

FAMILY OF SUPPORT: CHILD & YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVE

Impact Report Year Five



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THE SOBEY
FOUNDATION



Family
of Support

CANADA'S
CHILDREN'S
HOSPITAL
FOUNDATIONS

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A Time of Change – and a Collaboration Designed to Respond



The landscape of youth mental health in Canada is evolving. While the need for support remains high, there are signs that the ways in which young people and families access care is changing. Between 2018–2019 and 2023–2024, young people in Canada became less likely to visit an emergency room or be hospitalized for a mental health concern.¹ Meanwhile, proportions of young people with a mental health

concern who have visited physicians (on a non-emergency basis) or accessed support from a community mental health or substance use service have increased. Experts haven't established the causes of these trends. It may be that as concern about youth mental health challenges has grown, both the availability of less intensive supports and community awareness of those offerings have increased.

Remarkably, the Family of Support: Child & Youth Mental Health Initiative has been enabling work across the entire continuum of mental health care – in hospitals and community settings alike – since it embarked on its collaboration with Canada's Children's Hospital Foundations (CCHF) in 2020. Empire Company Limited and The Sobey Foundation have helped to drive initiatives ranging from the transformation of emergency mental health care at Stollery Children's Hospital in Edmonton to vital non-emergency interventions like the Saskatoon Tribal Council health bus, which brings mental health resources to nearby First Nations communities. A persistent focus of the collaboration has been to prioritize early intervention: helping young people access the right care sooner, when the potential to achieve the best health outcomes is highest.

Because Family of Support has always empowered local experts to allocate funds to the most important priorities in each region, programs have combined responsiveness and flexibility with an unwavering commitment to evidence and impact. As a result, at a tumultuous time for youth mental health in Canada – with broadly rising need, dramatic changes in media and technology, and a stressful, isolating pandemic – Family of Support has enabled care providers to adapt nimbly to evolving needs and priorities across the country. It has focused on connecting young people with timely supports, both by prioritizing assessment and building overall mental health care capacity tailored to local needs.

Children's hospitals across Canada have brought ingenuity, innovation and deep compassion to the mental health challenges of Canadian youth. Family of Support has been an invaluable ally on this journey since 2020, helping care teams share knowledge, grow impactful programs, and provide earlier access to assessment and support for thousands of young people, as described in the sections that follow. With strong programs underway and collaborative relationships activated, we expect momentum to continue building – and even more youth and families to benefit in the years ahead.

The entire CCHF network is deeply grateful for your generosity and trust, and we're inspired by the possibilities ahead as we embark on a new commitment to supporting young people together – responding to today's pressing needs while advancing the education and prevention measures that contribute to resilience, health, and wellbeing.

Sincerely,

Adam Starkman

President & Chief Executive Officer
Canada's Children's Hospital Foundations

¹ In both cases, these broader trends were interrupted by spikes in demand around 2021, during the pandemic.

Jane's Story

"A year ago, our daughter was fighting to survive her debilitating panic attacks, brain fog, and physical exhaustion. Today, she found out she got early admission acceptance to university. I really don't think I can express how thankful my family is for you."

Mother of Jane, in a letter to the Stollery Children's Hospital Emergency Department



Jane was 16 when she arrived at the Stollery Emergency Department (ED) with worsening thoughts of self-harm. She and her parents were frustrated and afraid: although Jane was following treatment recommendations from other providers, her mental health was deteriorating and her symptoms, including extreme fatigue, were interfering with school and daily life.

ED clinicians referred Jane to the Stollery Urgent Psychiatry Clinic, where the team reviewed her medications and history, soon diagnosing Jane with ADHD, OCD, and anxiety. They adjusted her medications in response to these updated diagnoses and worked with Jane to refine and optimize her treatment. "We never thought we'd be happy for a diagnosis of anxiety, OCD, and ADHD," her mother reflects, "and yet here she is today, thriving and happy with her life."

Family of Support has helped Stollery Children's Hospital to expand mental health capacity in its ED and reconfigure its offerings to provide faster, more effective support to young people like Jane amid growing demand.

For privacy reasons, photographs in this report, including this one representing "Jane," do not depict real patients.

A Steadfast Commitment to Youth Mental Health

Youth mental health has likely never been more on the minds of Canadians than it has over the past five years. We've seen growing attention to the effects of social media, increased need for care during and after the strains of the COVID-19 pandemic, and an erosion of taboos around mental health for people of all ages.

