

Voices in Action: A Community Guide to Integrated Youth Services (IYS) Adoption

November 2025



Acknowledgements

This guide is the product of many voices and contributions from across Ontario and beyond. It reflects a shared commitment to improving services for young people and the families who support them.

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ⁱ Names of specific members of YWHO's provincial youth and family advisory councils are provided only for those who wished to be identified. We are extremely grateful to all those who shared their perspectives and knowledge, including those who wished to remain anonymous.

The origins of this work are rooted in the **YouthCan IMPACT project**, which demonstrated the effectiveness of high-quality, coordinated youth mental health services delivered outside hospital settings and laid the foundation for YWHO. This guide was developed as part of the YouthCan IMPACT Extension Project: Knowledge Translation and Community Support in the YWHO Context, with funding support from the **Ontario SPOR (Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research) Support Unit (OSSU)**. We are grateful to OSSU and to the broader research community whose ongoing work continues to strengthen this field.

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YWHO Land Acknowledgement

The Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario (YWHO) Provincial Office (PO) operates on lands that have been occupied by First Nations for millennia; lands rich in civilizations with knowledge of medicine, architecture, technology, and extensive trade routes throughout the Americas. Toronto, the primary location of the YWHO Provincial Office, is covered by the Toronto Purchase, Treaty No. 13 of 1805 with the Mississaugas of the Credit. Toronto is now home to a vast diversity of First Nations, Inuit and Métis who enrich this city. YWHO serves youth and families throughout the lands now known as Ontario, which includes lands covered by 46 treaties and other agreements, as well as unceded and unsurrendered First Nations lands.

YWHO is committed to reconciliation. We will honour the land through programs and places that reflect and respect its heritage. We will embrace the healing traditions of the Ancestors, and weave them into our caring practices. We will create new relationships and partnerships with First Nations, Inuit and Métis, and share the land and protect it for future generations.

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Executive Summary

Communities across Ontario are working to improve how young people access and experience health care. Too often, services are fragmented, difficult to navigate, and not responsive to the realities of youth and families. Integrated Youth Services (IYS) models have emerged as a powerful response to these challenges. By bringing services together, centering the voices of young people, and grounding decisions in evidence and lived and living experience, IYS offer a pathway toward systems that are more accessible, equitable, and effective.

One of the most established examples of this approach is Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario (YWHO). YWHO is a growing provincial network of youth-friendly spaces that offer mental health, substance use, primary care, social supports, and well-being activities. Services are co-designed with young people and families, with a focus on rapid access, cultural inclusivity, and continuous learning. The model has demonstrated how integration can reduce barriers, improve outcomes, and create services that feel relevant and welcoming to youth.

This YWHO Community Guide to IYS Adoption draws on the experience of YWHO service networks (referred to as YWHO Hub Networks) across the province and offers practical tools and insights for local communities who want to collaborate in new ways, strengthen youth engagement, and build integrated approaches that reflect community needs.

At the heart of this guide is the guiding principle that youth and families must be partners, not just participants, in shaping services. Their voices, experiences, and leadership are essential to building systems that feel welcoming, relevant, and responsive. The guide highlights strategies for meaningful engagement, including how to support adult allies, create advisory structures, and remove barriers that limit participation. It also underscores the importance of collaboration among service providers and community organizations. Strong partnerships and a willingness to share leadership are the foundation of integrated service models. In fact, **youth and family engagement and partner collaboration and integrated governance are two of YWHO's six core components**, and the bulk of this guide is dedicated to supporting communities to strengthen these two foundational areas.

The guide also introduces YWHO's other four core components, which, together with youth and family engagement and partner collaboration and integrated governance, define what

high-quality IYS should look like: accessibility, cultural inclusivity and diverse services, integrated service delivery, and measurement-based care. While these components provide a blueprint for consistency across the provincial network, the guide emphasizes that each community will bring them to life in ways that reflect local strengths and circumstances.

Communities are at different stages of readiness, and the journey toward IYS adoption is rarely linear. To support this, the guide also outlines a phased approach to adopting IYS. For each phase, the guide points to practical tools, real-world examples, and resources that communities can adapt to their own context.

Ultimately, this guide is not a prescription but an invitation: an invitation for communities to imagine what's possible when services are designed with and for youth, when partners come together around shared goals, and when learning and equity guide every step. Whether a community is just beginning the conversation or is preparing to adopt IYS, this guide provides direction, encouragement, and a reminder that transformation is both achievable and urgently needed.

1.0 Introduction

Many communities across Ontario share a deep commitment to ensuring that all young people, and the families and networks that support them, have access to the services, supports, and opportunities they need to thrive. But for many youth and families, the system can feel overwhelming, especially when dealing with challenges such as those related to mental health, substance use, primary care, housing, education, relationships or employment. Communities are looking for better ways to work together more collaboratively, equitably, and effectively.

One promising approach is **Integrated Youth Services (IYS)**, which brings health, social, and community supports together in accessible, youth-friendly spaces. In Ontario, IYS is being advanced through **Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario (YWHO)**, a provincial initiative where youth, families, service providers, and partners co-design services aimed at improving youth outcomes. (See [Section 3.0](#) for more on YWHO's values, history, and core components.)

This guide offers practical tools, principles, and examples to help your community strengthen youth and partner engagement, and to consider what building a more integrated system of care could look like, whether or not you adopt YWHO's full IYS model.

Integrated Youth Services (IYS): Start Now, Transform Together

IYS are primarily focused on transforming how existing services work together, rather than simply adding new ones. Because this transformation is rooted in collaboration, shared vision, and better coordination of what already exists, you don't have to wait for significant funding to begin.

By moving toward a more connected, equitable, and collaborative local system, and being willing to adapt, share resources, and think beyond organizational boundaries, you can spark the kind of change that transforms how young people and families experience care. Every step toward working as one network builds momentum, strengthens trust, and creates the conditions for lasting impact in the lives of young people.

1.1 About This Guide

This guide is for anyone working to improve the health and well-being of young people in your community, including youth and family leaders, service providers, decision-makers, system planners, and other local champions. Whether you are just beginning to explore system transformation or are already bringing partners together, this guide offers ideas, tools, and practices to support your efforts. It is especially relevant for communities at the early stages of exploring integrated service delivery and for those looking to strengthen their capacity for meaningful youth and partner engagement.

This guide also draws on guidance from youth and families, research, worldwide experiences transforming health systems through IYS, and the lessons of established YWHO Hub Networks. It is a living resource, intended to grow and evolve as communities share lessons, adapt approaches, and deepen their engagement efforts. We welcome your feedback and contributions as we continue learning and improving together and encourage you to check the YWHO website regularly for new and updated resources.

The external websites and resources shared throughout this guide (and consolidated in [Appendix B](#)) are provided for informational purposes only. We encourage you to explore them thoughtfully and use your best judgment when deciding what's right for your needs and contexts. As always, proceed at your own discretion and feel free to seek additional advice or support as needed.

Connected Communities

This guide is designed for communities that are connected to YWHO for information, guidance, support, and/or peer and partner connections as they explore or begin moving toward an IYS approach. While not formally funded as part of the YWHO provincial network, connected communities are an important part of YWHO's broader provincial outreach and engagement movement to increase integrated services for youth.

This guide was developed to:

- Support communities to learn about IYS and YWHO and how collaborative, youth-centered approaches can improve access, coordination, service delivery, and outcomes.
- Provide practical guidance on youth and partner engagement as the building blocks for transforming local service systems.
- Highlight how integrated governance, including shared leadership, accountability, and decision-making, can strengthen youth, family, and partner collaboration.
- Offer tools and examples that reflect diverse community contexts and stages of IYS readiness.
- Provide an overview of YWHO, including its model, core components, and the major adoption phases and supports available for communities adopting IYS.
- Serve as a flexible, self-directed resource that communities can adapt to their local strengths, goals, and needs.
- Highlight considerations for how to recognize the unique contexts, strengths, and challenges of rural, remote, Indigenous, and Francophone communities.

After reading this guide, you will:

- Understand the YWHO IYS model and its six core components
- Gain insights about your community's readiness for IYS
- Be able to identify what is feasible and meaningful in your local context
- Be inspired by real-world examples and lessons from Ontario's YWHO Hub Networks
- Have access to practical tools, templates, and reflection questions to support your next steps

1.2 A Note on Language and Values

When we say *young people*, we mean all youth across identities, experiences, abilities, and needs. When we say *families*, we are referring to any trusted people or chosen support systems a young person turns to in times of need, such as relatives, caregivers, friends, and mentors.

This guide is rooted in principles of equity, inclusion, and reconciliation. We value approaches that are anti-racist, anti-oppressive, trauma-informed, and culturally grounded. We honour First Nations, Inuit and Métis leadership and perspectives, and we encourage all communities to prioritize diverse and inclusive engagement from the outset.

Language is not fixed but evolves as cultures shift and communities define themselves in new ways. In developing this guide, we drew on the wisdom of youth and family advisors, who helped ensure that its language reflects inclusive values and youth perspectives. We strive to use language that is respectful, relevant, and responsive, and that celebrates diversity, fosters connection, and supports belonging for all.

“

“I want this guide to provide hope that we can make a change.”

- Member of the Provincial Indigenous Youth and Family Advisory Committee (PIYFAC)

2.0 Integrated Youth Services

Section Overview:

IYS are transforming how young people and their families access help. This section introduces the IYS model, why it matters, and how it is being put into practice in Ontario and across Canada:

- **Why system change is needed:** Most mental health challenges begin by age 25, yet many youth face barriers to accessing the support they need. Services are fragmented, inequitable, and difficult to navigate, and youth in equity-deserving groups, including Indigenous, 2SLGBTQIA+, racialized, newcomer, and rural/remote youth, face the greatest barriers.
- **The goal of IYS:** To build youth-friendly, welcoming networks that strengthen and connect existing services and supports so young people and families can access the right help, at the right time, in the right place.
- **IYS momentum across Canada and beyond:** Building on *headspace* in Australia, IYS has spread internationally and is advancing in every province and territory in Canada, with support from a newly funded national IYS Collaboration Centre and a pan-Canadian IYS data platform currently under development.
- **IYS operate as learning health systems (LHSs):** IYS collect real-time data to assess and adapt services, reduce inequities, and generate evidence that improve both individual outcomes and the system as a whole.

In short: IYS is a movement to create accessible, inclusive, and youth-driven systems of care. It offers communities a path toward supporting young people in ways that are timely, collaborative, and transformative.

Adolescence and young adulthood are times of rapid developmental change and when many mental health and substance use challenges emerge. Research shows that approximately 75% of mental health issues begin by age 25,¹ making these challenges the leading cause of disability among young people globally.² Mental health problems also account for about 90% of all adolescent health problems^{3 4} and when left unaddressed, they can also reduce life opportunities, contribute to poor health, educational, and vocational outcomes, and result in significant long-term economic costs to society.^{5 6}

Despite this context, many young people still lack timely, appropriate, and evidence-based support. Studies estimate that 50–80% of youth in Canada do not receive the health care they need.^{7 8 9 10} Fragmented and siloed service systems that have long waits for services, strict eligibility rules, and a lack of youth-centered approaches create major barriers to accessing care.^{11 12 13 14 15} These challenges are often even greater for Indigenous youth, 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, newcomer youth, racialized youth, those living in rural or remote communities, and others who face stigma, systemic inequities, and culturally irrelevant services.^{16 17 18 19 20}

What are IYS?

IYS represent a growing international movement that transforms how young people and their families access and experience care by:

- Connecting, not replacing: IYS strengthen and align existing services in a community, rather than create new ones.
- Collaborating: Youth, families, and service providers work together to identify gaps, reduce duplication, and improve access.
- Providing youth-friendly services and spaces: Services are designed to be easier to access, more welcoming, and responsive to what young people need.

IYS are about building systems that are connected, inclusive, and designed around youth and their families.

To address these barriers, many communities are turning to IYS. The goal is simple: make services work better together so that young people can access the right support, at the right time, in welcoming and youth-friendly ways.

IYS shift systems toward collaborative, youth-centered care that break down silos and make supports easier to access. Services are delivered through youth-friendly "hubs" or sites that provide walk-in, appointment-based, and virtual options designed with youth and families and tailored to local needs. Formal models also include "backbone" structures to support implementation, evaluation, continuous quality improvement, and knowledge mobilization.

Why IYS Start with Youth and Families

Too often, service systems are designed around what works best for providers, not for young people and their families. IYS turn that approach on its head. The model begins by asking: *What do youth and their families need? What kind of experience do they want?*

When priorities are set by young people and their families, every part of the system, including planning, governance, service design and delivery, and evaluation, reflects their lived/living experiences and strengths. The result is a system that is more effective, inclusive, and responsive.

The IYS model took root in Australia in 2007 with *headspace*,²¹ now a national network of more than 170 centres. Since then, similar models have spread internationally, adapted to local systems and cultures.²² In Canada, IYS have grown organically, with community-driven efforts expanding into province- and territory-wide networks such as YWHO (Ontario; described further in [Section 3.0](#)), Foundry (British Columbia), Aire Ouverte (Quebec), and Huddle (Manitoba). Building on the foundations of ACCESS Open Minds, a pan-Canadian research initiative that helped focus on transforming youth mental health services, an Indigenous Youth Mental Health and Wellness Network was also launched in 2021 to advance Indigenous-led development of culturally grounded models of care.²³ Initiatives are now underway in every province and territory in Canada (see Figure 1). This national effort is supported by federal, provincial, territorial, and philanthropic partners, and driven by collaboration among youth, families, service providers, community organizations, sector leaders, and governments. These collaborations created the foundation for landmark federal investments. In 2024, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and Health Canada made critical investments to strengthen coordination, learning, and impact through a national IYS Collaboration Centre and a pan-Canadian IYS data platform.²⁴

Figure 1. IYS Networks across Canada





Integrated Youth Services as a Learning Health System

IYS are a model of continuous learning and improvement. IYS initiatives, including YWHO, operate as *learning health systems (LHS)*, where real-time data support collaborative decision-making, adaptation, and, ultimately, better outcomes for youth.

In an LHS, data about youth experiences, goals, and outcomes are collected and used not only to guide individual care, but also to improve programs and systems overall. This process is iterative: data and feedback inform decisions, changes are implemented, and new insights are generated for further action. Across IYS initiatives, this learning approach shows up in several ways:

For Youth and Families:

- **Measurement-Based Care (MBC):** Youth complete developmentally appropriate, standardized measures through a shared data platform. These measures are used to support self-reflection, goal setting, and progress tracking. (see also [Section 6.1](#)).
- **Youth and community-informed adaptation:** Regular feedback and involvement from youth, families, service providers, and Indigenous community leaders ensures services remain responsive to lived/living experience.

For Systems and Services:

- **Quality improvement:** Aggregated data help identify trends, gaps, and disparities, enabling IYS to adjust programming, address inequities, and use resources wisely.
- **Evidence-generating care:** IYS contribute to research by testing new models, sharing results across jurisdictions, and working with academic and policy partners to scale what works.

Grounded in co-design, transparency, and responsiveness, the LHS model helps IYS stay dynamic and aligned with what youth actually need, rather than locked into static programming. By embedding learning into the system itself, IYS become not only a vehicle for service delivery, but also a catalyst for system transformation.

To support high-quality IYS implementation, the **Federation of Integrated Youth Services Networks (FIYSN)** has identified, in collaboration with youth, families, and IYS community partners, ten guiding principles for IYS.²⁵ These principles, summarized in Figure 2, provide a common foundation for how IYS networks are designed, delivered, and sustained.

