

# Identifying areas of focus for mental health promotion in children and youth for Ontario Public Health

## Final Report Summary

### Link to final report:

<http://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/ServicesAndTools/ResearchAndEducationSupport/Pages/Past-LDCP-Cycles.aspx>

## Background

Early child and youth mental health promotion is an area requiring considerable attention given that the majority of mental health problems have their onset during childhood or adolescence<sup>1</sup>. Not only do these experiences cause difficulties at their onset, they can disrupt important life transitions, delay achievement of developmental milestones, and be burdensome throughout one's lifespan<sup>2</sup>. In Ontario, children and youth, aged 0 – 18 years, are currently facing significant mental health and substance use concerns<sup>1,3</sup>. There is a need for provincial direction for the work of public health units in mental health promotion for children and youth, since a clear role for public health units is not found in the Ontario Public Health Standards or the Ontario Mental Health & Addictions Strategy. Providing Ontario public health units with guidance for their role in promoting mental health in children and youth is required.

## Research Study Objectives

The objective of this research study was to identify the evidence-informed areas of focus for child and youth mental health promotion initiatives that are consistent with the core principles of Ontario's public health system. The research aim was addressed throughout three iterative phases of research, including: 1) a comprehensive literature review, 2) one-to-one provincial stakeholder interviews, and 3) public health leader focus groups. Each phase of research identified major areas of focus for child and youth mental health promotion. The objectives and methods, along with the areas of focus, for each phase of research, are presented in Figure 1.



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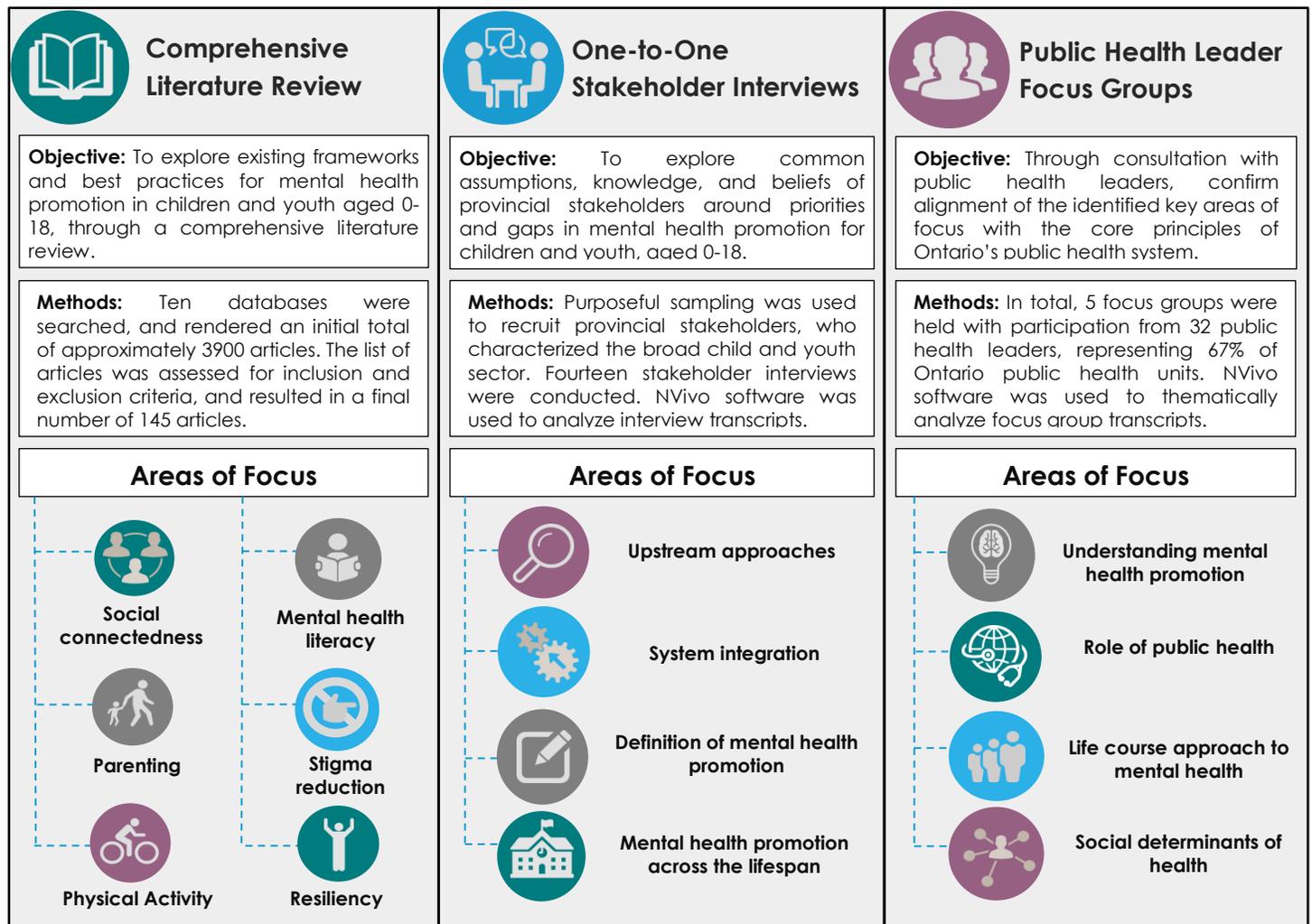
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## Supporting Organizations

Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario • Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Health Promotion Resource Centre • Chatham-Kent Public Health • Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit • Hastings Prince Edward Public Health • Leeds, Grenville & Lanark District Health Unit • Peterborough County-City Health Unit • The Regional Municipality of Halton, Health Department • Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit • Timiskaming Health Unit • Toronto Public Health

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## Research Study Overview



**Figure 1.** Objectives, methods, and findings from three phases of research.

## Recommendations

The findings from all three phases shaped the recommendations for action in Ontario public health units, including: 1) develop a shared understanding of mental health and mental health promotion across various sectors; 2) form a clear and consistent mandate for mental health promotion within public health; 3) develop a shared understanding of the link between physical health and mental health; 4) implement mental health promotion across the lifespan; 5) advocate for intersectoral collaboration to advance the mental health promotion agenda; 6) focus on the underlying social determinants of health; and 7) concentrate public health actions on social connectedness, parenting, resiliency, stigma reduction, physical health, and mental health literacy.

This research study reflects a major advancement in identifying areas for mental health promotion that are contextually relevant for Ontario public health, and may assist communities in moving forward mental health promotion for children and youth.

**References:** <sup>1</sup>Ministry of Children and Youth Services, G. of O. (2010). Mental Health Services. Retrieved March 9, 2015, from <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/specialneeds/mentalhealth/index.aspx>

<sup>2</sup>Ratnasingham S, Cairney J, Rehm J, Manson H, Kurdyak PA. Opening Eyes, Opening Minds: The Ontario Burden of Mental Illness and Addictions Report. An ICES/PHO Report. Toronto: Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences and Public Health Ontario; 2012.

<sup>3</sup>Boak, A., Hamilton, H. A., Adlaf, E. M., Beitchman, J., Wolfe, D., & Mann, R. E. (2014). *The Mental Health and Well-Being of Ontario Students, 1991-2013: OSDUHS Highlights (CAMH Research Document Series No. 39)*. Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.