These factors, combined with the ordinary emotional challenges of growing up, have put **youth mental health near the top of the public agenda**. This increased focus on mental health across society has emerged at a time when The Sobey Foundation and Empire Family of Brands have, alongside Canada's children's hospitals, been sharing the early results of years of foundational work to connect young people as quickly as possible with the support they need.

The Sobey family's engagement with youth mental health long predates the formation of this innovative partnership. At the same time, the fact that Family of Support began its work at a time when Canadians were so keenly aware of the mental health needs of young people in their communities – and so eager to lend their support – has **made this five-year collaboration a valuable channel for shared focus and impact**. Family of Support continues to succeed in engaging local families and communities, care teams and researchers, and thousands of Empire stakeholders.

In 2024, Family of Support raised and donated more than \$4.29 million, helping children's hospitals in Canada to design, create, and scale programs and initiatives focused on child and youth mental health, prioritizing those that support early intervention. This impressive total has included local giving by customers, teammates, suppliers and partners of Empire's 16 banners across the country, as well as generous support from The Sobey Foundation and Empire Family of Brands. The **cumulative giving connected to Family of Support since 2020 reached a remarkable milestone this year, more than \$20 million** – a huge achievement.

What has all this meant for kids navigating mental health challenges? Among other measurable results, Family of Support has helped to enable 98,693 clinical assessments and connected 128,163 young people with care and support. These statistics may seem abstract on the page. But in many cases, **the numbers represent life-changing – even life-saving – interventions**. They will be felt in the lives of individual young people and the families, schools, and communities that care about them – and they'll be felt for years to come.

Even as we celebrate the progress achieved so far, we're inspired by the possibilities ahead as we embark on the next chapter of our journey together, thanks to the renewal of the Family of Support collaboration. The entire CCHF network is deeply grateful for your continued generosity, engagement, and trust – and we're proud to work alongside you to create a more hopeful future for young people navigating mental health challenges. We're also proud to share this update on the work and impact you've helped to enable over the past year.

National Overview

A major national partnership involving 13 hospitals and hundreds of experts and care providers, Family of Support can be summarized in four key measures. The figures below are cumulative totals (2020–2024) connected to programs the partnership helps to make possible.

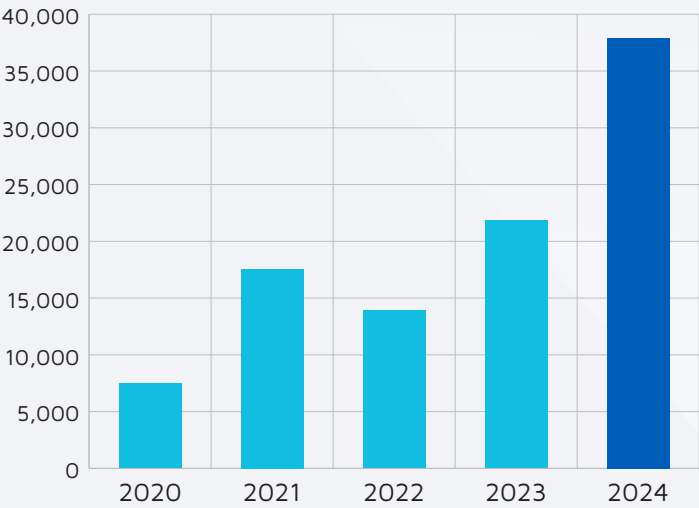
Measure 1 Assessments	Measure 2 People Trained	Measure 3 Patients Served	Measure 4 Treatment Spaces
98,693	17,161	128,163	98
Assessments are the first step toward connecting children and youth with the right support.	From practical guidance for community providers to specialized training for mental health professionals – access to training translates to sound, evidence-based care for kids.	The number of patients served is a powerful gauge of our success in meeting the surging need for mental health care.	Dedicated spaces keep patients and caregivers safe while enabling care and learning.

Why It Matters

These measures quantify five years of progress on more than 30 child and youth mental health programs across Canada – all chosen for their effectiveness and local relevance. Every intervention captured here is connected to positive impact in the lives of young people navigating mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, or disordered eating, as well as their family, friends and communities.