Figure 2. Ten Principles for IYS

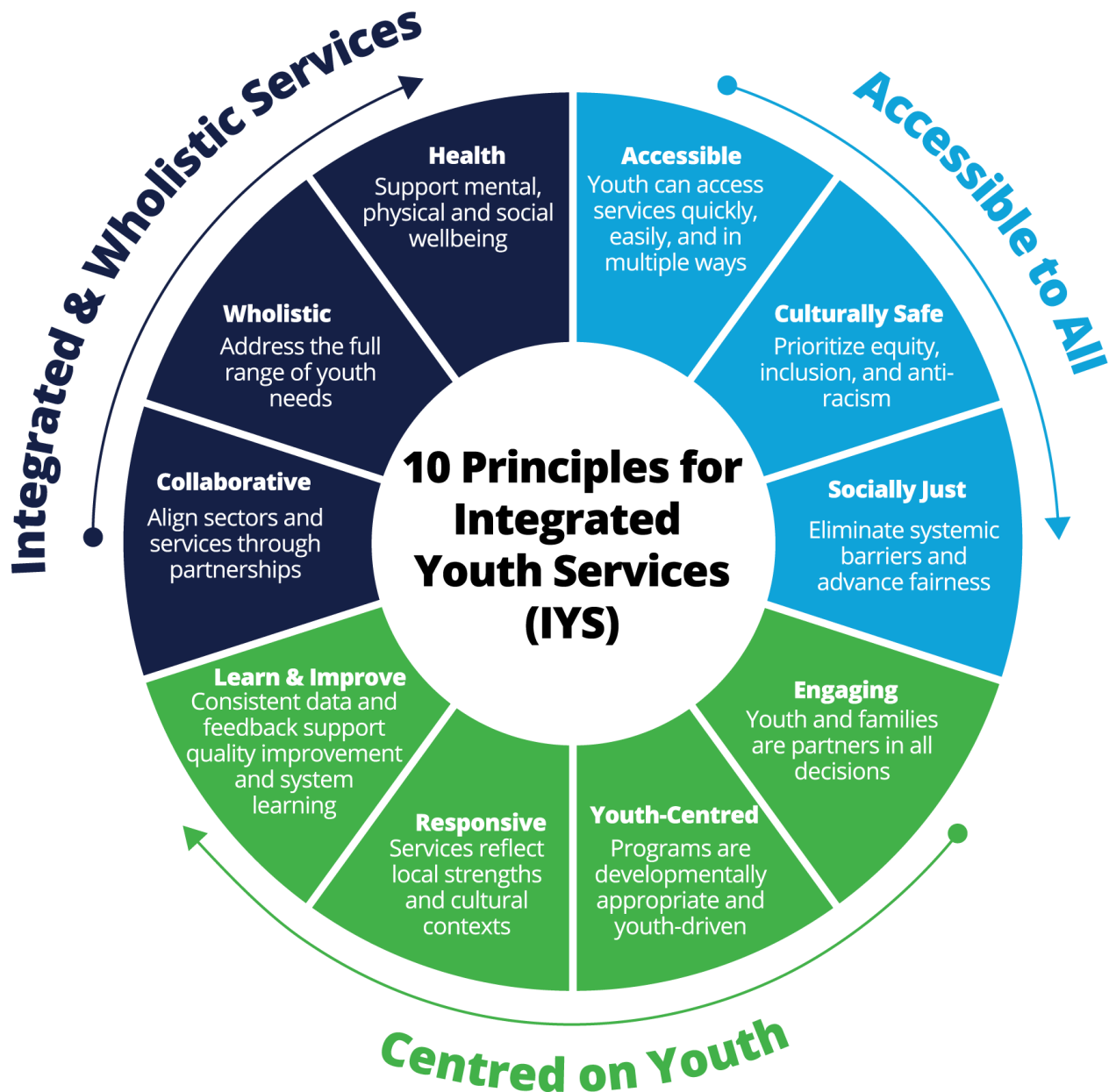


Diagram adapted from Foundry (2023)²⁶

3.0 Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario (YWHO)

Section Overview:

Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario (YWHO) is Ontario's model for IYS. This section provides an overview of YWHO, including its vision, core values, and how it supports communities to strengthen services for young people.

- **What YWHO is:** A provincial network of youth-friendly Hubs providing rapid and low-barrier access to mental health, substance use, primary care, education, employment, housing, and other community supports for youth ages 12–25.
- **How YWHO developed:** Launched in 2017 with funding from the Ontario Ministry of Health and philanthropic partners, YWHO built on earlier research and innovation projects such as the National Youth Screening Project and YouthCan IMPACT. Beginning with 10 demonstration sites, YWHO has since expanded into a growing provincial network.
- **YWHO Core values:** Youth- and family-centred, developmentally informed, wholistic, equitable, inclusive, and committed to continuous quality improvement.
- **Role of the YWHO Provincial Office:** Provides backbone support including for site implementation, knowledge exchange, evaluation, equity and Indigenous approaches, youth/family engagement, as well as community outreach and engagement.
- **YWHO as part of a broader movement:** YWHO builds on national and international IYS models (e.g., Foundry BC, ACCESS Open Minds, Headspace Australia) while adapting to Ontario's unique context.

In short: YWHO is a province-wide network and learning health system that is transforming how services are designed, delivered, and experienced by young people and their families.

[YWHO](#)ⁱⁱ is a province-wide IYS initiative for young people aged 12 to 25 and their families. It provides welcoming, youth-friendly access to supports for mental health, substance use, and related needs.

YWHO is made up of community-based Hub Networks (see definitions below) that bring together services such as mental health, primary care, substance use, education, employment, housing, peer supports, and other social services and skills and well-being activities in accessible locations.

By working together in this way, YWHO Hub Networks aim to:

- Improve transitions between health and social services
- Remove barriers that prevent youth from accessing care
- Reduce wait times for early intervention and developmentally-appropriate evidence-based/generating supports.

Key Definitions

YWHO Hub Network: A funded network of service providers, organizational partners, and youth and family advisories in a community that designs and delivers integrated youth services based on the YWHO model.

YWHO Hub: A central, youth-friendly access point, co-designed with youth and families, where young people can connect with multiple integrated services in-person or virtually.

YWHO Hub Network Partners: Service providers and organizational partners who have a memorandum of understanding with the lead(s) of the Hub Network and work collaboratively with the full Hub Network to deliver coordinated, population-specific, and culturally appropriate services.

ⁱⁱ <https://youthhubs.ca/>

3.1 YWHO Development and Expansion

The YWHO model builds on integrated collaborative care approaches co-designed by youth, families, and service providers. Its foundation was laid through the **YouthCan IMPACT project**, a three-year research initiativeⁱⁱⁱ launched in 2014, which demonstrated that high-quality, coordinated youth mental health services can be delivered effectively outside hospital settings.²⁷

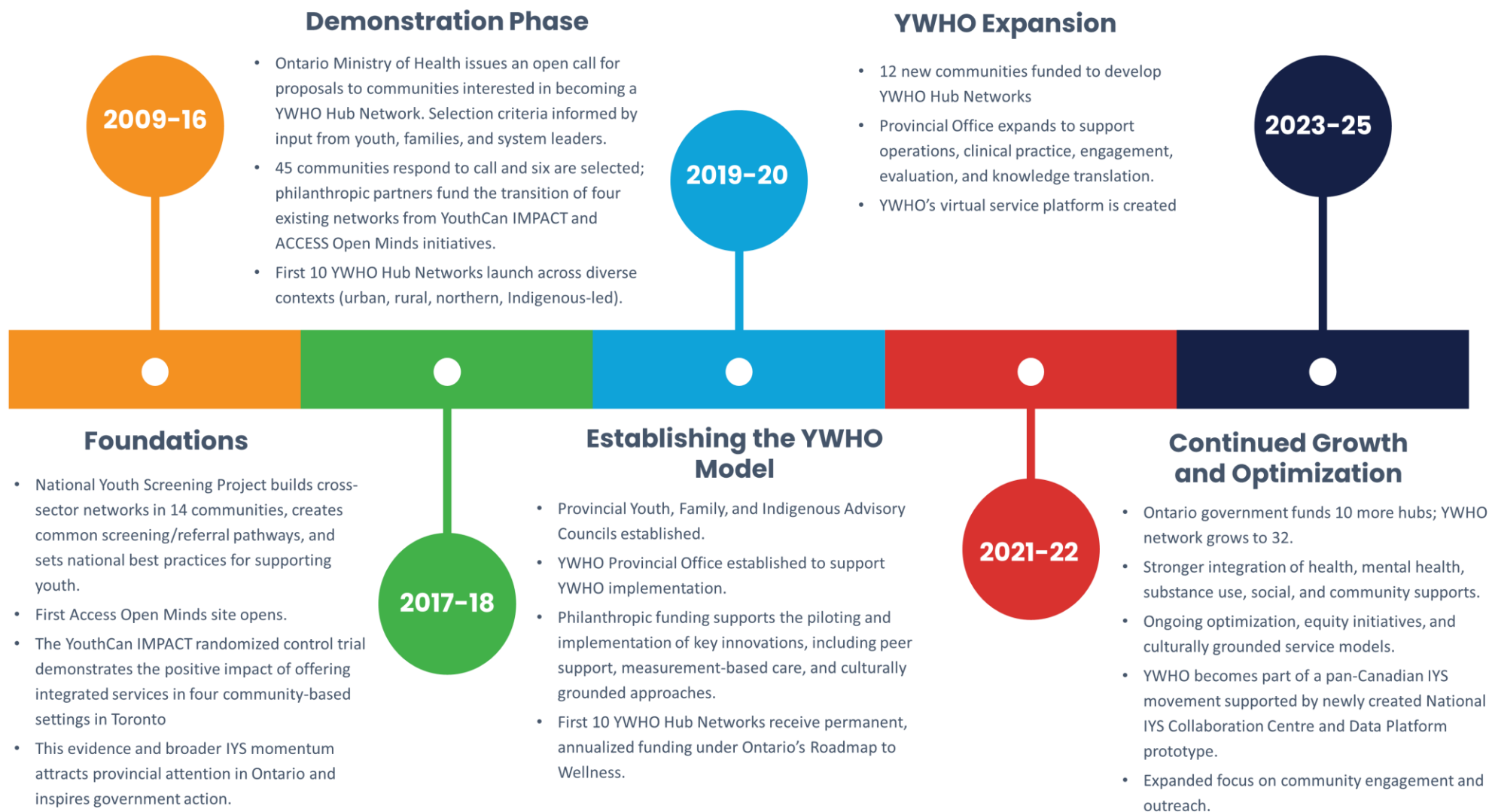
In 2017, YWHO was officially launched with funding from the Ontario Ministry of Health and philanthropic partners. Ten demonstration sites were established: three transitioned from the YouthCan IMPACT project, one from ACCESS Open Minds (see [Section 2.0](#)), and six communities were selected by the Ministry for Hub Network funding through an open call for proposals. Alongside these sites, a provincial backbone structure (now the YWHO Provincial Office) was created to provide centralized guidance while ensuring services are designed and delivered locally. **This blend of centralized support and local ownership has remained a defining feature of the YWHO approach.**

From the outset, YWHO has emphasized youth and family engagement as core principles. Services are intentionally designed to reflect lived and living experiences and community priorities, including those of Indigenous and Francophone partners. These networks collectively provide accessible, population-specific care and culturally appropriate supports delivered through an anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and decolonial lens.

The timelines presented in Figure 3 highlights the key milestones in the growth of YWHO, from its research foundation, through the demonstration phase, to the present-day network of funded and connected communities.

ⁱⁱⁱ Funded by the Ontario SPOR Support Unit, Canadian Institutes of Health Research, and philanthropic partners

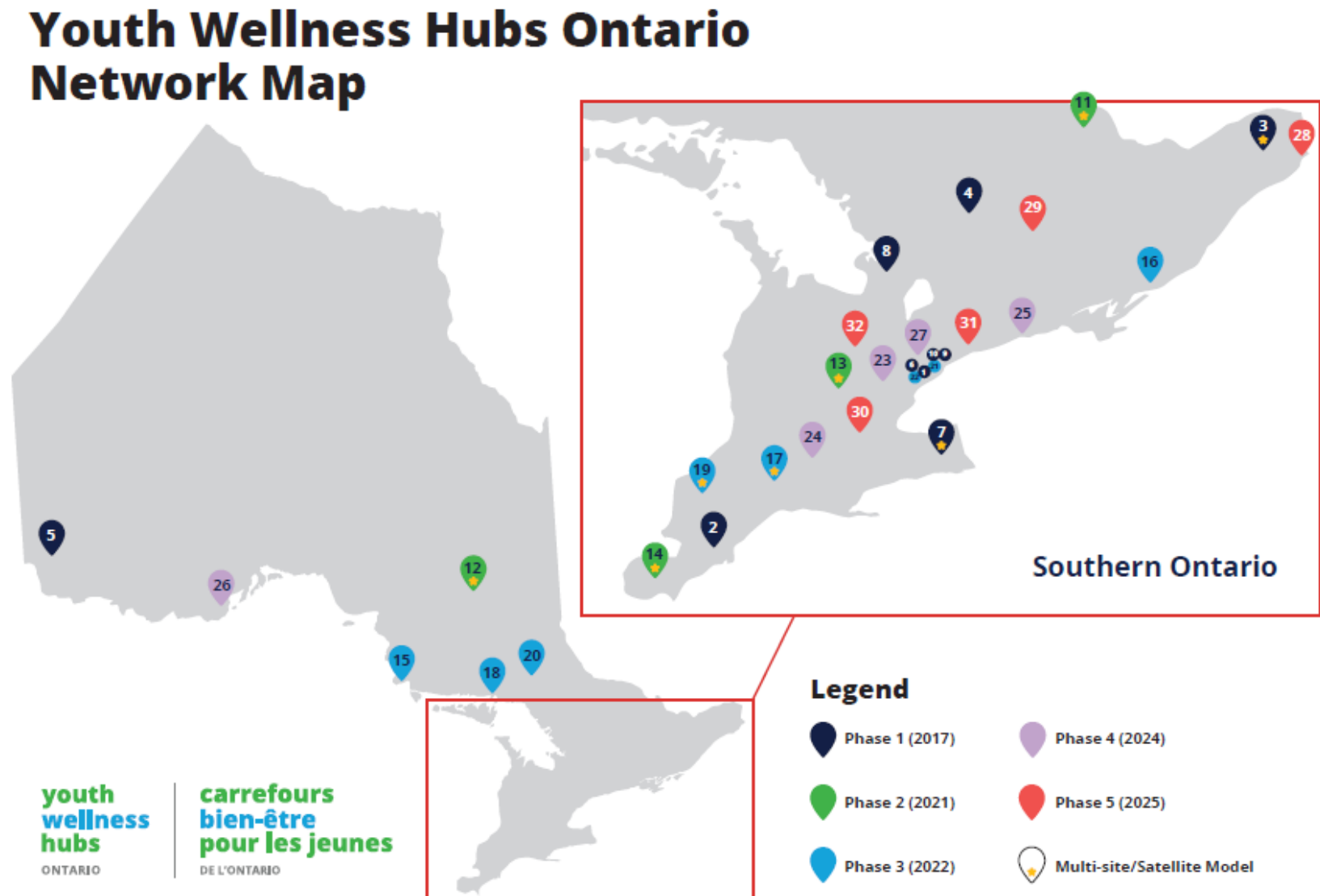
Figure 3. Timelines of YWHO Expansion



Today, the YWHO network has grown significantly. As of 2025, **there are 32 funded YWHO Hub Networks across Ontario**, alongside many additional *connected communities* that are working toward adopting the IYS model with YWHO's Provincial Office guidance. Figure 4 illustrates the geographic spread of the current YWHO Hub Networks across Ontario and more details about each Hub Network are available on the [YWHO website](https://www.youthhubs.ca/ywho-sites)^{iv}.

