

## **WORKSHOP 4**

### **UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF MENTAL HEALTH**

#### **Objectives**

Following this workshop, the youth will be able to:

- Describe the social determinants of mental health and their relationship to mental health promotion.
- Understand the overall impact of everyday life conditions on wellbeing.
- Identify key social determinants that are affecting youth mental health in their community.

#### **Overview**

Promoting good mental health includes building the conditions that support wellbeing. This involves giving attention to the social determinants of mental health and equity, including having a safe and nurturing home environment, places to gather and connect, skills for life, opportunities for education and meaningful employment, food security, and access to health care and treatment when needed.

#### **Total time**

2 hours

#### **Facilitator Prep**

- Review and summarize AWE evaluation results to share using modality of your choice.

#### **Welcome**

Ask each member of the group to describe a secret joy they have (e.g., a type of food, a show, a book genre, etc.).

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#### **Connect & Open**

Review AWE survey summary and anonymous compliments from last session.

#### **Look Back**

Review that last week the group discussed the differences between mental health and mental illness, and explored the concept of upstream mental health promotion. In one of the activities, they watched a video that introduced the social determinants of health, which have a strong impact on the mental health of individuals and communities. Ask for a volunteer to recap the discussion and share reflections.

#### **Look Forward**

Explain that today's session will explore mental health promotion in more depth to identify the social determinants of health that support good mental health and wellbeing.

#### **Gauging Knowledge**

Name an activity in your life that could be considered mental health promoting.

### Frame Video

Play the theme video, *Making the Connections: Our City, Our Society, Our Health*. Explain that understanding the concept of mental health promotion requires an awareness of the social determinants of health. These can be thought of as the everyday conditions that impact mental health and wellbeing. Some of these conditions or factors will be obvious, while others may be less so.

Invite brief reflections on the theme video



### Activity 1: Charting Mental Health and Wellbeing (20 minutes)

#### Aim

This activity helps further unpack the differences between mental health and mental illness and illustrates the ways that the social determinants shape these experiences.

#### Steps

1. Create two groups, each accompanied by a facilitator. Provide each group with one of the following stories. Each group should have a different story:

#### Group 1: Cheyenne's Story

(Story of a person who is diagnosed with a mental illness but is functioning well and experiencing good mental health.)

*Cheyenne is living with depression. Depression is a mental illness that causes extreme and ongoing feelings of sadness and other difficult emotions that impact how you feel and act. Because these symptoms of depression last for weeks or more, it can make it challenging to function in daily life, causing difficulties at home, in school, at work or in relationships. Despite her diagnosis, Cheyenne's depression is under control. She sees a psychologist for therapy and is in regular contact with her doctor. Her school life is going well. She has teachers who acknowledge her hard work and celebrate her successes. Her school also prioritizes student wellbeing and provides opportunities to participate in group sports and social activities, such as a lunchtime walking group and an after-school theatre club. She has access to healthy foods and is getting good quality sleep most nights. Her family can afford to pay rent for a small house in a neighbourhood where she feels safe. She shares this house with her mother, three siblings and her cat, Phillip. She has a core group of friends and feels like the people in her life love and understand her.*

#### Group 2: Hugo's Story

(Story of a person who does not have a diagnosed mental illness, but is experiencing poor mental health.)

*Hugo has recently moved to a new town after his father experienced ongoing challenges finding work. There weren't a lot of job opportunities in his hometown, where the main industry recently shut down. However, the move has meant that Hugo now lives far away from other family members and friends. At school, Hugo is finding it difficult to keep up in his math and science classes. The teachers seem very busy, and he does not get much extra support. He is feeling stressed and overwhelmed. His father works long hours at his new job, which means that Hugo spends lots of time in their apartment alone, where he plays video games all afternoon and late into the evening to pass the time. He hasn't yet made any friends in his new community and feels lonely and isolated. His new town has several fast-food restaurants, which Hugo frequents for most meals. He is having trouble sleeping at night, which causes him to struggle with focus at school. It also makes him irritable and cranky with his father, which puts a strain on their relationship.*

2. Explain that they will have approximately five to eight minutes to discuss their story and identify the social determinants affecting their character. Following this discussion, they will come back together to share.
3. Return to Circle. Have each group summarize their story and describe the social determinants they identified as impacting their character's mental health.
4. If needed, provide the following reflections: Despite being diagnosed with depression, Cheyenne's mental health is supported by positive social networks, feelings of connection to her school and healthy family relationships. Furthermore, she isn't exposed to risk factors such as substance use, violence or discrimination. Hugo's mental health appears to be particularly influenced by his limited social network, lack of community involvement and income pressures.
5. Show the "Four Quadrants of Mental Health" slide. Have each group plot their character into the quadrant they feel is the best fit. If needed, assist the youth to plot the characters: Cheyenne, as a person living with a diagnosed mental illness but experiencing good mental health, should be plotted in the upper right quadrant. Hugo, who does not have a diagnosed mental illness but is experiencing poor mental health, should be plotted in the lower left quadrant.
6. For five minutes, have the groups pick a different quadrant on the graph and write a story for a new character whose experience would fall within that quadrant.
7. Return to Circle. Have each group share their story.
8. Check in with the group about how they felt about this activity.