Assessments: 98,693

Cumulative Total 2020–2024



Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Assessments	7,485	17,567	13,906	21,837	37,898

Note: The significant year-over-year increase in assessments from 2022 has been driven by a number of factors. The Summit: Marian & Jim Sinneave Centre for Youth Resilience in Alberta, in development for several years, began to receive patients in 2023, moving from 0 assessments in 2022 to 1,344 in 2023. Also this year, the IWK Foundation and Children’s Hospital Foundation of Manitoba allocated Family of Support funds in new ways, supporting more assessments. At six other foundations, assessment numbers increased as existing Family of Support programs grew organically, simply seeing more patients.

What It Means

Assessments are the critical first step in young people’s mental health journeys, when professionals evaluate their needs and connect them with appropriate support. In some cases, assessment occurs when a young person seeks mental health support. In other cases, the care team of a young person with a physical concern may proactively provide a mental health assessment, recognizing that physical issues (illness, injury, treatment) often affect mental health.

Progress to Date

The Family of Support: Child & Youth Mental Health Initiative has helped to enable nearly 98,700 assessments since 2020. In some cases, these are in-depth processes, like those carried out at Montreal Children’s Hospital’s Centre of Excellence in Adolescent Severe Obesity, where care providers assess the physical, psychosocial, and mental health effects of this chronic disease on young people. In other cases, assessments are overlaid onto other (non-mental health) programs, as in BC Children’s Hospital’s PainCare360 program, which focuses on providing effective support to young patients with complex pain, including by assessing mental health challenges that might arise from their conditions.



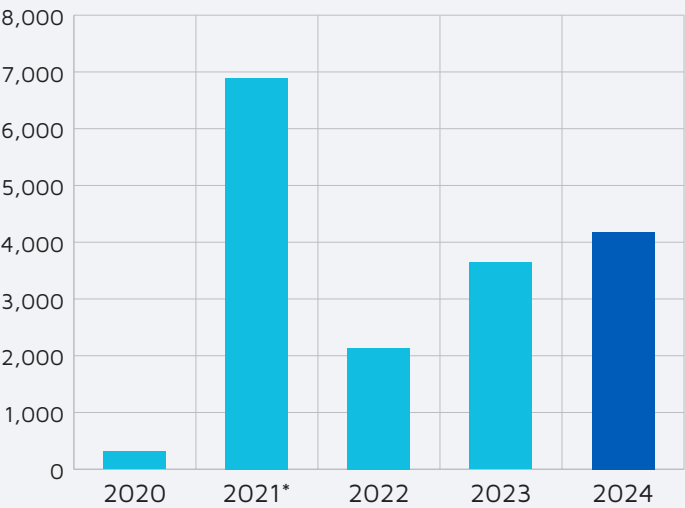
PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Neuropsychological Assessments SickKids Foundation

Young people’s brains change rapidly, and kids benefit when they’re able to make the most of key developmental windows – for example, having plenty of opportunities to develop language, whether aurally or through sign language or other approaches. Aided in part by Family of Support, the SickKids Psychology Department carries out in-depth assessments that explore every aspect of how a young person’s brain is working – including intellectual function, memory, language, attention, motor skills, and school skills. By understanding each young person’s current situation, teams can better identify helpful developmental supports, from assistive technologies to tailored learning programs. These efforts support mental health by helping young people achieve educational and social success, which in turn supports overall well-being.

People Trained: 17,161

Cumulative Total 2020–2024



Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
People Trained	313	6,897	2,134	3,640	4,177

*A BC knowledge mobilization initiative focused on the general public caused a spike in the number of people trained in 2021.

What It Means

Young people benefit when those who support them – healthcare providers as well as people like teachers and youth workers – have mental health training. This kind of learning lets people working in different care settings more quickly and accurately identify and refer young people with mental health issues. Family of Support-enabled training initiatives have included specialized opportunities for professionals as well as offerings that build mental health literacy in community settings.

Progress to Date

Since 2020, Canada’s children’s hospitals, aided by Family of Support, have trained more than 17,100 professionals – from pediatricians and nurses to social workers and emergency physicians. These efforts have helped professionals expand their knowledge and skills in areas such as trauma-informed care, migration and settlement, family-based care, and prevention and early intervention.



An artistic capture of a focus group discussion convened in 2024 as part of PRIME. The results of this process are being analyzed for a planned series of peer-reviewed publications.