^{iv} <https://www.youthhubs.ca/ywho-sites>

Figure 4. YWHO Hub Network Map



3.2 YWHO Values

A set of core values guides every aspect of YWHO service co-design, implementation, knowledge mobilization, and evaluation. These values, presented in Figure 5, serve as a foundation for decision-making and collaborative practice across Hub Networks.

Figure 5. YWHO Values



3.3 YWHO Core Components

At the heart of the YWHO model are six interrelated core components. These reflect the essential building blocks for delivering high-quality, accessible, and equitable care for youth and families across Ontario. Each component is evidence-based/evidence-generating and is implemented through a blend of provincial guidance and local leadership. Together, they help ensure that young people have timely access to the right supports in welcoming spaces designed with and for them.

These components are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. As you explore what it might take to adopt IYS in your community, they can serve as a roadmap to highlight what's possible, what's needed, and what to prioritize as you and your partners move forward.

The six core components are summarized in Figure 6 below. Two of them (Youth & Family Engagement and Integrated Governance & Partner Collaboration) are explored in greater detail in the following sections of this guide ([Sections 4.0, 5.0, and 6.0](#)) and the remaining four components are in [Section 7.0](#).

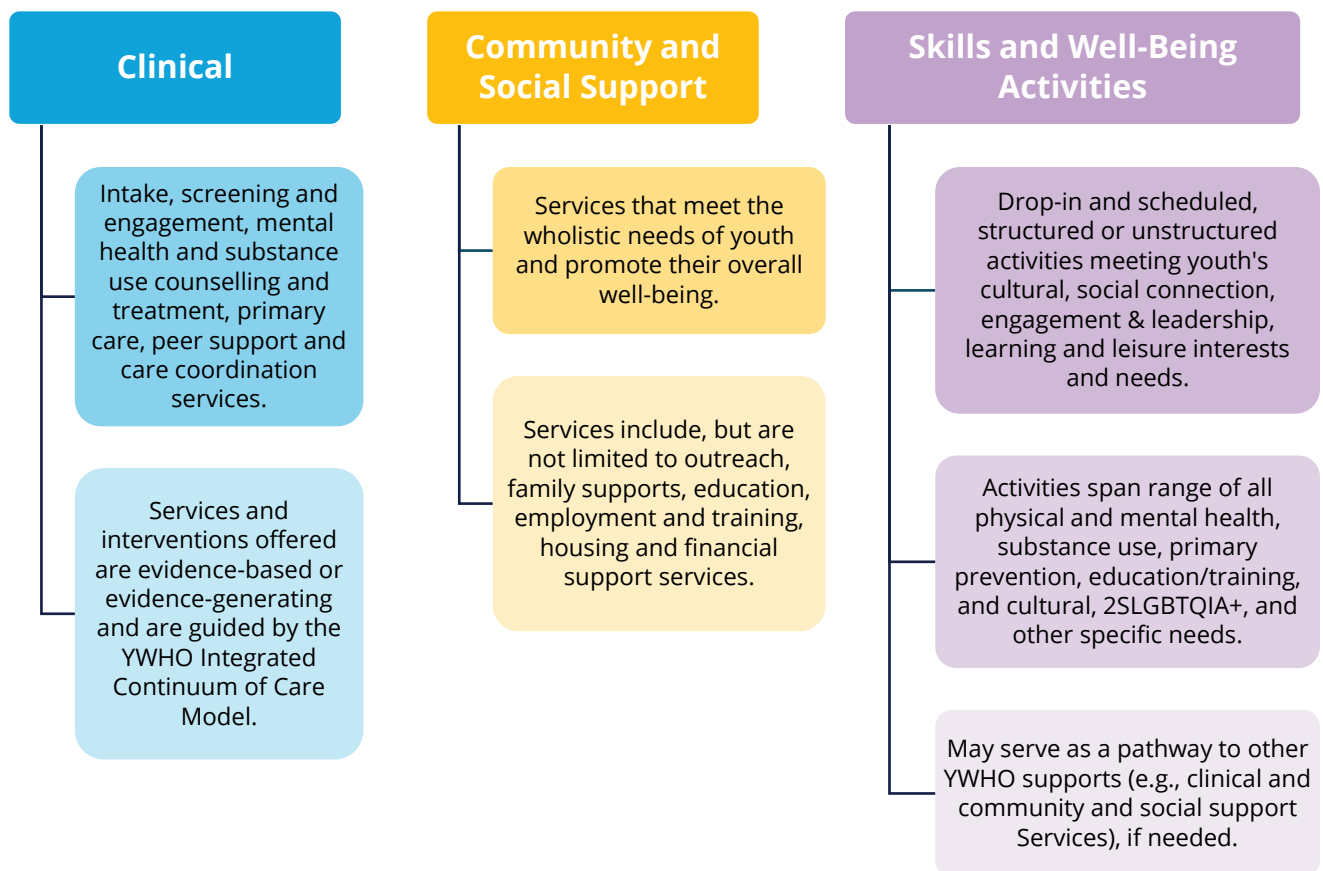
Figure 6. YWHO's Core Components



3.4 YWHO Service Pathways

The YWHO model is built around three interconnected service pathways that ensure young people can access the right supports in one integrated space. Each pathway responds to different dimensions of youth needs, including clinical care, social supports, and opportunities for connection and growth, while remaining flexible and coordinated. Figure 7 illustrates how these pathways come together within a YWHO Hub Network

Figure 7. YWHO Service Pathways



4.0 Youth and Family Engagement

Section Overview:

Youth and family engagement is a cornerstone of IYS and of YWHO. This section highlights why authentic engagement matters, what it looks like in practice, and how communities can strengthen their own approaches. It is both a roadmap and a toolkit for building engagement that is authentic, equitable, and sustainable.

Key Messages:

- **Why it matters:** Engagement is central to equity, inclusion, and effective service design. When youth and families are true partners, services are more relevant, trusted, and impactful.
- **Principles for engagement:** Authenticity, transparency, shared power, cultural safety, and continuous relationship-building.
- **Evolving practice:** Engagement often starts informally (conversations, relationship-building) and grows into more formal structures such as advisory councils, co-design groups, and governance roles.

What This Section Provides:

- **Frameworks and principles** that define meaningful engagement in IYS.
- **Reflection questions** to help communities assess their current practices and identify opportunities to improve.
- **Tools and templates** to guide planning and support inclusive participation.
- **Case studies and examples** from YWHO Hubs Networks and the YWHO Youth Advisors Team that illustrate how engagement is practiced in real settings.
- **Lessons learned and strategies** to address common practical barriers to youth and family engagement (e.g., transportation, childcare, or compensation).

IYS work best when communities embrace youth and families as equal partners in shaping change. Effective engagement is not about adding youth or family voices after decisions are made. It's about embedding youth and family partnership from the very beginning and through all phases of system redesign and transformation. In IYS models, including YWHO, youth and family engagement is both a core component and a principle that underpins every other component of the model. Done well, engagement is a standard of high-quality equitable care.²⁸

4.1 Why Engagement is Important

Lived and living experience is expertise

Young people and families are the foremost experts in their own lives. They bring insight into what it's like to ask for help, navigate complex systems, and receive care. Recognizing this knowledge as valid expertise helps everyone focus on what matters most: supporting the health and well-being of young people and ensuring that services are grounded in real experiences.

Meaningful engagement means better services and service outcomes

When youth and families are meaningfully engaged, services become more relevant, accessible, and effective.^{29 30} Their perspectives shape how services are designed, delivered, and evaluated, which results in improved access and outcomes. Youth engagement in their own care also strengthens trust with providers, increases satisfaction with care, and contributes to positive outcomes like enhanced mental health, emotional well-being, and overall quality of life.^{31 32 33}

Engagement fosters growth and resilience

Meaningful engagement also fosters personal growth. Engagement opportunities help young people develop a stronger sense of control and self-efficacy, along with social and civic engagement.³⁴ These experiences can strengthen identity, boost self-esteem, and build leadership skills. Over time, youth engagement has been linked to better academic outcomes, improved health, and reduced substance use and risk behaviours.^{35 36}

When youth and families lead, communities thrive

Engagement strengthens the fabric of communities. When young people and families develop confidence, leadership, and a deeper sense of belonging through IYS engagement, communities benefit from greater civic engagement, stronger partnerships, and a shared capacity for change. Empowering young people and families with meaningful roles and responsibilities generates momentum for transformation that reaches beyond the IYS system, influencing schools, neighbourhoods, and broader health and social systems.^{37 38}

4.2 Principles of Youth and Family Engagement

YWHO's youth and family engagement practices are grounded in principles that ensure participation is meaningful, inclusive, and impactful. These principles draw on a *strengths-based approach*, which recognizes that youth and families bring valuable skills, lived and living experiences, cultural knowledge, and community connections. By focusing on these strengths, engagement becomes empowering and youth and families are supported to shape services in ways that reflect their aspirations, capacities, and local realities. The principles outlined below set the context for what meaningful engagement looks like, while the sections that follow provide practical guidance on how these principles can be put into action.

1. Build Connection and Trust

Youth and family engagement begins with authentic relationships. Building trust takes time, consistency, and a willingness to meet people where they are at, both figuratively and literally.

Key Practices:

- Honour lived and living experiences of youth and families as valid expertise.
- Ensure all community partners commit to supporting engagement as core work.
- Root relationships in mutual respect, trust, and acknowledgment of past harms.

Figure 8. In Their Words: How to Engage and Build Trusting Partnerships with Youth



2. Advance Equity, Access, and Safety

Equitable engagement means removing barriers and actively creating safe, inclusive opportunities for all youth and families to participate.

Key Practices:

- Provide honoraria and practical supports such as food, transportation, and childcare.
- Adapt to emotional, cultural, and logistical needs of youth and their families.
- Apply anti-racist, anti-oppressive, trauma-informed, and culturally-responsive practices.
- Offer multiple participation options that respect individual needs and comfort levels.
- Ask Indigenous youth and other equity-deserving youth what culturally safe engagement looks like in your community.

3. Reflect the Diversity of Youth and Families

Engagement should reflect the full range of identities, experiences, and voices in a community, not just those already connected.

Key Practices:

- Reach out through schools, peer and partner networks, cultural groups, and trusted community spaces.
- Include youth with lived and living experience of mental health, substance use, and other complex challenges in your engagement efforts.
- Define “family” broadly to include chosen supports, caregivers, and allies.
- Build on existing advisory groups rather than duplicating efforts, while also engaging young people who are not yet involved in IYS work.

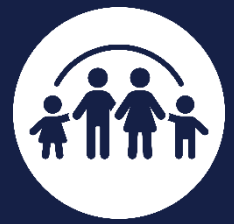
4. Centre Youth and Family Preferences

There’s no standard approach to youth and family engagement. Engagement should adapt to the preferences, capacities, and communication styles of youth and families in your community.

Key Practices:

- Use digital storytelling, social media platforms that are familiar to youth, and creative outreach to share information and invite input.

- Communicate with professionalism and authenticity and avoid condescending or overly “youthful” tones.
- Offer multiple entry points for involvement, such as short-term or “drop-in” opportunities, project-based roles and ongoing advisory positions.



Families as Partners: Voices from the Provincial Family Advisory Council

Families remind us that when a young person struggles, the effects ripple across the whole family. Parents, siblings, and caregivers also need to be seen, supported, and respected. Their message to new communities is clear: families can be important partners in recovery. With respect and reassurance, families can bring strength, hope, and healing into a young person's journey.

Families emphasized several priorities they hope every community working to adopt IYS will keep in mind:

- **Youth challenges affect the whole family.** Supports for youth should be paired with opportunities for families to process their own emotions and learn how to provide positive support.
- **Every family is different.** Avoid “one size fits all” approaches. Some families have strong networks, while others are isolated and need more support.
- **Involve families from the beginning.** Building in family voice from the start prevents re-work later and creates stronger, smarter programming.
- **Respect youth choice.** Families should be included in ways that strengthen rather than override youth voice. Young people should always have the option of inviting parents, siblings, or other trusted adults into care and decision-making.
- **Mix formal and informal engagement.** Advisory councils and planning tables matter, but so do informal opportunities: coffee chats, family picnics, talent shows, or events that bring laughter and connection back into family life.
- **Close the loop.** Families want to see how their input is shaping programming and decisions. Transparency builds trust and authentic partnership.
- **Dedicated points of contact matter.** Having a family navigator or another trusted staff member makes it easier for families to ask questions, get information, and feel included.



In their words:

“Families are partners in moving forward—we want to be part of the team. When we are treated with respect and our voices are valued, we can stand alongside youth and service providers as equals.”

5. Share Power with Authenticity

Youth and families need to see that their voices matter and lead to action. Engagement without follow-through breaks trust.

Key Practices:

- Be transparent about where youth/families are part of the decision making.
- Complete the loop by showing how input was used (or why it wasn't).
- Provide regular opportunities for dialogue, reflection, and course correction.



Quick Tip: When inviting youth and families to get involved, start by asking what they are proud of, whether it's a skill, an accomplishment, or a personal strength, and use these as building blocks for their engagement role.

6. Build Partner Capacity for Youth and Family Engagement

Engagement is a skill that often requires training, reflection, and practice. Engaging youth and families may not come naturally to all of your community partners and may even be uncomfortable for some who have no experience sharing power with members of their community. Building capacity helps partners move past any initial uncertainty, gain confidence, and strengthen their ability to engage meaningfully and inclusively.

Key Practices:

- Train partners on engagement values, inclusive language, and youth-centered practices using the resources provided in this guide.
- Support partners to share decision-making with youth and families.
- Guard against drift back to traditional, adult-driven planning processes.
- Provide opportunities for youth to strengthen their own engagement, leadership and advocacy skills.

Resources

Title	Description	Reference
Quality Standard for Youth Engagement	The Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health collaborated with youth, families, service agencies, and researchers to co-develop a set of system-level quality standards for youth and family engagement. It outlines evidence-informed principles and benchmarks that can guide organizational practices and systems in holding youth as partners, not just consultees.	Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health. (2021). <i>Quality Standard for Youth Engagement</i> . Ottawa, ON. https://cop.kdehub.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/quality_standard_for_youth_engagement_wcag.pdf
Quality Standard for Family Engagement	This standard, developed by the Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health, outlines evidence-informed standards to guide meaningful and equitable family engagement within child and youth mental health systems.	Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health (2021). <i>Quality standard for family engagement</i> .