### Facilitator Tips

- This activity introduces ideas that may be difficult for some youth to grasp. In everyday representations of mental health and mental illness, these concepts are often presented as interchangeable. Check in to assess the group's understanding and respond to any questions.

## Activity 2: Understanding the Social Determinants of Health (20 minutes)

### Aim

This activity helps the group understand the concept of social determinants of health, as well as connections between them and policy. The group will also begin identifying issues affecting youth mental health in their communities and connect these to various social determinants.

### Steps

1. Share the “Social Determinants of Mental Health” slide.
2. Let the group know that the concept of social determinants can take time to understand. In simple terms, the social determinants reflect the everyday conditions in which we live, grow, learn and play. They have a profound influence on our access to opportunities, experiences of health and illness and related risks, and quality of life.
3. Review the social determinants at the individual, family, community, societal and environmental levels. Ask the youth to consider how these social determinants sometimes function across levels (e.g., substance use influences at the individual and family level). Explain that the social determinants have a strong impact on our mental health and wellbeing.
4. Ask the youth to estimate what proportion of a person’s wellbeing is determined by their biology and genetics versus the social determinants of health (e.g., access to healthcare, income, education, housing, etc). Provide the response options:
  - a. 15% biology, 85% social determinants
  - b. 25% biology, 75% social determinants
  - c. 50% biology, 50% social determinants
  - d. 85% biology, 15% social determinants
5. Share the “What Makes Those Living in Canada Well?” slide.
6. Review the social determinants listed on the slide. Summarize that the social determinants account for 85% of the factors contributing to our wellbeing. Offer that policy is an effective tool for shifting access to the social determinants of good health.





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### Workshop 4 cont.

7. Ask the group if they have questions or if any of the details on this slide surprise them. Have them reflect on whether there are other factors that could be considered social determinants of health.
8. Explain that the following video will help illustrate how an understanding of the social determinants can help reveal the various influences that impact wellbeing.
9. Play the [Jigsaw Youth Mental Health Promotion video](#).
10. Send the youth into groups to discuss the social determinants they think are influencing the mental health of youth in their communities. Have them note their ideas. Tell them they will be asked to give a summary of their group's discussions.
11. Return to Circle. Ask each group to summarize their group's conversations.



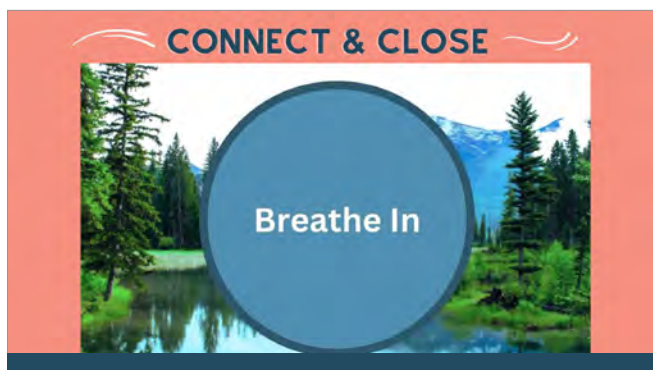
### Facilitator Tips

- Reassure the group that it's okay if they don't immediately understand the social determinants of health as it is a complicated concept.
- Note the social determinants the youth identify as impacting their community. These may be early indicators of policy target areas.

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### Connect & Close: Breathing Bubble (10 minutes)

1. To wrap up this workshop, introduce slow, controlled breathing as an exercise that can be effective in managing stress. Explain:  
*When you breathe slowly, a message is sent to your brain signalling that it is safe to calm down and relax. The brain then relays this message to your body, which responds accordingly. Breathing exercises are a good way to relax, reduce tension and cope with stress. Best of all, they are portable and can be used discretely in a variety of settings.*
2. Let the youth know that if they have tried breathing exercises before and find them uncomfortable, they can take part in an alternative relaxation exercise and note three things they are grateful for.
3. Show the [Breath Bubble video](#).
4. Ask the group to follow the prompts in the video to facilitate slow, controlled breathing for three minutes.



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*Workshop 4 cont.*

5. Ask the group how they feel after the breathing activity.
6. Distribute the AWE survey and allow a few minutes for everyone to complete. If any youth doesn't want to do so immediately, ask that they complete it before the next meeting.
7. After the group finishes the survey, thank them for their participation and close the workshop.
8. After the workshop closes send a link to the AWE survey by email for those who did not complete it during the session.

