including simple activities in their daily routines which 1) reinforce the parent/caregiver-child relationship, and 2) support the child's development in one or more of the five developmental domains.

The NTS model uses [Ages and Stages Questionnaires \(ASQs\)](#) and includes training, coaching, resources, technology, and ongoing support for implementing and sustaining the program widely in communities. The NTS app is currently used by **235 service providers**. The initiative supports partner agencies in working collaboratively and is guided by and customized to local needs.

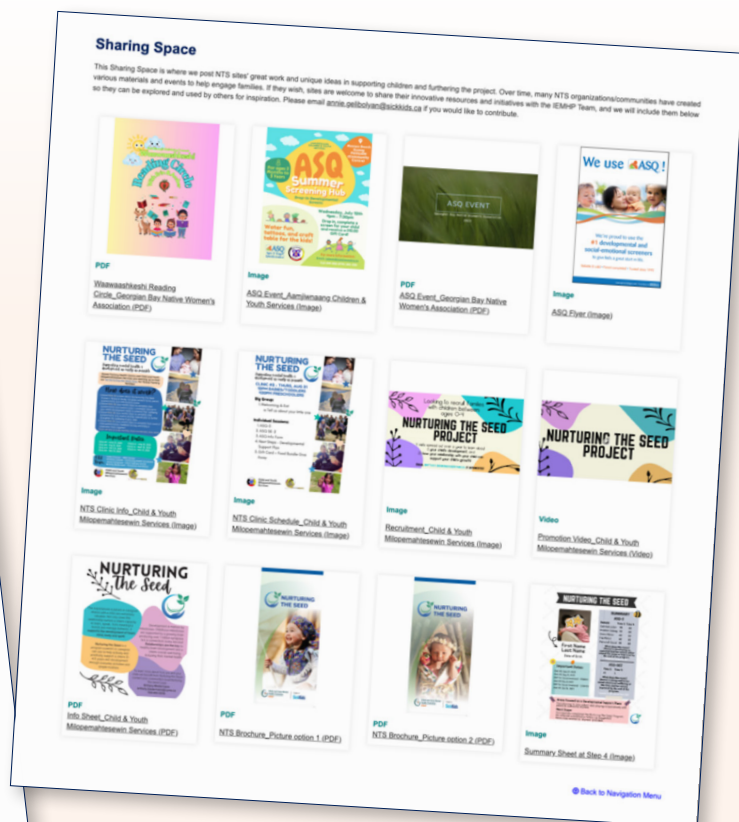
Over the past several years, Nurturing the Seed has evolved into a pan-Canadian project where we also measure the effectiveness of the model. As of March 2024, there were anonymized records of **249 children** in the NTS database. We have begun compiling and analyzing this data to then collaboratively interpret it with each partner community.





The 2023-24 fiscal was our fifth year of receiving PHAC funding, and this partnership has helped us tremendously in furthering the NTS work. We established the NTS Advisory which consists of one lead representative from each partner site and guides every aspect of the project. We also launched the NTS Portal where service providers can access all relevant materials, aids, data collection tools, tutorials, reports, and contacts. The highlight of the Portal is the “sharing space” where we post resources created by our partners as they tailor the ever-evolving model to their unique context.

Left to right: Brittany Biedermann, NTS lead in Moosonee/Moose Factory, ON, Lesley Watts, Senior Program Manager, IEMHP, and Lisa Sloan, NTS lead in Timiskaming, ON presented the Nurturing the Seed and Natural Helpers programs at the 2023 Children’s Mental Health Ontario conference.



This past year, we also **trained 72 service providers** across the country in using ASQs and DSPs. An important accomplishment to note is the initiation of the NTS train-the-trainer model where leads from multiple sites commenced the process of becoming trainers themselves. This work is key in ensuring sustainability across the program sites in building and supporting the program over time.

Lastly, in December 2023, we held **2 focus groups** with 6 service providers and **6 key informant interviews** with 7 caregivers which, upon the preliminary thematic analysis, allowed us to gain invaluable, and overwhelmingly positive, insight into their experience with implementing NTS. Below are a few examples of what we heard.