	It defines best and emerging practices to ensure that families are recognized as essential partners in planning, delivering, and evaluating mental health services. It also offers practical implementation tools, indicators, and examples for organizations seeking to strengthen collaboration with families at service, organizational, and system levels.	Knowledge Development and Exchange (KDE) Hub. https://cop.kdehub.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/quality_standard_for_family_engagement_wcag.pdf
Meaningfully Engaging Youth	This is a resource to help communities and organizations strengthen youth engagement. It outlines principles and practices that foster authentic youth participation, emphasizes the value of relationships, equity, and shared decision-making, and provides tools to support communities in creating meaningful roles for young people.	Tamarack Institute. (2020). Guide: Meaningfully Engaging Youth. https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Resources/Publications/Guide%20-%20Meaningfully%20Engaging%20Youth%20EN.pdf
Walking the Talk: A Toolkit for Engaging Youth in Mental Health	This toolkit aims to build greater understanding of how youth engagement can directly benefit youth, service areas and communities in Ontario's child and youth mental health sector. It highlights the benefits, provides guidance to implement youth engagement initiatives at the agency-level and showcases the many youth engagement success stories and examples from across the province.	Knowledge Institute on Child and Youth Mental Health and Addictions. (2016). Walking the Talk: A Toolkit for Engaging Youth in Mental Health. https://youthrex.com/toolkit/walking-the-talk-a-toolkit-for-engaging-youth-in-mental-health/

McCain Model of Youth Engagement

A core part of authentic youth engagement is recognizing that participation can vary in depth and influence depending on the context. To guide youth engagement in research and service design, the McCain Centre at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) developed the **McCain Model of Youth Engagement** (see Figure 9). This evidence-informed framework emphasizes **choice, flexibility, and opportunity**, and illustrates multiple pathways for involving youth; from participating in projects to providing consultation, working as equal partners, or leading initiatives themselves. The model helps teams align the type and depth of engagement with the goals of their project, while ensuring youth have meaningful opportunities to shape outcomes.³⁹

Figure 9. McCain Model of Youth Engagement



Graphic adapted from Carlon (2006)⁴⁰

4.3 Getting to Know Youth in Your Community

Effective engagement begins with a genuine understanding of the young people in your community, including who they are, what they need, and what strengths they bring. This is not a one-time task but an ongoing process that should be co-led with young people. By grounding engagement in youth's lived and living experiences, communities can build trust, create space for authentic collaboration, and ensure that youth perspectives directly shape services and decision-making.

Getting to know youth can take many forms and should reflect local context and partner capacity. For example, in rural or remote areas, approaches may need to adapt for distance, connectivity, or cultural realities. No matter the approach, the goal is to give youth a voice and gather insights in ways that are inclusive, culturally responsive, and tailored to their diverse realities.

Why Getting to Know Youth in your Community Matters

- Aligns services and supports with the actual needs of local youth.
- Prevents assumptions and generalizations, particularly about equity-deserving groups.
- Builds shared knowledge that informs outreach, service planning, and engagement approaches.

The guiding questions presented in Table 1 can help you better understand the realities, priorities, and needs of youth in your area.

Table 1. Guiding Questions to Get to Know Youth in Your Community

Area	Guiding Questions
Demographics/Social Determinants of Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do local data (census, school board, agencies, other indices) tell us about youth aged 12–25 (race, Indigeneity, gender identity, language, income, disability, housing, employment)?
Needs & Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the most common issues youth face?• What barriers make it difficult to access support?• Do these differ across subgroups?• How do youth describe their own mental health and wellness needs?
Cultural & Community Contexts and Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What communities do youth identify with? Which organizations, networks, or peer groups do they trust and turn to? Where are youth most active?
Developmental Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do needs differ for younger teens (12–15) vs. older youth (16–18) and emerging adults (18–25)? Are services tailored accordingly?

How to Gather Insights

- Review local data sources.
- Conduct youth-led surveys, scans, focus groups, or listening sessions (see the following page for examples of questions you might want to ask youth in your community).
- Host collaborative “youth insight” workshops with youth, families, and providers.
- Use mapping or photovoice activities to capture youth perspectives on their lives and supports.

Resource: Sample Questions for Gathering Youth and Family Perspectives^v

YWHO Implementation and Engagement Leads and YWHO Hub Networks^{vi} have shared the following menu of questions that your community can use/adapt to engage youth and families. We have included questions that can guide early youth and family engagement, as your community explores IYS, as well as questions that can inform later stages of planning for IYS adoption (e.g., IYS space planning, identifying inclusive and culturally diverse services) that are described in later sections of this guide.

Quick Tips:



- Frame the questions as an opportunity to dream big and shape what IYS could become.
- Keep the language simple and inclusive.
- Offer multiple ways for youth and families to share their ideas (e.g., surveys, conversations, creative activities).
- Let participants know how their input will be used to design services.
- Make sure youth and families have a basic understanding of what IYS are so that their feedback is grounded in a shared understanding.

1. Youth and Family Engagement

- How would you like to be involved in shaping IYS as it develops?
- What's the best way for you to share ideas or get involved?
- What are some barriers that would need to be addressed to support your involvement?

2. Community Strengths

- What are the best things about being a young person in this community?
- Which organizations, groups, or places do youth and families trust most in the community?
- How could your community build on these strengths and connections?

^v These questions were adapted from various surveys developed by Jonathan Berges (YWHO Implementation Specialist), Lee Cameron (YWHO Engagement Lead), Alex Bucik (Community Health & Education Coordinator), and the YWHO Haliburton Hub Network.

^{vi} See Acknowledgements section for more details

3. Community Needs & Barriers

- What challenges do youth in the community face that IYS should help with?
- Are there services or supports missing in the community that IYS could provide?
- When you think about your own wellness, what supports would make the biggest difference for you?

4. Youth Services and Spaces

- What kinds of activities or supports would you most like to see through IYS?
- If there was a youth-friendly drop-in space, what would make it welcoming and comfortable?
- What should the space look or feel like so that youth want to spend time there?

5. Service Access & Practical Supports

- What would make it easier for you to access services offered by IYS (e.g., transportation, hours of operation)?
- What days or times would work best for you to attend IYS programs or services?
- What could IYS do to make sure *all* youth and families can access programs or services?

6. Communication & Outreach

- What's the best way for communities to let youth know about what's happening with IYS (text, social media, phone, email, posters, word of mouth, etc.)?
- Where do you usually hear about events or activities in your community?
- How would you like to be kept informed as IYS develops?

4.4 Mechanisms for Youth and Family Engagement

There is no single way to engage youth and families. Effective approaches vary by community, context, and individual preference. Engagement can be formal or informal, structured or spontaneous - what matters most is that it is genuine, inclusive, meaningful, and responsive. Communities are encouraged to build on what already works locally, drawing from both partner organizations and youth themselves, and taking into account the practices and reflections noted earlier.

1. Engage Youth and Family Ambassadors

Local youth and family leaders can act as ambassadors, building trust, spreading the word, and modeling meaningful engagement. Their involvement creates early momentum and a culture of collaboration.

Key Practices

- Identify youth and family members who are already respected and connected in their communities as well as those who may not yet have a voice or platform but bring equally important lived experiences and perspectives.
- Support ambassadors with mentorship opportunities and compensate them for their time.
- Work with ambassadors as role models and peer mentors for others.
- Highlight their contributions to normalize and celebrate youth and family leadership.

2. Meet Youth and Families Where They Already Are

Engagement is most effective when it happens in the places that youth and families naturally spend their time. *Bring engagement to them.* Do outreach in familiar and trusted places to reduce barriers and build stronger relationships.

Key Practices

- Participate in existing community events (e.g., fairs, cultural gatherings, sports tournaments, or festivals).

- Host drop-in sessions or informal meet-ups in youth-friendly spaces (e.g., community centres, malls, libraries, cafés, or religious spaces) or where youth are already accessing services in the community (e.g., youth shelters, food banks, community based mental health/substance use treatment agencies).
- Share information in accessible, everyday locations (e.g., schools, parks, transit hubs, food banks, shelters, clinics).
- Partner with Indigenous communities and/or other locally relevant partners to participate in culturally relevant gatherings (e.g., community celebrations, seasonal feasts).
- Co-design outreach activities with youth and families to ensure relevance.

3. Host a Youth Event

Youth gatherings like community town halls, forums, or workshops give young people a chance to express their opinions, pinpoint needs, and help create projects that affect their lives. The [YWHA Youth Advisor](#) team that contributed to the development of this guide has identified the following key practices to effectively plan, coordinate, and assess activities that appeal to young people while making sure their opinions are heard.

Key Practices:

1. Understanding Youth Needs

- Needs Assessment: Start by collecting insights on the key issues that matter to young people in your community.
- Media Tools Usage: Use surveys, focus groups, or casual conversations to highlight recurring priorities and concerns.
- Youth Resource Mapping: Create an overview of the programs, services, and spaces currently accessible to youth in the community. Use this to pinpoint areas where resources are lacking or where youth feel overlooked.

2. Event Planning and Designs:

- Youth-Centered Approach: Directly involve youth in the planning phase to guarantee that the event takes into account their priorities and areas of interest.
- Accessibility and Inclusivity: Pick a time, place, and structure that work for a variety of young people. Take accessibility requirements, cultural relevance, and transportation into account.

- **Engaging Format:** To keep young people interested, include interactive components like Q&A sessions, small-group discussions, artistic, musical, or narrative endeavors, or digital resources (see page 38 for ideas from the YWHO Youth Advisor Team)

3. Outreach and Promotion:

- **Youth-Friendly Messaging:** Make use of imagery and language that appeal to younger audiences.
- **Channels of Communication:** Promote the event through social media, schools, community centers, and peer networks.
- **Peer Ambassadors:** Work with young leaders or peer influencers as peer ambassadors to help spread the word and promote involvement and teamwork.

4. Gathering Youth Feedback

- **Interactive Methods:** Use live polls, digital surveys, suggestion boards, or group reflections during the event.
- **Safe Spaces for Sharing:** Ensure youth feel comfortable expressing themselves, whether through anonymous feedback tools or small-group discussions.
- **Creative Feedback Options:** Encourage art, writing, or digital media submissions that capture youth perspectives in different ways.

5. Follow-Up and Accountability

- **Closing the Loop:** Share back the results of the event and explain how youth feedback will influence decisions or future actions.
- **Ongoing Engagement:** Offer opportunities for continued involvement, such as youth advisory groups or follow-up workshops.
- **Evaluation:** Assess the event's impact by measuring youth satisfaction, diversity of participation, and tangible outcomes achieved.



Resource: Example Structure for a Youth-Focused Town Hall

(Developed by the YWHO Youth Advisor Team)

This resource offers a structure for a youth-friendly town hall, along with practical tips to make gatherings engaging, creative, and inclusive so that young people's voices are heard and acted upon.

Welcome & Icebreaker (10 mins):

- Youth facilitator opens with a music/energizer game
- Use small paper chits to choose a question to answer
- Quick round of introductions. Fun fact, one-word check-ins!!!

Context & Purpose (15 mins):

- Share why youth are gathered and what will be done with their input

Small-Group Discussions & Utilizing Creativity Skills (40 mins):

- What are the biggest challenges youth face in our community?
- What resources or supports are missing?
- What ideas do you have for solutions?
- Share, create and express

Interactive Feedback (30 mins):

- Live polling or idea board (e.g., using Kahoot, Mentimeter, sticky notes on wall)

Creative Sharing (20 mins):

- Invite groups to present highlights through posters, skits, or drawing
- Involve youth in engaging events (e.g. paintings, jewelry making, clay designs)

Wrap-Up & Next Steps (15 mins):

- Thank participants
- Share information about how the results will be used
- Invite youth to join follow-up opportunities

Closing Circle (10 mins):

- One-word check-out: How do you feel leaving today?



Post Event:

Feedback Form (Short + Youth-Friendly):

- What was your favorite part of today's event?
- What could we improve for next time?
- What issues or topics are most important to you?
- How would you like to stay involved?

Post Event Summary:

- Key issues identified by youth
- Proposed youth solutions and ideas
- Next steps and action plan:
 - Ongoing opportunities for engagement
 - Collaborations with other youth facilitating partners
 - Promotion by other youth engaging agencies



4. Leverage Social Media

Social media is a powerful tool for connection, storytelling, and dialogue. It allows youth and families to share experiences, spark conversations, and amplify diverse voices in real time.

Key Practices

- Support youth-led content creation (e.g., videos, stories, memes, infographics) that reflect lived experience or key messages.
- Invite youth to lead campaigns or manage “takeovers” that encourage youth to speak in their own voice and on their own terms.
- Use platforms popular in your community to reach out to youth and their families and introduce them to engagement/leadership opportunities.
- Ensure your content strategy is sustainable, safe, and respectful of youth privacy and reflects the cultural identities of your community.
- Make it engaging and interactive - The YWHO Youth Advisor Team emphasized the importance of dynamic and interactive content by:
 - Using memes, live streams, or vlog series to “work in the moment,” with recorded content reposted later.
 - Building audience interaction into content (e.g., using reels with open comment sections).
 - Keeping posts short, fun, and aligned with current social media trends rather than relying on posters or one-way communication.

Resources

Title	Description	Reference
Starter Guide. Engaging with Youth on Social Media	This guide is a practical tool designed to help programs assess the degree of youth participation. It provides a framework and set of indicators to evaluate the quality of engagement, including youth voice, decision-making, and inclusion. The guide supports organizations to strengthen authentic youth partnerships through regular reflection and assessment.	University of Michigan. (2020). <i>Starter Guide. Engaging with Youth on Social Media.</i> https://www.etr.org/index.cfm/_api/render/file/?method=inline&fileID=D95BB6D0-8A8C-4594-A16A0EFA4AFDD5B1
Tips for adults on engaging youth through social media	This guide provides practical advice to help adults engage youth in meaningful ways on digital platforms. The resource highlights approaches that are youth-friendly, inclusive, and respectful, and offers guidance on building trust, encouraging participation, and supporting youth voice in online spaces.	Government of Canada. (2021) Tips for Adults on Engaging Youth Through Social Media. https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/national-child-day/tips-for-adults-engaging-youth-social-media.html



YWHO's Youth and Family Advisories

Youth and family advisories are a cornerstone of YWHO's commitment to meaningful engagement. At the provincial level, YWHO has established the following advisory bodies that provide expertise, lived experience, and guidance on initiatives, projects, and system-level priorities.

Provincial Youth Advisory Council (PYAC)

The PYAC is a collective of youth aged 12–25 nominated by YWHO Hub Networks across Ontario. PYAC provides youth insights and protects youth interests across YWHO initiatives. It offers a space for youth to connect, share ideas and issues from their Hubs, and create tools to support local youth advisory councils (YACs). PYAC also contributes oversight and guidance to provincial projects at their inception, implementation, and evaluation stages.

Provincial Family Advisory Council (PFAC)

The PFAC is a group of family members with lived experience supporting loved ones with mental health and substance use concerns. PFAC advocates for youth- and family-driven priorities, supports engagement of families at YWHO Hub Networks, and provides consultation and feedback on provincial projects and initiatives.

Provincial Indigenous Youth and Family Advisory Circle (PIYFAC)

The PIYFAC creates opportunities for Indigenous youth and families to share perspectives on supports needed to improve mental health, substance use, and related services in Ontario. It informs Hub Networks and partners on how to deliver care reflective of First Nation, Inuit, and Métis youth and their communities. Grounded in an Indigenous worldview of community, interconnectedness, and the stages of life, the Circle includes youth, family members, and Elders with diverse backgrounds and experiences.

In addition to these provincial structures, each YWHO Hub Network also works to establish local youth and family advisory councils. These local bodies ensure that engagement is grounded in the realities of each community, while also linking to, and learning from, the broader provincial network of advisories.

For more information about YWHO's provincial advisories, please email our community outreach and engagement team at inquiries@ywho.ca.

5. Establish Youth and Family Advisory Councils

Youth and family advisory councils (see page 42 for a description) provide structure for ongoing engagement. When integrated into governance structures, advisories ensure that youth and family perspectives directly influence Hub planning, hiring, service delivery, and evaluation. It is important to keep in mind that these advisory structures do not need to be formal in the early stages of collaboration. In many communities, engagement begins through informal conversations and relationship-building and only evolves into formal advisories once trust and clear communication have been established. Even once formal advisories are in place, levels of participation and engagement may vary among members. Allowing for flexible involvement where appropriate and feasible can help ensure that youth and families can engage in ways that work best for them.