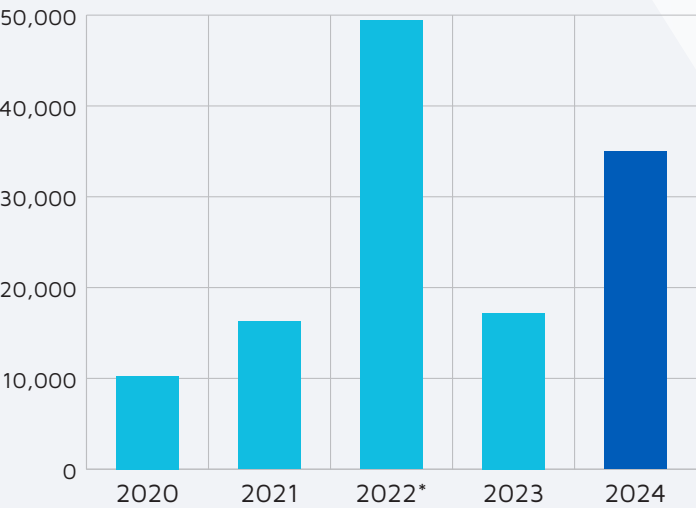
PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

PRIME Children’s Hospital Foundation of Manitoba

Partnering for Innovation in Mental Health through eHealth Excellence (PRIME), a program enabled in part by Family of Support, engages in a wide range of training and knowledge-mobilization activities, including conferences and workshops. Some of these activities centre around exchange with Indigenous communities and Knowledge Keepers – vital participants in mental health activities in Manitoba. These forms of shared learning help to increase the relevance, reach, and impact of mental health supports by breaking down silos between researchers, academics, hospitals, and communities.

Patients Served: 128,163

Cumulative Total 2020–2024



Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Patients Served	10,281	16,260	49,433	17,209	34,980

Note: Two factors in particular contributed to the significant increase from 2023 to 2024 in the number of patients served. First, this year’s figure includes patients who received care in the 10 new therapy rooms at the CHU Ste-Justine (see spotlight below). Second, work resumed at the Janeway Children’s Health and Rehabilitation Centre’s Tuckamore Centre and Mental Health Unit, which paused operations last year due to operational changes among program delivery partners.

*An online learning resource rolled out in 2022 drove this increase; individuals who accessed the resource were coded as patients served. Generally, the ‘patients served’ metric captures young people touched by more targeted and sustained supports.

What it Means

The “patients served” measure captures any young person who has directly received mental health care from a program connected to Family of Support. To name just a few examples, in 2024 this group included thousands of young people in crisis who presented at Family of Support-enhanced emergency departments (see page 4 for Jane’s story). It also included young people who accessed non-emergency supports, such as help with a substance use concern or family-based therapy focused on an eating disorder.

Progress to Date

The need for mental health care among children and youth across Canada is immense. Funds from Family of Support are helping hospitals innovate to keep pace with demand and expand access – so young people connect with care earlier, which supports better long-term outcomes. Since 2020, support from this partnership has helped Canada’s children’s hospitals serve more than 128,100 children and youth with mental health concerns. While one important emphasis of the partnership is on early intervention and prevention, Family of Support has shown flexibility and pragmatism in supporting upgrades to help hospital emergency departments respond to surging need across the continuum of care.



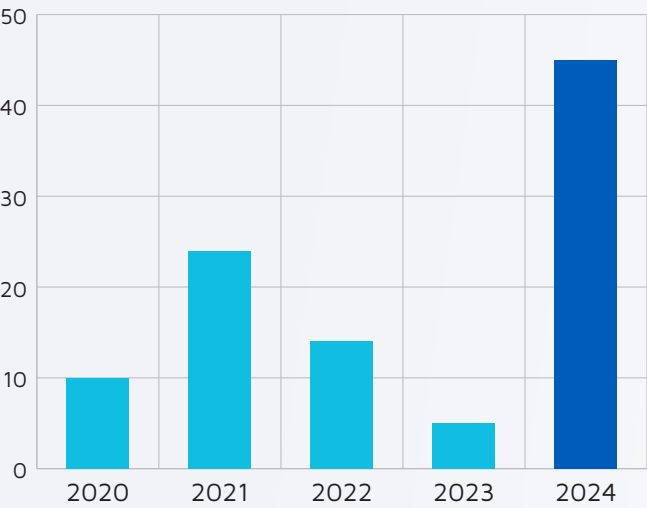
PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Transition Care Program Children’s Hospital, London, Ontario

For young people living with sustained health challenges, the transition from paediatric to adult healthcare can be challenging. Youth face increased vulnerability as they and their families seek to connect with new care teams. Aided by Family of Support, over the last few years Children’s Hospital has been working to enhance transition care specifically for young people living with mental health challenges. The hospital works with youth aged 12 to 14, ensuring they and their families have a complete understanding of their condition(s). This knowledge is empowering – helping them navigate care systems and advocate for themselves more effectively. The team at Children’s also begins work to connect families to supports in the adult system, well before those supports are needed. A smooth transition from youth to adult care helps reduce young patients’ stress and supports adherence to care plans – ultimately contributing to positive health outcomes and well-being.