“With my child doing well, it made me feel like I could be a resource to some parents that might be struggling.”

- Parent/Caregiver

“Nurturing the Seed taught me how important it actually is for me to sit on the floor and interact with my child, which wasn’t something I had thought of before.”

- Parent/Caregiver

“Nurturing the Seed has facilitated conversation among all my colleagues, so we have common language to talk to families, work with each other more cohesively and through silos.”

- Service Provider

“We get a lot of hesitation at first and people that aren’t necessarily confident in their skills. As we work our way through it, I can see the confidence build.”

- Service Provider

“I know in our community there is very little support. So having NTS helps to see where children are struggling and provide activities that they can do between visits.”

- Service Provider

“With Nurturing the Seed, I learned to set goals for my child. Every month, I’d pretty much make a goal that I wanted to help her meet.”

- Parent/Caregiver



To learn more about this project, please visit the [Nurturing the Seed page](#) on IEMHP’s website.

Natural Helpers for the Children



The Natural Helpers for the Children program celebrated the successful delivery of a second cohort (January to March 2024) in Moosonee and Moose Factory, ON. Sustainability is a key element of the program and was a focus for this community in the development and roll-out of the pilot program delivered there in 2022. With planning in place for future groups annually, the program is proving to be a promising model for communities to engage in and to carry out for years to come. In addition to the Moose Factory program, there is planning underway to expand the program up the James Bay coast to neighbouring communities.

The following is an update from our pilot program partner, Brittany Biedermann, who has played an integral role as co-facilitator for the initial group, and as program lead in her community of Moose Factory and Moosonee, ON. Brittany is the Prevention Coordinator at Child and Youth Milopemahtesewin Services in Moose Factory, ON.



Art created during the reflection activity that is part of Natural Helpers.



Left to right (adults): Brittany Biedermann, Lesley Watts, Warren Kapashesit, Chaya Kulkarni, Bernice Kapashesit presented at the WAIMH Congress in Dublin.



Our 'Natural Helpers for the Children' Learning Circle is just one example of the beauty that can happen when two powerful forces, coming from different backgrounds, bringing together each of our unique gifts, for the same fierce passion for the lifelong wellbeing of our infants, young children, and future generations. We've just recently successfully delivered our 2nd cohort of Natural Helpers program within our community, and we were deeply pleased to witness not only the continued receptivity from our community, but also that it has proven to be a sustainable model! It is quite special to see something that you've been so invested in developing come to life and take fruition. With each cohort, we will see: more community members taking up the responsibility of being Natural Helpers for the children in their lives in their own unique way, more community members trained and supported to be facilitators of this beautiful community-based program, and more infants and young children feeling seen and cared for through every interaction they have with those that have participated in the Natural Helpers for the Children Learning Circle! I feel incredibly privileged to be in a role to help grow this initiative in other communities in our region, although my biggest dream is that every Indigenous community in our country would have their own unique Natural Helpers program!

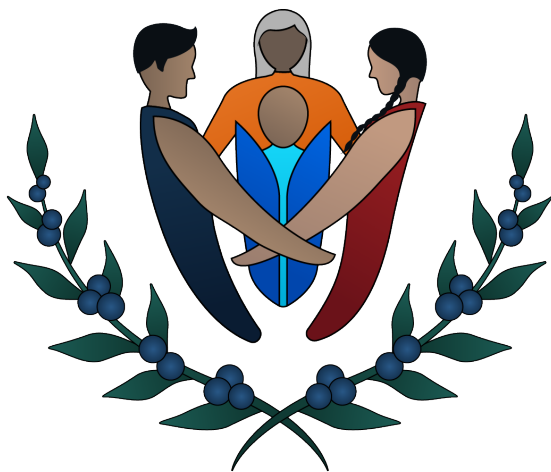
“It has been a very rewarding experience partnering with the Infant and Early Mental Health Promotion team for the past 4 years. What started out as a curious phone call seeking information about training lead to a lengthy genuine relationship of exchanging knowledge and working together to develop meaningful and tailored programs and services to support the mental health of our littlest community members and their families in our region.”