Key Practices

- Develop clear terms of reference (see the example developed by the YWHO Youth Advisor Team beginning on page 45), scope of influence, and membership roles for advisories.
- Integrate advisories/councils into decision-making processes.
- Compensate members fairly and provide supports such as food and transportation.
- Create opportunities for co-leadership and co-design.
- Celebrate and communicate the impact of advisory contributions.

Leveraging Existing Youth Advisory Structures

You don't always need to start from scratch when forming youth advisory councils. Many communities already have youth leaders and advisory structures in place that can be engaged.

For example, Ontario municipalities are required to create Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) Plans, which bring together advisory committees with mandatory representation from health care, social services, police, education, and, importantly, youth.⁴¹ These plans show how existing advisory tables can support youth engagement and system coordination. For example, the following municipalities have formed youth-focused networks and action tables within their CSWB frameworks, offering useful models for communities advancing IYS:

- **Barrie:** Barrie's CSWB Plan includes a Transitional-Aged Youth Services Network, which coordinates youth mental health and addiction services across agencies.⁴²
- **Halton:** Halton's CSWB Plan established several Action Tables, including a Youth Mental Health Action Table, to tackle priority issues identified by the community. This brings together partners from health, education, social services, and youth representatives to coordinate solutions.⁴³

At the same time, it is still essential to intentionally engage youth, particularly those from equity-deserving groups, who haven't yet been empowered to share their perspectives so that decision-making reflects the full diversity of young people's experiences.



To support communities in establishing meaningful youth advisory structures, this guide includes a sample **Terms of Reference for a Youth Advisory Council (YAC)**. This resource outlines the purpose, roles, commitments, and supports associated with youth participation in a YAC. Communities can adapt it to reflect local needs and contexts.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL (YAC)



01. Purpose

- Share ideas + experiences.
- Advise on space, hours, services.
- Help plan/run events.
- Be a link between youth & Hub.
- Join meetings + activities.

- Youth voices in planning + decision-making.
- Services are youth-friendly, inclusive, low-barrier.



03. Term

- Attend scheduled meetings.
- Counted if 60%+ attended.
- 4 missed = staff check-in.
- 5 missed = step down.

- 1 year commitment (renewable).



05. Opportunity

- \$30/hour OR volunteer hours.
- No payment if <60% meeting attended.
- Paid monthly (direct deposit).

- Represent Hub on regional/provincial councils.
- Co-create programs + projects.
- Build leadership skills.



07. Communication

- Give 2 weeks' notice.
- Complete exit feedback survey.

- With staff: give feedback + reply to messages.
- With peers: share Hub info + bring back youth feedback.



09. New Members

- Serve as mentors (up to age 27).
- Support youth but don't represent them.
- Voting only in tie-breaks.

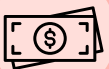
02. Our Role



04. Meetings



06. Honorarium



08. Leaving YAC



10. Adult Allies (26+)



- Ages 12-25.
- Apply + may be interviewed.
- Equity focus: Indigenous, Black, racialized, youth with disabilities, youth with lived experience of mental health/substance use.

AGREEMENT OF TERMS

I, the undersigned, have read and understand all the information in this document and I agree to conduct my activities in accordance with its contents.

Youth Advisor name:

Witness Name:

Youth Advisor signature:

Witness Signature:

Date:

Date:

Beginning of 1-year term date:

Term end date:

YOUTH ADVISOR INFORMATION & EMERGENCY CONTACT

Youth Advisor name:

Phone #:

Email Address:

Address:

Allergies:

Any other medical conditions:

Emergency Contact Name:

Relationship to you:

Phone #:

6. Create Formal Youth Engagement Roles

Many IYS initiatives, including YWHO, recognize the value of formal roles dedicated to supporting youth and family engagement. These roles, such as Youth Engagement Leads and Family Engagement Leads, provide the infrastructure and expertise needed to make engagement sustainable, consistent, and meaningful. By having staff whose primary responsibility is to champion engagement, IYS signal that youth and family voices are central to their work, not optional add-ons.

Formal engagement roles can also help manage some of the real-world challenges that come with inclusive participation. Youth and families may be balancing multiple pressures, such as employment or housing instability, while trying to contribute to engagement activities. Engagement Leads can help reduce barriers, manage interruptions, and create conditions that allow young people and families to be fully present. These roles are also vital in supporting diverse representation and ensure that participation is not limited to those who already have the resources, time, or stability to engage.

Key practices include:

- Designating a role with clear responsibility for youth and/or family engagement.
- Positioning Engagement Leads as connectors who bridge youth, families, peer support workers, and organizational leadership.
- Embedding these roles within decision-making structures to ensure that youth and family perspectives shape planning, governance, and service improvement.

Be an Adult Ally

Adult allies play an important role in creating meaningful youth engagement. Being an ally means moving beyond a traditional mentor role and working with youth as equal partners. The *Adult Ally Tip Sheet* provided in [Appendix D](#) highlights the benefits of adult-youth partnerships for youth, adults, and organizations, and outlines the key characteristics of effective allies, such as active listening, interrupting adultism, and creating safer spaces. This practical resource can help adults reflect on their role, build stronger partnerships with youth, and foster organizational cultures that truly support youth voice.

Resource:

Title	Description	Reference
Takeover Guide: a guide to supporting youth takeover experiences; virtually and in person	According to this guide, a takeover is when “adults move aside and intentionally provide space and opportunities for a young person to share the power and platforms that are typically reserved as adult spaces. By doing so, the voices and perspectives of young people are amplified. This experience ideally contributes to youth feeling valued, heard, and included, which ultimately increases their sense of belonging.” This guide provides practical resources to plan your own youth takeover, including suggestions for facilitating both virtual and in-person takeovers.	Children and Youth Planning Table. 2021. Takeover Guide: A Guide to Supporting Youth Takeover Experiences; Virtually and in Person. https://childrenandyouthplanningtable.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Takeover-Guide.pdf

7. Check in on Engagement Practices

Engagement is most meaningful when it is continuously shaped by the youth and families who participate. Beyond creating structures like advisories, communities should build in regular opportunities to ask youth how engagement is going. These check-ins help ensure that processes remain welcoming, safe, and impactful, while signaling that feedback about engagement itself is valued. By actively listening and adapting, communities demonstrate accountability and strengthen trust with young people and families.

Key Practices

- Create regular opportunities for youth to share how engagement processes feel to them.
- Use a mix of approaches such as short surveys, informal conversations, focus groups to gather feedback.
- Close the loop by sharing back what you heard and what changes will be made as a result.
- Encourage honesty by making feedback safe, anonymous (if desired), and free from negative consequences.
- Normalize adaptation: show that engagement practices evolve based on youth and family experience.

Do's and Don'ts of Youth and Family Engagement

Your community can use the following checklist as a quick reference when planning or reviewing engagement activities.

Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Co-create engagement opportunities ✓ Create inclusive, welcoming, safe spaces and prioritize relationship-building and flexibility ✓ Be open to different ideas about how to engage youth and families ✓ Make space for diverse forms of input (e.g., verbal, written, creative, digital, informal) ✓ Adapt engagement processes to reflect different community contexts and readiness levels ✓ Set clear goals and expectations ✓ Provide training, mentorship, and support to youth/families ✓ Compensate fairly and transparently ✓ Reduce barriers (transport, childcare, food, timing) ✓ Tailor opportunities to different comfort levels ✓ Ask for feedback on how engagement is going 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Overlook youth and families who may be less vocal or harder to reach ✗ Use engagement as a checkbox process ✗ Talk down to, or patronize youth ✗ Avoid difficult topics or seek only "safe" input ✗ Overburden a few individuals with excessive requests ✗ Limit engagement to the "usual voices" ✗ Expect youth/families to "represent everyone" ✗ Conflate attendance with engagement ✗ Treat engagement as one-time only ✗ Assume digital engagement works for everyone ✗ Rush the process or expect formal structures immediately

A Note on Growth and Change

Youth and family engagement evolves. Early efforts often focus on building relationships and creating space for youth and families in decision making. Over time, as trust deepens and your IYS adoption or engagement efforts mature, engagement becomes more sustained and embedded with roles growing in depth and complexity. Even if the initial excitement fades, this evolution is natural and healthy. Embrace it as a sign of trust and maturity.

4.5 Reflection Questions

Before You Begin: A Note on Reflection Questions

The reflection questions throughout this guide (which are consolidated in [Appendix C](#)) are meant to spark curiosity, prompt meaningful conversations, and help your community explore its current strengths, needs, and opportunities. You don't need to have all the answers right now. These questions are an invitation to think deeply and collaboratively. As you move forward, you'll find new tools and examples to support your learning and planning.



1. How are we creating safe, welcoming, and inclusive spaces where diverse youth and families feel able to contribute their perspectives?
2. What supports (e.g., honoraria, accessibility measures, dedicated roles) are in place to reduce barriers and make engagement sustainable?
3. In what ways are youth and families sharing real power in shaping services, governance, and system change, rather than being consulted after decisions are made?
4. How do we ensure that engagement reflects the diversity of our community, including those who may face the greatest barriers to participation?
5. How are we learning from engagement over time? Are we celebrating successes, identifying gaps, and adapting our approaches as youth and family needs evolve?

5.0 Partner Collaboration and Integrated Governance

Section Summary:

Partnerships are at the heart of IYS. No single organization can meet the range of needs of young people and families, so effective collaboration is essential. This section highlights why partnerships matter and how they can be developed and sustained. It also offers practical tools communities can use to strengthen collaboration.

- **Partnerships should be the early focus.** IYS depend on collaboration among health, social, education, and community partners to deliver services that reflect youth needs.
- **Collaboration takes time.** Trust-building, shared visioning, and clear agreements at the outset help prevent misalignment and create a foundation for lasting integration.
- **Shared governance strengthens accountability.** Structures that include youth, families, and partners ensure that decision-making is transparent and equitable.
- **Each partner brings unique strengths.** Community partners all contribute different expertise, from clinical services to outreach, cultural safety, and lived experience, that together create a more wholistic system.
- **Equity and inclusion must be embedded.** Partnerships that intentionally apply anti-oppressive, culturally-safe, and inclusive practices are better able to engage equity-deserving youth and families. Partners should also represent the community, youth, and families that will be supported.
- **Partnerships evolve.** Roles and relationships change as needs shift; flexibility is key to sustaining collaboration over time.
- **Practical resources are included.** To help communities identify and engage partners, build integrated governance tables, and reflect on how their engagement efforts are going.

The core goals of IYS to bringing together multiple services, systems, and supports around young people to improve service access requires deep, intentional partner collaboration. No single organization can meet the full spectrum of youth needs alone. That's why strong, trust-based partnerships are foundational to creating more accessible, integrated, and responsive systems of care.

Partnership is fundamentally about building relationships. And it begins with taking time to understand your community, getting to know each other as partners, and identifying shared principles that can serve as the foundation for collaboration.

As your community network grows, the types of partners and the mechanisms for collaboration will evolve. **Partnerships are living systems.** They will shift as needs, people, and community priorities change. New partners may join, others may step back, and the ways in which collaboration happens will likely need to be revisited and reimaged over time. What matters is that your approach remains inclusive, transparent, and flexible. Keeping the focus on youth, nurturing relationships, and holding true to your shared values will help you navigate change together.

It is also important to acknowledge that doing partnership well takes sustained commitment, time, and resources. Collaboration should not be something done off the side of individuals' desks. It requires intentional roles, consistent communication, and infrastructure to support it. And while it can be complex, challenging, and at times slow-moving, communities engaged in this work in the context of IYS consistently describe the deep rewards of solid investment in this process.

This section builds on the foundations of youth and family engagement ([Section 4.0](#)), extending the same principles of inclusion, transparency, and shared leadership to organizations and systems. We begin with the informal work of building relationships and shared vision, then move toward convening leadership, integration, and ultimately, integrated governance.

Finally, remember: **youth are partners.** Their voices, leadership, and lived experience are vital, not just in service design and delivery, but in how partnerships function. Embedding youth as true partners helps ensure that your collaborative work remains grounded, inclusive, and effective.

5.1 Building Trust and Shared Vision

Every integrated initiative begins with early steps: building trust, discovering common purpose and developing a shared vision for supporting young people and their families. These first steps prepare communities for the more formal work of leadership and integrated governance that comes later.

This early partnership work may feel informal, but it lays the groundwork for everything that follows. It is about creating the right space for collaboration: ensuring youth, families, and partners feel safe and respected, identifying supports that make participation possible, and establishing clear roles for facilitating effective partnership meetings.

Partnership Starts with Shared Understanding

Before you work together, you need a common view of what ‘working together’ means: Make room for honest conversations about values, priorities, youth needs, and each partner’s strengths, roles, and limits.

You can only work as fast as the speed of trust. Build the trust and relationships that will carry IYS work forward.

Creating the Right Space for Connection

Before diving into the *work* of collaboration, communities need to create the right conditions for connection that feel safe, inclusive, and accessible so that everyone can contribute meaningfully. As partners in your community move toward IYS, this often means connecting with people they have not worked directly with before (such as youth and families) or engaging with familiar partners in new and sometimes unfamiliar ways (e.g., sharing decision-making power). This section offers practical guidance on how to get partners together, support their participation, and ensure that the right roles are in place to facilitate effective engagement sessions. Investing in these conditions up front is critical to building trust and a shared vision for IYS in your community.

Getting Partners Together

The first step in building collaboration is simply getting people together and creating the conditions that allow everyone to contribute fully. This involves anticipating and reducing barriers so partners, youth, and families can engage in planning meetings and

conversations in ways that are inclusive, accessible, and productive. Here are some tips to get you started:

- **Provide accessibility supports:** If feasible, think about providing American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation, live captions, translation, and physically accessible venues.
- **Provide honoraria:** Recognize the expertise and time of youth and family participants.
- **Provide meals and refreshments:** For in-person sessions, provide food to sustain energy and encourage informal networking.
- **Address childcare, transportation, and other barriers:** Offer childcare options (e.g., on-site care, stipends, or flexible scheduling for parents/caregivers), transportation supports (e.g., transit passes, parking vouchers, mileage reimbursement, ride-sharing), and any other practical supports that may prevent participation.
- **Offer flexible formats and times:** Offer virtual, hybrid, or in-person sessions scheduled at times that work for youth and families (e.g., evenings, weekends).
- **Rotate meeting locations:** Hosting sessions in different partner spaces can build respect and deepen mutual understanding.
- **Respect time:** Acknowledge that youth, families, and community leaders have many competing demands. Be intentional about how time is used and design processes that ensure that participation is valuable for everyone.

Creating a Safe and Inclusive Space

The next step to foster connection is to ensure that participants feel welcome and safe to share openly. This is especially important when youth and families are present, and when sensitive experiences may be discussed.

- **Welcoming environment:** Consider participant comfort and how to create a sense of belonging. Are symbols of inclusion visible? Is the space physically and culturally safe?
- **Setting the ground rules:** Co-create guiding principles at the outset (e.g., all work is done to better support young people; all perspectives are valid; listening is as important as speaking; aim to understand, not convince).
- **Inclusive openings:** As appropriate, begin with a land acknowledgement (see text box on the next page) and welcome all participants. Use icebreakers that allow participants to introduce themselves and their connection to youth.