Treatment Spaces: 98

Cumulative Total 2020–2024



Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Treatment Spaces	10	24	14	5	45

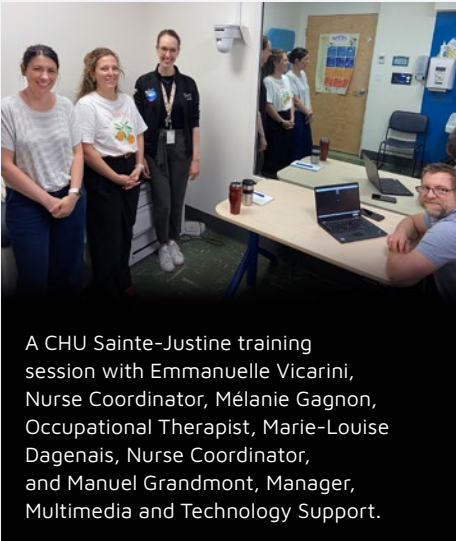
Note: The significant year-over-year increase from 2023 to 2024 is due mainly to the addition of 33 new spaces in Manitoba connected to the PRIME program. One important use for these programs in 2024, alongside treatment and care, was the focus groups described on page 8 of this report.

What It Means

Treatment spaces for mental health help to make young people safe and comfortable while they receive (or await) care. They include regular treatment rooms as well as more specialized facilities such as emergency spaces for kids in crisis and high-tech training and observation rooms. Increasing the availability of appropriate clinical spaces can help to support earlier intervention by ensuring that both the people and the places that support high-quality care are available when they’re needed.

Progress to Date

Family of Support has helped to add or expand close to 100 treatment spaces. Through the partnership, children’s hospitals have increased the number of spaces equipped with important safety features for patients, families, and staff. They’ve also given more patients access to innovations such as environments designed for calm and comfort, or advanced equipment designed to build skills and resilience.



A CHU Sainte-Justine training session with Emmanuelle Vicarini, Nurse Coordinator, Mélanie Gagnon, Occupational Therapist, Marie-Louise Dagenais, Nurse Coordinator, and Manuel Grandmont, Manager, Multimedia and Technology Support.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

New Audiovisual Rooms CHU Sainte-Justine

In the past few years, CHU Sainte Justine has allocated Family of Support funds to the creation of 10 therapy and observation rooms equipped with state-of-the-art audiovisual technology to facilitate both treatment and training. The upgrades to these rooms are now complete with 2024 marking the first full year of use by the team at CIRENE (the French acronym for the Integrated Centre for the Child Neurodevelopment Network). These rooms will help to further improve interdisciplinary collaboration – advancing the education and training of residents and new staff while also reinforcing the security and confidentiality of patient data. By helping to develop the next generation of care professionals, this new infrastructure will ultimately elevate the overall quality of care and service provided to children in Quebec with neurodevelopmental disorders.

Family of Support 2024

Together, Family of Support and its network contributed a remarkable **\$4,291,327** to child and youth mental health initiatives across Canada this year.

\$4,291,327

\$1,610,000

Direct Donations from The Sobey Foundation and Empire Company Limited

Each year, funds contributed by The Sobey Foundation and Empire are distributed across Canada's 13 children's hospitals. Every children's hospital in Canada has chosen a local, evidence-based mental health program as their Family of Support priority. (See page 13 for a complete list.)

\$2,681,327

Funds Raised Locally by Empire Family of Brands and Teammates

Each year, Empire also leads an annual in-store campaign across its 16 banners, inviting customers and teammates to donate. Every dollar raised locally through in-store contributions to Family of Support stays close to home, going directly to the local children's hospital foundation.

"This generous commitment allows us to improve access to essential mental health and addiction treatment for Maritime children and youth when they need it most. Thank you for bringing hope to families across the region during challenging times."