- Brittany Biedermann

Over the past year, IEMHP has presented the Natural Helpers program alongside partners at multiple conferences and through conversations with other communities. The highlight of the year was having the opportunity to travel to Dublin, Ireland and present at the World Congress of the World Association for Infant Mental Health (WAIMH) in July 2023 with our partners from Moose Factory. It was a great honour to see them represented on a world stage, showcasing their innovation and being recognized for their significant efforts in supporting infants, children, families, and communities.

Our hope for the Natural Helpers program is to partner with more Indigenous communities across the country in supporting similar models being developed and geared to their unique needs. We are awaiting news about two potential sites we hope to support in the coming year(s).

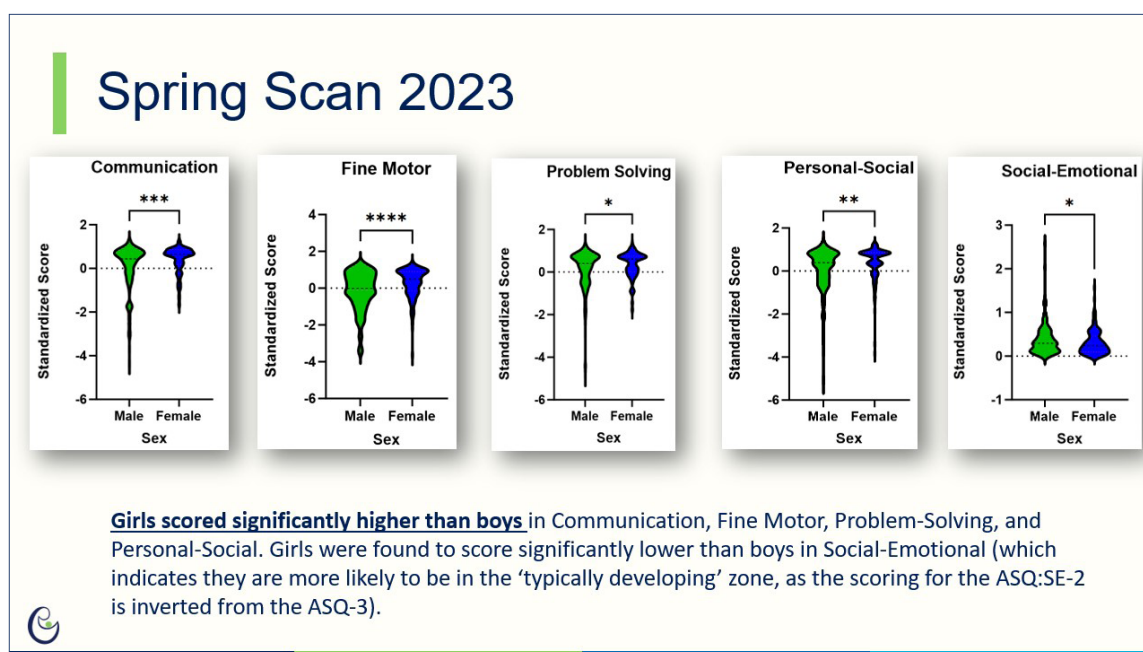
To learn more about this program, please visit the [Natural Helpers page](#) on IEMHP’s website.



The Canadian Database of Development, Infancy to Six (CanDDIS)

The Canadian Database of Development, Infancy to Six (CanDDIS) is the first database of under-6 child development in Canada. This database houses anonymous Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) scores for both the ASQ-3 and the ASQ: Social-Emotional 2 alongside demographic information.

The CanDDIS is a unique opportunity to learn about the developmental status of children across Canada, by region, by community, and by organization. The information collected can ensure that best practices, informed by research, are reflected in programs, and organizational policies can be established that embed developmental knowledge into the practice of all those supporting young children and their families. Not only that, but this information can also inform policy decisions at the provincial and federal levels that have the power to impact lifelong trajectories.