- **Inclusive facilitation:** Provide multiple ways to contribute (e.g., sticky notes, whiteboards, chat, graphic facilitation). Encourage quieter voices through small groups or direct invitations.
- **Informal connections:** Build in coffee breaks or meals, as unstructured conversations often strengthen relationships.
- **Regular check-ins:** Pause to ask how the group is feeling about the process and adjust as needed.
- **Flexibility:** Allow participants to step out, take breaks, or contribute in non-verbal ways.

Honouring the Land and Ancestors

Land acknowledgements are more than symbolic gestures. Done thoughtfully, they:

- Honour Indigenous peoples' ongoing relationships to land, ancestors, and treaties.
- Remind us of our shared responsibilities in reconciliation.
- Should be prepared with care, including correct pronunciations and personal reflection.
- Are not required for every internal working meeting but should be included at the start of formal or public gatherings.⁴⁴



Quick Tip: Review resources, like the [CAMH Land Acknowledgements Guide \(2022\)](#), for practical guidance on when and how to deliver acknowledgements in ways that are meaningful and not tokenistic.

These practices not only create safety in the moment but also model the kind of collaboration and respect that will be essential for building lasting partnerships beyond the meetings/workshops themselves.

Identifying Roles and Responsibilities for Early Engagement Sessions

Defining roles early helps engagement sessions run smoothly and avoids misunderstanding. Co-developing responsibilities also reinforces shared ownership. A list of roles that can support formal engagement sessions as well as examples of people who could fill them are provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Roles to Support Engagement Sessions

Role	Example Leads
Lead	Senior leader
Facilitation	Youth leader and service planner co-lead
Notetaking/documentation	Program evaluator, admin staff, or youth with support
Presenting	Community lead, youth presenter, Elder, or funder/financial supporter
Timekeeping	Volunteer, youth participant, or staff
Tech support (for hybrid/virtual)	Information technology (IT) staff, youth volunteer, or partner agency
Participant support	Greeters, accessibility aides, or volunteers managing materials
Follow-up/Feedback Loop	Program evaluator, administrative staff, or youth leader

Following Up Clearly

A strong session doesn't end when the meeting closes. Clear, accessible follow-up helps maintain momentum, reinforces shared ownership, and ensures that everyone understands next steps. Summaries should be concise and easy to engage with. Bullet points, visuals, or even short videos work better than lengthy reports. Sharing these promptly not only strengthens accountability but also shows participants that their contributions were heard and valued.

Follow-up is most often shared by email, but the format can vary depending on the community. Some groups may prefer shared folders (e.g., Google Drive), online platforms, or other tools that make information accessible to everyone involved. As noted above, assigning a specific person or team to lead follow-up ensures this important step is not overlooked.

Aligning Values and Goals

Once the right space for connection has been established, your community is ready to explore your shared purpose and to develop **mutual trust**. Before moving into formal agreements or joint initiatives, it is important to spend time exploring each partner's values, priorities, and ways of working. This early investment lays the foundation for collaboration that can adapt and endure. The resource provided below provides a ready-to-use template with prompts and facilitator tips to guide this work during partner meetings.

Resource: Partnership-Building Template - Aligning Values and Relationships

This resource helps partners build trust, surface shared values, and begin aligning around common goals. The three steps presented in Table 3 are designed to move the group from the individual to the collective. Partners begin with personal reflection (Step 1) to ground themselves in their own motivations and hopes. They then share and explore the values and aspirations that bring them together (Step 2). Finally, they take an honest look at where they are aligned and where differences may exist (Step 3). This progression builds trust, creates a shared foundation, and sets the stage for deeper collaboration.

Working through these steps is best done in a relaxed, welcoming environment where participants feel free to speak openly, listen with curiosity, and learn from one another. Depending on your context, the steps can be completed in one session/workshop or across several sessions/workshops.

Communities can revisit this template as their partnerships evolve and update their shared values and priorities, as needed, as new partners join or contexts change. The results can also be summarized into a shared statement of purpose or partnership principles, which can then guide decision-making, leadership discussions, and eventually, the development of integrated governance structures.

Table 3. Steps to Partnership-Building

Step	Prompts	Facilitator Tips
1: Personal Reflections Invite each participant to reflect individually.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What motivates me (or my organization) to support youth in this community? • What makes me hopeful about this work? • What do I want youth to experience when they walk into a service space we are part of? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow quiet time so participants can think and jot notes before sharing. • Offer multiple options for reflection (writing, drawing, digital tools) to meet different comfort levels. • Encourage youth and family members to share first, so institutional voices don't dominate the tone. • Use a "pair and share" before opening to the larger group to build comfort. • Remind participants there are no "wrong" answers—personal perspectives are all valid.
2: Values and Aspirations. Identify the long-term values and aspirations that partners bring to this work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What values guide the way we work with youth and families? • What are we trying to create together? • What does "integration" mean to us in practice? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capture responses on a flip chart, whiteboard, or collaborative tool. • Group similar ideas to highlight common threads. • Use different colors for values and goals. • Encourage participants to expand on or question each other's contributions.
3: Exploring Alignment and Differences Surface areas of alignment as well as potential differences to build an honest foundation for collaboration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which values or priorities do we all share? • Where do our perspectives or approaches differ? • What principles should guide how we work together? • What differences could create challenges if we don't address them? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normalize differences—remind participants that misalignment is common and can be managed. • Use diagrams, sticky notes, or digital tools to map areas of alignment vs. tension. • Close by identifying 2–3 shared commitments that everyone agrees can anchor the partnership.

Leading Collaborative Partnerships

Strong, inclusive partnerships don't just happen. They require time, intention, and leadership. In the case of IYS, effectively leading partnership work is not about a single individual or institution holding power. In early stages, one or more “lead” or “co-lead” organizations that are already well-connected across service sectors or experienced in convening diverse groups can help coordinate early partnership meetings. Their role is to hold space for collaboration, not to dictate outcomes. Over time, leadership may shift as new partners join, goals evolve, or community conditions change. **In IYS, leadership is dynamic.** This ensures that collaboration remains responsive and sustainable.

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership is a model that reflects the fact that no one organization can always represent the full needs of youth, families, and communities. Instead, two or more organizations share the leadership role so that they can support flexibility and responsiveness to community context, strengths, and the perspectives of all partners.

Attributes of distributed leadership include:⁴⁵

- **Relational** - Rooted in trust, not hierarchy
- **Intuitive** - Informal ways of working together
- **Task-based** - Shifts depending on the task
- **Evolving** - Roles adapt over time
- **Inclusive** – Anyone, including youth and families, can lead

Core Qualities of Partnership Leaders

Leadership can take many forms. Regardless of the model and who is assuming the leadership role, certain qualities consistently help leaders build trust, foster inclusion, and keep collaboration moving forward. These qualities, summarized in Figure 10, reflect not only the skills of individuals, but also the values and supports that organizations bring to the table.

Figure 10. Core Qualities of Partnership Leaders



While these qualities highlight skills and values that support effective leadership, they also point to an important reality: not all partners enter with the same level of resources or capacity. Effective partnership leadership addresses this by sharing resources, compensating participation, and building supportive structures so that all partners can contribute fully. In this way, equity is not an add-on to leadership, but a core quality that sustains collaboration over time.



Distributed Leadership in Practice: Partnerships Between Health and Community-Based Organizations

Distributed leadership is strongest when partners bring complementary strengths to the table. A particularly effective example of a partnership model in IYS is between health organizations and community-based organizations. When these types of organizations share leadership, they create something stronger than either could achieve on their own.

Why this type of partnership works:

- **Complementary strengths:** Community organizations often lead with trust-building, outreach, and culturally relevant services.^{46 47} Health organizations contribute specialized treatment, clinical expertise, and system-wide infrastructure.^{48 49} These strengths are not mutually exclusive. For example, some community organizations deliver advanced clinical care, while some health systems excel in outreach.
- **Mutual reinforcement:** Working in tandem, each strengthens the other and makes services both accessible and clinically robust.
- **Shared responsibility:** No single partner dominates. Each contributes what it does best, sharing responsibility for youth outcomes and system improvement.

The impact for youth and families:

- Smoother pathways between community and clinical supports.
- Services that are both culturally safe and clinically sound.
- Better coordinated and less fragmented systems of care.

A particularly powerful form of distributed leadership

This model is distributed leadership in action. By blending local connection with system capacity, health and community partners create a leadership model that is particularly effective.

Shared leadership between health and community-based organizations is particularly effective in IYS. Working together, they embody the spirit of distributed leadership: shared, balanced, and greater than the sum of their parts.

5.2 Growing your Partnership Network

As your community begins to build trust and a shared vision, the next step is to consider who should be part of the journey. IYS thrive when there is a broad, inclusive network of partners that bring complementary strengths and resources. Identifying partners is not a one-time exercise but an evolving process, as new organizations, youth, and community leaders step forward. The goal is to bring together a mix of voices that reflects the diversity of local youth and families, balances formal service providers with grassroots and cultural supports, and ensures that collaboration remains grounded in equity and shared purpose.

Mapping Relationships to Support IYS Exploration

One practical way to begin identifying partners is through **relationship mapping**. This process helps communities understand who is already engaged, who is missing, and where opportunities for future collaboration exist. Mapping is not about building a full IYS network overnight. It's about taking stock of the landscape, strengthening relationships, and creating a shared sense of purpose and values across sectors and roles.

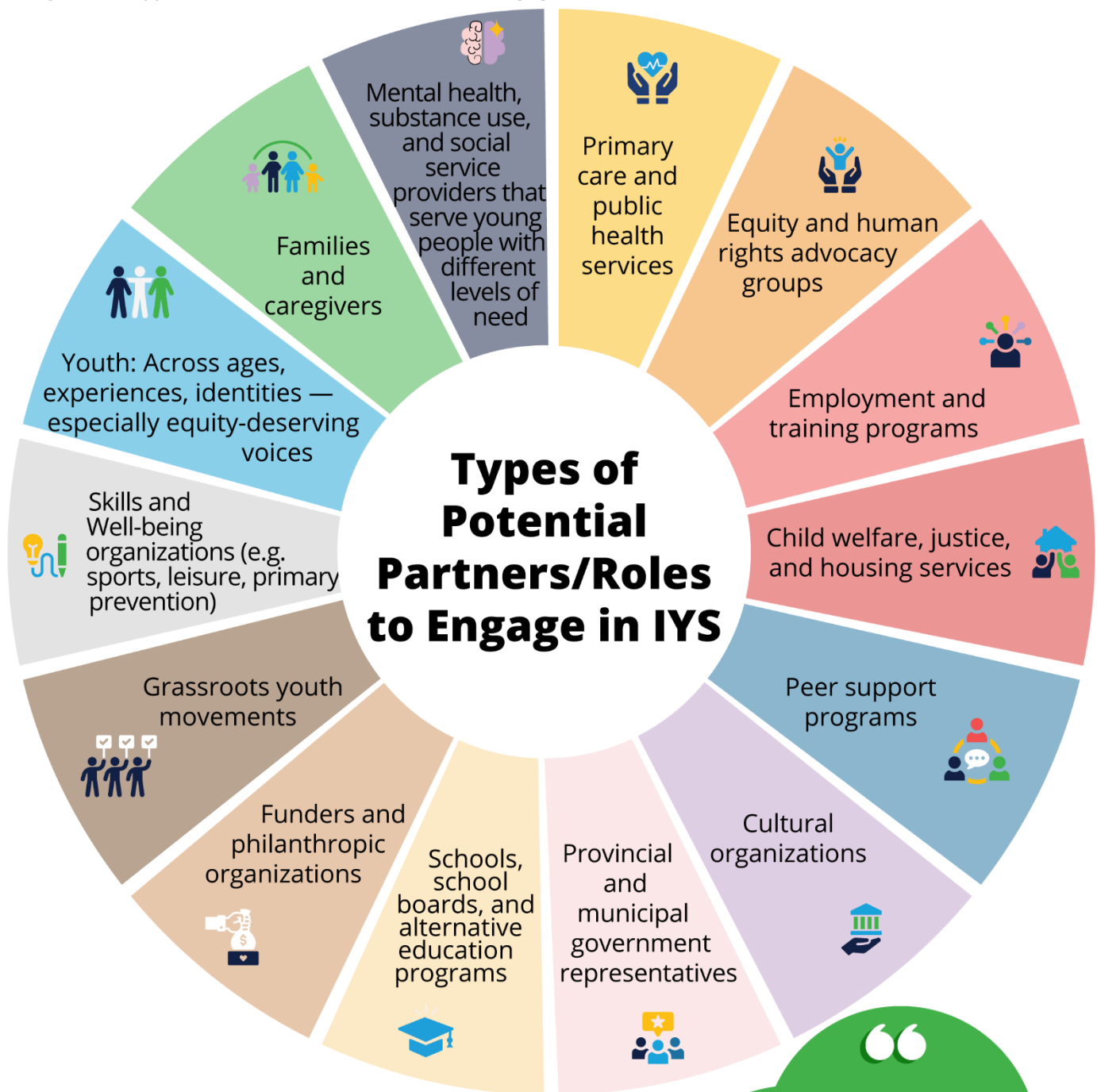
Mapping partner relationships helps communities to:

- **Identify** organizations and individuals already supporting the well-being of young people
- **Elevate** underrepresented voices, including youth, families, and equity-deserving groups.
- **Assess** the depth and quality of existing relationships and services.
- **Spot** opportunities for collaboration, alignment, and co-creation.

This mapping should be revisited regularly. Community capacity, leadership, and youth needs are dynamic, and new partners often emerge as the work evolves. Being intentional about including grassroots groups, cultural leaders, and informal supports trusted by youth helps ensure that relationship maps reflect the full diversity of the community.

Types of potential partners to consider engaging in your IYS journey are illustrated in Figure 11.

Figure 11. Types of Potential Partners/Roles to Engage in IYS



“We knew we needed to ask: Who is this space for? Who isn't here? And why not? That shaped everything—from our hiring to the partners we brought in.”

— YWHO Sudbury

Resource: IYS Partner Mapping Inventory and Mapping Examples

Use the partner mapping inventory template (Table 4) to identify and record the range of partners in your community who are supporting youth and families, what role they play, their preferences for engagement, and barriers and opportunities for collaboration to support IYS development. Examples are provided to illustrate the details that are helpful to record during your mapping process. Communities should adapt the categories to reflect their local context and complete the inventory collaboratively with youth, families, and partners.

Table 4. Partner Mapping Inventory Template and Examples

Group / Organization	Sector / Role	Current Involvement in Youth Services	Preferred Ways to Engage	Barriers to Collaboration	Opportunities for Collaboration
Examples: Local School Board	Education	Provides referrals, occasional joint planning	Joint workshops, working groups	Timing, different planning cycles	Mental health in schools, youth engagement efforts
Youth-led Collective	Peer support & advocacy	Leads youth programs, co-design contributor	Creative spaces, flexible hours	Lack of honorarium, informal status	Embed youth in planning and governance
Friendship Centre	Indigenous Services	Offers a range of youth services and recreational supports	Working groups, team meetings	Lack of formal connection/ need time to foster	Culturally safe programming, community outreach
Parents/ Caregivers	Family voice	Provides informal feedback, supports events	Evening meetings, online surveys	Language barriers, scheduling	Family navigation roles, co-design of service information
Community Health Centre	Primary Health Care	Walk-in health services for youth	Joint care planning, team meetings	Competing priorities	Shared service pathways, on-site clinic days
Housing Services Organization	Social Services	No current involvement in youth services	Introductory meeting, site visit	Lack of formal connection, need time to foster	Explore crisis response, housing support pathways

Partnerships in Diverse Communities

As already discussed, partnerships must be shaped by the unique strengths, needs, histories, contexts, and priorities of local communities. The following examples highlight considerations for working with Indigenous, rural/remote, and Francophone communities. These are not exhaustive guidelines (or communities) but starting points for conversations about building respectful, equitable, and responsive relationships.