Dr. Maureen Brennan, Director of Mental Health and Addictions at IWK Health

Your Growing Impact

Over the first five years of Family of Support, the partnership with The Sobey Foundation and Empire Family of Brands has achieved impressive cumulative results on each of its four key measures: assessments, patients served, people trained, and treatment spaces created. These four measures are important – but ultimately, they are proxies for important forms of impact that are more difficult to quantify.

Improving access

When hospitals perform more assessments, this will in some cases mean earlier intervention in mental health concerns, and ultimately better long-term health outcomes. Similarly, the training of more professionals will likely mean that more young people – whether in hospitals or communities – have access to high-quality, evidence-based interventions. Ultimately, all four of the output measures connected to Family of Support indicate more access to better care, more quickly. These changes will lead to meaningful differences in the health and lived experience of individual children and youth as well as their families and communities.

Investing in understanding

While research is not a specific focus for Family of Support, many programs it enables have the effect of creating and spreading knowledge about effective approaches. At The Summit in Calgary, one of the most research-intensive mental health facilities for young people in Canada, every patient who receives care can be part of leading-edge studies through Mental Health Research 4 Kids, helping to discover and develop new treatments. In Nova Scotia, the training and exchange supported by the IWK through the Learning Link help clinicians refine their approaches to youth. This knowledge equips them to support more complex cases, enabling more children and youth to access timely care closer to home. And The Children's Hospital Foundation of Manitoba's PRIME program (see page 6) facilitates multi-directional exchanges of knowledge and insight among hospital teams, Indigenous leaders, young people, and policymakers. In all these ways, Family of Support helps hospitals, young people, and families develop a shared understanding of community needs and promising responses.

Improving care through communities of practice

Family of Support helps give hospitals the capacity and flexibility to collaborate in pursuit of continuous improvement. These collaborations, in turn, spread new ideas and approaches, helping to ensure that young people and families benefit as quickly as possible from leading practices. To note just one example, the PainCare 360 program at BC Children's Hospital (BCCH), to which Family of Support contributes, is part of a national collaboration called SKIP (Solution for Kids in Pain), which works to improve pain management for pediatric patients across Canada – focusing on both the physical and psychological effects of pain, including chronic pain. BCCH works with SickKids in Toronto to advance care for complex pain patients and it supports knowledge translation and program implementation at both the national and regional level. In short, over and above the important goal of improving pain care for young patients at BCCH, the program helps to elevate and reinforce effective pain management across Canada.

Program Overview

Member Foundation	Program Name	Year Five Assess-ments	Year Five People Trained	Year Five Patients Served	Year Five Treatment Spaces
Alberta Children's Hospital Foundation	Mental Health Research 4 Kids	–	–	✓	–
BC Children's Hospital Foundation	PainCare360 integrated pain program	✓	✓	✓	–
Children's Health Foundation	Transition care for Children's Adolescent Mental Health Program	–	✓	✓	✓
CHEO Foundation	Child and Youth Counsellor (CYC) in Emergency Department	✓	✓	✓	✓
CHEO Foundation	Dialectical Behaviour Therapy Program (DBT)	✓	✓	✓	✓
CHEO Foundation	Head to Toe Program (H2T)	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Children's Hospital Foundation of Manitoba	PRIME: Partnering for Innovation in Mental Health through eHealth Excellence	✓	✓	✓	✓
CHU Sainte-Justine Foundation	Innovations in care and training	✓	–	–	–
IWK Foundation	IWK Mental Health and Addictions (MHA) program	✓	✓	✓	✓
Janeway Children's Hospital Foundation	Tuckamore Centre and Mental Health Unit	–	✓	✓	✓
Jim Pattison Children's Hospital Foundation	The Saskatoon Tribal Council (STC) Health and Dental Bus	–	–	✓	–
MacKids	Substance use supports for pediatrics	✓	✓	✓	–
The Montreal Children's Hospital Foundation	Centre of Excellence for Adolescent Severe Obesity (CEASO)	✓	✓	✓	–
The Montreal Children's Hospital Foundation	Family-Based Therapy (FBT) for young people with eating disorders	✓	✓	✓	✓
SickKids Foundation	Neuropsychological assessments to support early intervention	✓	–	✓	–
Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation	Stollery Mental Health Services Team	✓	✓	✓	✓