The CanDDIS experienced great growth in the past year. The CanDDIS currently has partnerships, in various phases of engagement, development, and implementation, with 18 community partners across Canada (mainly concentrated in Ontario). At the time of this writing, there are 2,382 entries in the CanDDIS. This number is expected to double in the next year as several Public Health Units in Ontario are in the first phases of joining the CanDDIS, have trained data entry persons on-site, and are beginning to enter data.

Following community-based data entry, reports are generated based on the community partner's requests. A section of a report requested from Bruce County is shown here. The report has been shared with permission from Bruce County representatives.

Certificate & Fellowship Programs

The development of IEMHP's *Foundations in Early Well-Being: A Certificate in Infant and Early Mental Health*, is well under way! Set to launch in January of 2025, the certificate is comprised of 7 modules that cover key concepts ranging from early relationships, brain development, the impact of adversity, issues surrounding equity, diversity and inclusion, understanding intervention and treatment options, as well as system approaches to addressing the unique needs of infants, young children and their families. The Certificate aims to support practitioners in enhancing their knowledge and skills to make positive changes to their practice. For this first year, the program will be free and offered first to IEMHP's longstanding partners.

The *Emerging Leaders Fellowship* program is still under development and will focus on each fellow working on a capstone project that highlights IEMHP's 5 Core Components, while being mentored by a topic-related expert. The program will span 10 months and will encourage fellows how to turn realize their project within the scope of their practice and their role, and how they may use this experience to further develop their own leadership skills in the infant and early mental health field.

World Association of Infant Mental Health (WAIMH) Partnership

Affiliate

It's official! We are the Central and Eastern Canada affiliate of the World Association of Infant Mental Health. This was formalized at the Expanding Horizons conference earlier this year, and couldn't be more thrilled. This opportunity expands our network and gives us access to so many experts in our field. This step also positioned us to submit a bid, which we successfully won, to host the World Congress in 2026.

2023 World Congress in Dublin

This past year we joined colleagues internationally at the World Congress in Dublin to share a Canadian perspective on our research and practices related to infant and early mental health. The team presented at 6 different sessions over 5 days. In collaboration with our partners from Moose Factory, our work with Indigenous communities, children, and families was showcased. Our innovative resources, such as 'Hand in Hand' and 'Nurturing the Seed,' received global attention throughout the Congress. This has led to relationships with practitioners, policy makers and researchers from around the world, strengthening our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion for infants, young children and their families.

Digital Initiatives (Social Media, Newsletters, Website)

Over the past year, our digital presence has seen significant growth and engagement across various platforms.

The Home Page emerged as the primary entry point with 15,912 visits. There is a notable interest in foundational knowledge and free trainings, evident from the 5,826 visits to the Introduction to Infant and Early Mental Health (IEMH) page. Our Resource Library and Learning Centre attracted 4,512 and 4,854 visits respectively, showcasing significant engagement with our resources. Additionally, the Lecture Series garnered 2,102 visits, indicating a healthy interest in our educational offerings.



17,000

website user visits

13,000 visits

Canada

2,600 visits
United States

Ireland

UK

Poland

Australia

Japan



In the last fiscal quarter, we implemented a consistent social media strategy across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. This effort led to impressive growth: Facebook saw a 13.2k increase in impressions, a 30% rise in link clicks, and a 750% surge in content interactions. On LinkedIn, we experienced a 300% increase in page views and a 248% rise in visitors, with 90 new followers in the last quarter alone. Our newly launched Instagram account has also contributed to our social media presence. Altogether, we now have over 5,500 followers across all platforms.

Our e-newsletter has been a vital source of website traffic, boasting over 7,400 subscribers. With an improved email communications strategy in the last quarter, we've increased our sends, achieved a 36% higher click-through rate, and reduced our unsubscribe rate by 29%.

These digital initiatives have significantly enhanced our ability to connect with and support our community.