Partnerships with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Communities

Strong partnerships with Indigenous communities are essential to ensuring IYS reflect the identities, cultures, and priorities of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis youth. Relationships must be grounded in respect, reciprocity, and a recognition of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination.

Each community will have distinct governance, protocols, and cultural practices. Engagement should follow the guidance of local leaders, including Band or agency leadership, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, youth and other community leaders. It should also acknowledge the ongoing impacts of colonization and working from anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and decolonial approaches.

Partnerships can build on existing strengths such as Indigenous-led health and social services, cultural healing practices, and community-led youth initiatives. Relationship-building may involve community gatherings (e.g., Pow Wows, feasts, or seasonal ceremonies), land-based activities, or culturally grounded processes like talking circles. These approaches must be community-led, with the pace and process set by Indigenous partners.

Resources

Title	Description	Reference
A Pathway for Indigenous Community Engagement	The <i>Pathway for Indigenous Community Engagement</i> infographic developed by the University of Manitoba provides a guide for respectful, relationship-based engagement with Indigenous communities. It describes five	University of Manitoba. (2021). A Pathway for Indigenous Community Engagement.

	stages of a journey that is grounded in ongoing engagement, trust, reciprocity, and respect.	https://umanitoba.ca/sites/default/files/2021-05/a-pathway-for-indigenous-community-engagement-infographic.pdf
Principles of Engagement with Indigenous Communities	This social media resource describes seven key overarching principles that guide all levels of engagement with Indigenous communities, while still allowing for different approaches for individual, community, and system levels of engagement.	Julie Gerrard. (2022). Principles of Engagement with Indigenous Communities. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/principles-engagement-indigenous-communities-cms-ns
Protocols for Engaging with Indigenous Peoples & Communities	<i>Protocols for Engaging with Indigenous Peoples</i> sets out guidance to “build respectful relationships” and to engage “in ways that recognize and respect Indigenous rights, histories, and traditions.” It highlights the importance of “respect, reciprocity, and responsibility” as the foundation for meaningful engagement.	The Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund. (2021). Protocols for Engaging with Indigenous Peoples & Communities. https://downiewenjack.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Protocols_for_Engaging_with_Indigenous_Peoples_2021.pdf
Working with Elders	Working with Elders is a guideline published by the First Peoples’ Cultural Council (FPCC) that offers best practices and considerations when engaging Elders and Knowledge Keepers in projects, events, and cultural initiatives. The resource covers respectful communication, planning, supports for Elders, and adapting engagement when in-person gatherings are limited.	First Peoples’ Cultural Council. (2021). <i>Working with elders</i> (Guidelines). First Peoples’ Cultural Council. https://fpcc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/FPCC-Working-with-Elders_FINAL.pdf

Partnerships with Rural and Remote Communities

Rural and remote communities often cover wide geographies, making in-person engagement challenging. Virtual tools can help, but not all partners may have reliable internet or private spaces. Flexibility and creative communication are critical.

Local service landscapes typically involve partners with broad mandates, long-standing relationships, and deep community knowledge. Partnerships can leverage these strengths while connecting with regional or provincial providers to fill gaps and reduce travel burden.

Youth in these communities may also face greater isolation. Outreach should be innovative and meet youth where they are, whether that be through mobile or satellite services, school and recreation partnerships, or by creating safe, welcoming spaces in hubs such as libraries, youth centres, or cultural gathering places.

Resource

Title	Description	Reference
Engaging with Rural Communities: Tips and Best Practices for Researchers and Practitioners in Implementation Science	The Consortium for Cancer Implementation Science developed this set of tips and best practices to build capacity among implementation scientists and practitioners who want to work with rural communities to improve population health.	Consortium for Cancer Implementation Science Community Participation in Implementation Science Action Group. (2023). Engaging with Rural Communities: Tips and Best Practices for Researchers and Practitioners in Implementation Science . https://cancercontrol.cancer.gov/sites/default/files/2023-10/43637_DCCPS_IS_CCIS_Public_Good_Engaging_Rural_Communities_v06_RELEASE_508.pdf

Partnerships with Francophone Communities

Partnerships in Francophone contexts must respect language rights and the importance of offering services in French. In mixed-language communities, consider potential language barriers within the broader network of partners.

Effective collaboration may require translation, bilingual materials, and clear communication strategies. Partnerships should also draw on Francophone-led organizations, cultural associations, and community media to reach youth and families in ways that resonate with their identity.

As with all contexts, youth engagement is vital. Francophone youth should be actively involved in service design, delivery, and evaluation through advisory groups, youth leadership roles, or co-design sessions. These approaches improve service relevance while building trust, visibility, and belonging for Francophone young people.

Many Communities, Many Pathways to IYS

As noted at the beginning, YWHO envisions this guide as a living resource that can be adapted to reflect the diverse identities and experiences of communities across Ontario. Future versions might take the form of a guide to support adoption of IYS in rural remote communities, Francophone, Indigenous and other types of communities. At the same time, it is important to remember that even within any “type” of community, for example, among Indigenous communities, there is significant diversity in identities, cultural practices, and histories. For this reason, the guide should be seen not as a template, but as a foundation that can and should be adapted in countless ways to reflect the unique strengths, voices, and contexts of local communities. You know your community best and therefore lean into the uniqueness of community and engage any and all populations to be as inclusive as possible.

Growing Your Network at the Right Pace: Tips from YWHO Hub Networks

Building strong, integrated partnerships takes time, and that timeline will look different in every community. The pace should reflect your local context: the needs you’re addressing, the readiness of your partners, and the strengths already present.

Many YWHO Hub Networks emphasized “starting slow and growing over time.” Early success often comes from establishing a few strong partnerships, then expanding as new needs or opportunities emerge. Tips for growing your partnership network are presented in Figure 12.

Figure 12. 5 Tips for Growing Your Network



Be patient

Partnerships will grow and shift; expect to revisit and adjust roles, relationships, and structures



Connect with others

Learn from communities that have already gone through the process.



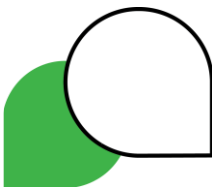
Communicate the values of IYS

Not all partners will immediately understand what makes IYS different. Sharing real-world examples can help build momentum and buy-in.



Use your data

Demographic information can guide partner selection, reveal local needs, and even shape decisions about physical locations.



Ask questions

Building partnerships and adopting IYS is complex. Reach out to YWHO resources - no question is too small.

5.3 Practicing Collaboration: Getting to Know Your Community Better

After identifying and building trust and a shared vision between community partners, you can collaboratively explore **what exists in the community** to support young people and their families. Mapping community service resources and youth-friendly spaces provides a shared picture of what supports are accessible, where the gaps lie, and how informal and cultural assets can be better integrated. Unlike relationship mapping, which highlights *who is connected to whom*, these activities explore *what resources are on the ground* for youth today, offering partners a practical starting point for collaboration and joint planning.

Mapping Community Service Resources

Understanding what already exists is a critical step in building more integrated, youth-centered systems of care. Mapping community service resources gives partners a shared view of the service local landscape.

Why it Matters

- Builds a shared foundation for service planning and collaboration.
- Surfaces underrecognized, informal, and culturally specific supports.
- Identifies gaps, overlap, and disconnections between services.
- Strengthens trust between partners by valuing diverse knowledge and perspectives.

Resource: Three Steps to Service Mapping

Step 1. Get Organized

Before collecting information, take time to lay the groundwork. A thoughtful planning process ensures mapping is purposeful, inclusive, and sustainable.

1a. Define the Scope and Purpose - Clarify what you want to learn and why. Mapping may aim to:

- Identify services relevant to youth aged 12–25.
- Explore strengths, as well as gaps in specific areas (e.g., housing, harm reduction, Indigenous cultural supports).
- Compare availability across geographies (i.e., rural, remote, urban).
- Lay the foundation for IYS/collaborative design.

Key Questions:

- What details do we want to map (e.g., hours of operation, youth populations served, services offered)?
- What types of services will we include (e.g., clinical, community and social support, skills and well-being)? (Note: community spaces are explored in the next section.)
- What catchment area are we mapping?

1b. Build a Planning Group - Form a small team to guide the process, including:

- Youth with lived/living experience
- Family members or caregivers
- Local service providers across sectors
- Indigenous, Francophone, or other cultural/community leaders
- Organizational leaders and planners/evaluators

This group can co-design workshops, decide who to invite, and ensure inclusive, accountable practices. Refer to [Section 5.1](#) for tips on how to structure and facilitate these conversations to create the right space for connection.

1c. Choose Your Tools - Decide how you'll collect and organize your information. You might use:

- The Integrated Community Service Mapping Template (see Table 5 further below)
- Flip charts or sticky notes for in-person workshops
- Online tools like Miro for virtual or hybrid sessions
- Spreadsheets or shared drives to organize and consolidate inputs



Quick Tip: Keep it simple, collaborative, and accessible and ask participants how best to summarize the information collected during the workshop and share it with participants for validation.

Step 2. Hold Service Mapping Workshops

Workshops validate and expand the preliminary picture of services, while surfacing nuances not visible in public directories (e.g., trusted peer supports, cultural anchors, service gaps). They also foster connections among partners.

Design considerations

- Match session/workshop format to local capacity (e.g., half-day in-person, short virtual sessions, or youth-led/provider-led).
- Be mindful of accessibility, language, and cultural protocols.
- Co-design with youth and family representatives to ensure relevance and inclusivity.

Format and Structure

There's no single "right" way to organize a service mapping workshop. Some communities host a series of short sessions focused on specific sectors (e.g., one for clinical services, one for peer support), while others prefer one or two longer sessions that bring a broad mix of partners/participants together to discuss all services.

Choose an approach that fits your capacity, goals, and the needs of your community. For example:

- **Option 1:** Half-day in-person session for 20–30 people from a mix of sectors and including youth and family representatives.
- **Option 2:** Three 90-minute virtual sessions, each focused on a different service area (e.g., wellness activities, social supports, clinical care).
- **Option 3:** Separate youth-led and provider-led sessions, with cross-sharing between the two.

A well-structured agenda is also critical. It sets expectations, keeps participants engaged, and ensures that discussions stay focused and productive. A clear plan also signals respect for participants' time and demonstrates that their contributions will lead to concrete outputs. The example provided in Figure 13 combines core elements from different communities' approaches into one practical half-day schedule.

Figure 13. Example Agenda for Service Mapping Workshop (Half-Day)

Time	Activity	Objective
9:00–9:15	Welcome, introductions, and land acknowledgement	Acknowledge traditional territory; set a respectful, inclusive tone; give participants a chance to connect.
9:15–9:30	Workshop purpose and goals	Clarify why the service mapping is being done, how the results will be used, and what outcomes are expected.
9:30–9:45	Overview of mapping goals, process, and shared values	Provide context on what service mapping is, outline the process for the day, and establish guiding values for the work.
10:00–10:45	Small group mapping activity	Identify services, referral pathways, and gaps; capture informal and cultural supports; highlight strengths and opportunities.
10:45–11:00	Break	Informal networking and relationship-building among participants.
11:00–11:30	Report-back and large group discussion	Share findings from small groups, compare across service areas, identify common themes and gaps.
11:30 – 11:50	Thematic discussions <i>(optional)</i>	Explore specific themes such as mental health, substance use, housing, education, or cultural supports in more depth.
11:50–12:00	Closing reflections and next steps	Summarize key insights, explain how and when the map will be shared, and invite participants to stay engaged.

Step 3. Share and Use What You Learn

Mapping is only useful if the insights are shared and used to inform action. After your mapping sessions, take time to analyze and summarize what you've learned.

Organize the information

- Compile service listings using a table, database, or the Integrated Community Service Mapping Template provided in Table 5.
- Group services by category (e.g., housing, recreation, clinical).
- Note which services are youth-specific versus for the general population.
- Highlight strengths, gaps, duplications, and opportunities.

Make it visual and accessible

- Create simple infographics, directories, or posters.
- Use plain language and inclusive design for youth and families.

Close the loop

- Return to participants with a summary of findings and how they'll be used.
- Invite ongoing input to refine and update the mapping.

Use mapping as a springboard to:

- Identify new partners or sectors to engage over time.
- Inform system planning and funding proposals.
- Support development of youth-friendly pathways and navigation tools.

Reminder: Service mapping is not a one-time activity. Revisit regularly and treat it as a living resource.

Resource: Integrated Community Service Mapping Template

The template provided in Table 5 is designed to help communities identify and analyze local youth-serving assets. It blends practical service information with reflective prompts to support inclusive, integrated planning.

How to use this template:

- **Resource type** – Choose a category, such as: Mental Health, Substance Use, Peer Support, Education/Employment, Physical Health, Sexual Health, Cultural/Spiritual Supports, Housing, or Recreation.
- **Population reached** – Include both age group and identity/community details (e.g., “2SLGBTQIA+ youth,” “Black youth,” “youth in care”).
- **Strengths / gaps / barriers** – Use these columns in workshops or interviews to prompt discussion of what’s working and where challenges exist (e.g., accessibility, inclusion, capacity).
- **Potential role in IYS** – Capture how each resource could contribute to an IYS approach (e.g., partner, co-located service, youth-led programming)

Table 5. Integrated Community Service Mapping Template

Service Type	Name of Asset / Organization	Location	Primary Contact (Name, Role, Email/Phone)	Brief Description of Services or Space	Population Reached (Age group, communities served)	Strengths (What’s working well?)	Gaps / Barriers	Potential Role in IYS
Example: Mental Health	Community Health Centre	Main Street, Town A	Jane Doe, Youth Clinician jane.doe@email.com	Walk-in mental health counseling	Ages 16–25, primarily downtown youth	Trusted provider, strong walk-in model	Not youth-designed space, limited hours	Potential hub partner for co-located walk-in service

Mapping Community Locations for IYS Service Delivery

Earlier, we explored how to create inclusive spaces for engaging youth in IYS planning. This section focuses on a different application: mapping the physical locations of existing community organizations to potential identify sites for IYS service delivery that are youth friendly, safe, supportive, and accessible.

Why it Matters

Mapping potential locations for IYS delivery ensures services are rooted in spaces that youth would actually use and value. It highlights whether environments feel safe and welcoming, while also considering practical factors like accessibility, cost, privacy, space to co-locate services, and room to grow as IYS expands. By balancing youth preferences with these realities, mapping supports sustainable, inclusive, and youth-centered service planning.

What to Explore

When identifying potential IYS locations, it's important to look at more than just availability. Consider where youth already spend time, whether spaces feel safe and welcoming, and how practical factors, like accessibility, cost, size, and room for growth, may impact service delivery. Equity should also guide decisions, ensuring locations resonate with diverse groups of youth.

See the IYS Service Location Mapping Template on the next page for a tool to help document and compare these details across different sites.

Ideas for Mapping Activities

There are many creative ways to engage youth directly in identifying and assessing community spaces. The following activities can help make the process interactive, youth-led, and grounded in lived experience:

- Organize youth-led walks where youth guide tours of their neighbourhoods, capturing spaces through photos or notes, and then debrief as a group.
- Facilitate space mapping using a large map or digital tool; ask participants to mark safe, barrier, or opportunity spaces with icons or stickers.
- Host photovoice or storyboards where youth document and share the places that matter most to them.