Expanding Horizons National Institute 2023

The Expanding Horizons National Institute on Infant and Early Mental Health 2023 marked a significant milestone as the first in-person gathering for many practitioners since the onset of the pandemic, resulting in an exceptionally warm, excited, and inspired audience. Hosted over three days (April 26-28, 2023), the congress brought together over 400 participants from Canada, the United States, Finland, and virtual attendees from Australia, underscoring its global impact.

The event featured a robust lineup of six keynote speakers who illuminated the latest developments in infant and early mental health. Notable speakers included **Rob Meeder**, Medical Director of the Family, Child and Youth Mental Health Program at Waypoint Centre for Mental Health Care in Penetanguishene, Ontario; **Kaija Puura**, Professor of Child Psychiatry at Tampere University, Finland, and Chief Physician in the Department of Child Psychiatry at Tampere University Hospital; **Christine Chambers**, Canada Research Chair (Tier 1) in Children's Pain and Professor of Psychology and Pediatrics at Dalhousie University; **The Honourable Carolyn Bennett**, former Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health; and, of course, our very own **Chaya Kulkarni**, Director of IEMHP, also delivered insights crucial to advancing the field.

The congress not only facilitated the exchange of pioneering research and clinical practices but also fostered collaborative discussions among professionals dedicated to enhancing early childhood development. It was a testament to the resilience and dedication of the global community committed to improving the mental health and well-being of infants and young children.

Impact of Expanding Horizons 2023 on attendees

Attendees of the conference
strongly agreed that:

85 - 95%
of attendees

Felt engaged during the sessions

70 - 77%
of attendees

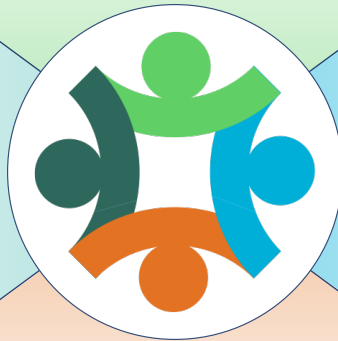
Were able to connect with
people who do similar work

85 - 97%
of attendees

Learned something that will
influence their practice

72 - 92%
of attendees

Agreed that sessions increased their confidence



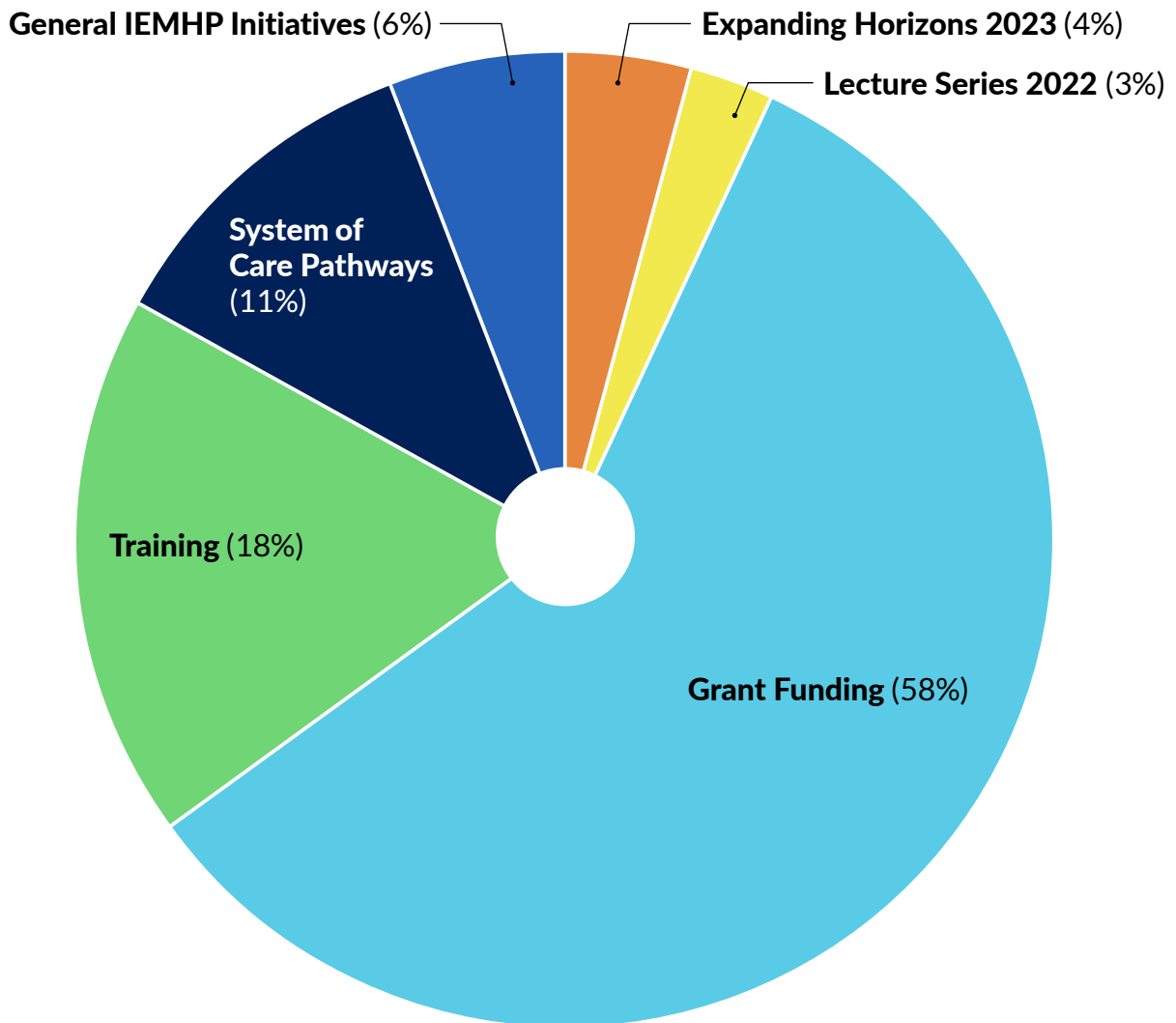
"This felt so validating after the last three years and that's the same validation we can provide the parents by using the approaches laid out! Amazing, thank you - I will remember this feeling when interacting with families."

"I met other practitioners from another part of the country that are doing similar work. It was great to connect and discuss during the exercise."



Funding

IEMHP 2023-24 Funding Streams





The Year Ahead

Expanding Horizons National Institute 2025

The IEMHP team has been diligently planning our next Expanding Horizons National Institute. Scheduled for May 6-8, 2025, at the Sheraton Toronto Airport Hotel and Conference Centre, we anticipate hosting 500 delegates from across the country and beyond. Join us for another invigorating and transformative event. Stay tuned for program details!



Expanding Horizons

National Institute on
Infant and Early Mental Health

World Association of Infant Mental Health (WAIMH) World Congress 2026

The IEMHP team is thrilled and honored to co-host the next WAIMH Congress in Toronto! This prestigious event will be held from October 2 to 6, 2026, at the Sheraton Centre Toronto Hotel, expecting over 1,500 international delegates. The congress theme, “Harmony in Diversity: Nurturing the Youngest Minds Around the World”, guides our collaborative efforts with WAIMH to create an unparalleled and enriching experience for all our guests and colleagues.



WAIMH 2026

19TH WORLD CONGRESS | TORONTO, CANADA



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Thank You to Our Collaborators

We want to sincerely express our gratitude to all our partners who have made Infant and Early Mental Health a priority in their work and in their communities. Without each and every one of you, we wouldn't be where we are today. Your dedication, collaboration, and unwavering support are what make it possible for us to drive meaningful change and build a stronger foundation for the well-being of children and families. Together, we are creating a brighter future – one where every child has the opportunity to thrive.

Thank you for your commitment and partnership.





Infant and Early Mental
Health Promotion

SickKids[®]



For more information,
please visit our [website](#) or contact us at iemhp.mail@sickkids.ca.