Use Mapping as a Springboard

Mapping spaces can spark practical next steps for partners and youth. For example:

- **Strengthen existing spaces** - share findings with operators and exploring youth-friendly improvements.
- **Highlight gaps** - where certain youth groups lack safe and welcoming environments and prioritize responses.
- **Build advocacy tools** - embed maps, photos, and stories in proposals for youth-focused infrastructure and resources.

Resource: IYS Service Location Mapping Template

Use the template below to record information about potential locations. It can be adapted based on your community's context and the types of spaces under consideration.

Location	Why Youth Use/Like It	Accessibility (Transit, Cost, Hours)	Safety & Welcoming Factors	Space Capacity (Room to Co-locate/ Expand)	Existing Supports Nearby	Equity Considerations	Notes/ Considerations
Example: Recreation Centre	Popular spot for sports and drop-ins	Accessible by car but limited transit	Welcoming for youth but fees may be barrier	Large gym and multipurpose rooms	Gym, snack bar, some health programs	Strong for sports/ physical activity, less inclusive for newcomer/ 2SLGBTQIA+ youth	Could explore subsidy for youth access

5.4 Reflection Questions



1. What mechanisms are we using to build and sustain trust between partners?
2. How are youth, families, and partners meaningfully included in decision-making?
3. What practices are we using to create safer, inclusive, and accessible spaces (physical, cultural, and relational) for collaboration?
4. In what ways are power imbalances identified and addressed within our collaboration?
5. How are the insights from our partner and location mapping activities being used to guide collaboration, decision-making, and next steps?

6.0 The Transition from Partner Collaboration to Integrated Governance

Section Summary:

- **Integration evolves over time:** Communities often begin with informal collaboration among partners and gradually move toward more formal, structured governance models.
- **Shared decision-making is key:** Integrated governance means that partners, including youth and families, work together in formal structures with clear roles, processes, responsibilities, and accountability mechanisms.
- **Core features of effective governance:** Diverse and inclusive membership, transparent decision-making, attention to equity, mechanisms for safer spaces, and feedback loops with youth and families.
- **Resourcing collaboration:** Early investments in youth, family, and partner engagement lay the groundwork for sustainable integrated governance. As hubs mature, collective resourcing supports the infrastructure, staffing, and systems needed for long-term integration.
- **A culture of continuous improvement:** Integrated governance requires ongoing reflection, adaptation, and learning to stay responsive to community needs and to uphold the values of equity, inclusion, and youth-centred care. This section provides self-reflection resources to help you with this work.

Strong partnerships grow and mature. In the IYS journey, communities often begin with informal collaboration, gradually moving toward more structured and integrated ways of working together. Integrated governance represents the point where shared vision and trust are translated into shared decision-making, accountability, and stewardship of resources. This section lays out the building blocks of integrated governance, highlights both the benefits and challenges of this work, and offers strategies and tools that communities can adapt as they formalize their partnerships.

6.1 Integrated Governance

Integrated governance is a collaborative approach to decision-making that brings together partners, including youth and families, to guide how systems and services evolve over time. It helps communities move beyond siloed operations toward shared leadership, accountability, and transparency. At its core, integrated governance provides a framework for collective leadership, resource-sharing, and long-term sustainability.

Getting Ready for Integrated Governance

Integrated governance doesn't happen overnight. It evolves from intentional steps that build trust, inclusion, and shared purpose. In many ways, this stage builds directly on the partner collaboration work detailed above, taking those relationships and ways of working together and formalizing them into a shared structure for decision-making and accountability.

The **three domains of IYS integrated governance** (structure and roles, collaboration and partnership, and accountability and improvement) help communities move toward stronger, more coordinated governance. These domains and their elements can also serve as prompts for discussion: partners can reflect on where strengths already exist, where gaps remain, and what priorities to focus on as governance structures take shape. Figure 14 summarizes these three domains and their key elements.

Figure 14. Domains of IYS Integrated Governance

Structure and Roles	Collaboration & Partnership	Accountability and Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance table including Network Lead(s), partners, youth, and families • Terms of Reference / Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) defining decision-making, roles, and accountability • Members of the Youth Advisory Council and Family Advisory Council integrated into governance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth and family co-design and shared decision-making • Inclusive partner representation (equity, cultural, community leadership) • Commitment to safer spaces and equitable participation practices • Shared resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback loops (to youth, families, and partners) • Transparent communication and reporting back on decisions • Shared monitoring of resources, services, and outcomes • Continuous learning and quality improvement (aligned with YWHO's Learning Health System)

Governance Structures

Integrated governance can take many forms. While the core principles remain the same (i.e., shared accountability, transparency, and meaningful youth and family participation) the structure may vary by community. The “right” model depends on factors such as the number and type of partners involved, local history of collaboration, available resources, and community priorities.

Some communities may prefer highly collaborative arrangements where all partners share decision-making equally, while others may opt for a central coordinating organization, or a small number of organizations, to streamline processes. In the context of YWHO, Hub Networks often use a lead or co-lead organization model, but other approaches can work equally well depending on the local context.

Most communities develop multiple governance structures over time, each with a distinct focus, such as space, services, finance, or community engagement, and connections between them. These structures often evolve incrementally as partnerships mature, reflecting the growing capacity, priorities, and trust among partners. Strong linkages across governance structures ensure that decisions are coordinated, inclusive, and grounded in shared priorities.

In YWHO, governance structures:

- Provide a **formal home for collaboration**, helping to move beyond ad hoc or informal conversations.
- **Balance responsibilities** by distributing work across smaller structures or working groups while maintaining a shared vision.
- Ensure that **youth and family advisory groups** are embedded in decision-making, not consulted after the fact.
- Establish **accountability and transparency**, supported by detailed Terms of Reference (see template on page 87) and memoranda of understanding (MOUs) for governance structures with clear feedback loops across governance structures and back to the wider community.

Quick Tips:



- Not all communities will be ready to establish formal governance structures right away.
- Communities should describe their governance structures in ways that best fit their local context (e.g., governance tables, councils, committees, and/or working groups).
- Governance structures should have clear mandates, membership, and connections to the broader governance system.

Resources

Title	Description	Reference
Rapid-Improvement Support and Exchange (RISE) OHT (Ontario Health Team) Resource Hub	RISE provides evidence-based support to OHTs, using a 'rapid learning and improvement' lens.	Rapid-Improvement Support and Exchange (RISE). <i>Rapid-Improvement Support and Exchange (RISE) OHT (Ontario Health Team) Resource Hub</i> . https://www.mcmasterforum.org/rise
Nine Pillars of Integrated Care	The International Foundation for Integrated Care's <i>Nine Pillars of Integrated Care</i> defines the essential elements of integrated care. The resource outlines nine interconnected pillars that organizations can use as building blocks for planning, implementing, and evaluating integrated service models. It offers a clear, evidence-informed structure to guide local collaboration and system transformation.	International Foundation for Integrated Care. (n.d.). <i>Nine Pillars of Integrated Care</i> . https://integratedcarefoundation.org/nine-pillars-of-integrated-care

Resource: Terms of Reference (ToR) Template for Integrated Governance Structures

This generic TOR template is designed to help governance structures identify who should be involved, choose an approach that aligns with shared values, and document the process for transparency and accountability.

1. Purpose and Scope

Description: Define the role, scope, and objectives of the integrated governance body, and how it supports the broader IYS initiative or network.

Example: The Integrated Governance Table provides shared leadership, accountability, and decision-making across partner organizations, youth, and families as they relate to IYS. It aligns partners around a common vision, ensures transparency, and stewards resources to meet community needs.

2. Guiding Principles

Description: Identify the core values and principles that guide the integrated governance body's work and decision-making.

Example:

- *Youth-centred and developmentally informed*
- *Equitable, inclusive, and culturally responsive*
- *Transparent and accountable*
- *Collaborative and partnership-driven*
- *Evidence-informed and continuously improving*

3. Membership

Description: Outline the composition of the integrated governance body, including representation from relevant sectors, partners, and community members. **Membership should reflect the diversity of the community served.**

Example: Membership includes representatives from:

- *Leading or co-leading organization(s)*
- *Partner organizations (funded and in-kind)*
- *Youth representatives*
- *Family/caregiver representatives*

4. Roles and Responsibilities

Description: Define expectations for participation, leadership, and contributions from members.

Example: Members are expected to:

- *Attend meetings regularly and participate actively*
- *Represent the perspectives of their organization, network, or lived experience group*
- *Engage in shared decision-making, with a commitment to consensus where possible*
- *Maintain confidentiality when required*
- *Uphold the guiding principles in all activities*

5. Meetings

Description: Specify meeting frequency, format, quorum requirements, and how agendas will be set.

Example:

- *Frequency: Monthly (or as determined by the Table)*
- *Format: In-person and/or virtual*
- *Quorum: At least 50% of members, including at least one youth and one partner organization representative*

6. Decision-Making

Description: Describe the decision-making approach, including how inclusivity and efficiency will be balanced, and any voting or consensus processes.

Example: The Table will use a collaborative decision-making approach that balances efficiency and inclusivity. Consensus will be sought for major decisions. When consensus is not possible, decisions will be made by majority vote, with quorum requirements met.

7. Conflict Resolution

Description: Outline the process for addressing disagreements or conflicts within the governance body.

Example: Conflicts will be addressed through open dialogue at the Table, with facilitation by the Chair or a designated neutral party if needed. Persistent issues may be referred to an external mediator.

8. Accountability and Reporting

Description: Explain how decisions, progress, and outcomes will be communicated to partners and the community.

Example: The Governance Table will ensure transparency by sharing meeting summaries, quarterly progress updates, and an annual public report on achievements, challenges, and next steps. Updates will be communicated through agreed-upon channels (e.g., email, newsletters,

website). Subcommittees/other governance structures will report back to the Table and feedback loops will allow partners, youth, and families to provide input on decisions and progress.

9. Review and Evaluation

Description: Describe how and when the ToR will be reviewed to ensure it remains relevant and effective.

Example: This ToR will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains relevant and effective. Updates will be approved through the established decision-making process.

Appendices

Description: Include supplementary materials that support the ToR, such as contact lists, meeting calendars, or relevant policies.

Example:

- *Contact list of members*
- *Annual meeting calendar*
- *Key governance resources or policies*

6.2 Empowering Youth and Families in Integrated Governance Structures

A defining feature of the IYS model is the intentional integration of youth and families into local (and provincial) governance structures. This ensures that those most affected by decisions have a meaningful role in shaping IYS priorities, policies, and service delivery. There is no single “right” way to achieve this. Governance structures will vary across communities depending on their size, history, resources, and relationships. Some communities may create formal advisory councils or designate youth and family seats on existing governance bodies, while others may embed youth and family leadership into working groups, project teams, or decision-making committees.

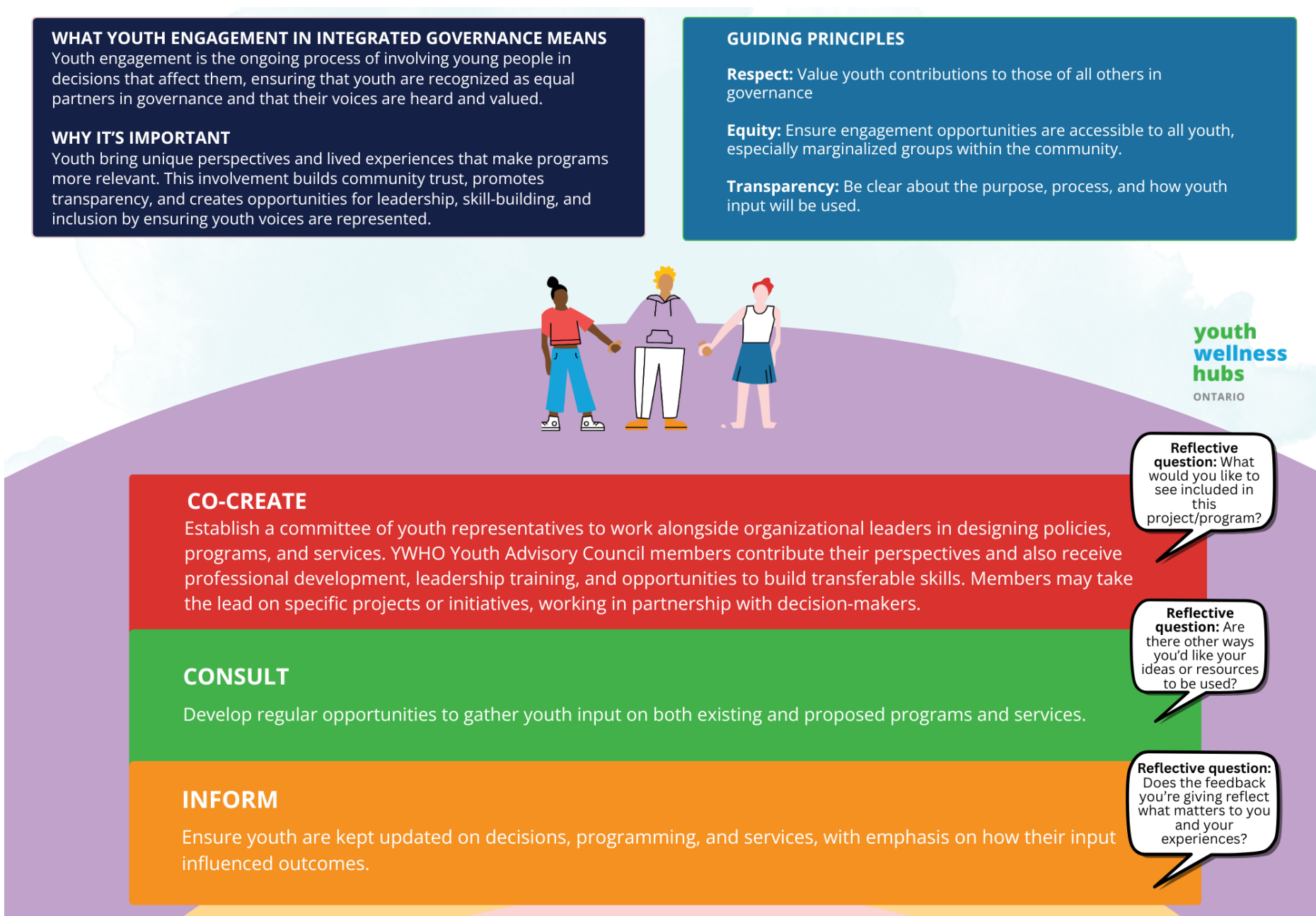
In the Words of YWHO Youth Advisors: What Youth Engagement in Integrated Governance Means

Youth engagement is the ongoing process of involving young people in decisions that affect them, ensuring that youth are recognized as equal partners in governance and that their voices are heard and valued.



The following resources, developed by the YWHO Youth Advisor Team, show both the principles and practice of youth engagement in integrated governance. Figure 15 summarizes their guidance on how youth voices can be meaningfully embedded through “co-create, consult, and inform.” The accompanying case study illustrates how these principles can be put into practice in the development of IYS in your community. And finally, their advice is offered on how your IYS network can strengthen direct connections between youth advisors and organizational leadership.

Figure 15. Guidance from the YWHO Youth Advisor Team



Case Study: Youth Voices in Action

Building on the principles of integrated youth voices in IYS governance, the following case study, developed by the Youth Advisor Team, illustrates how co-creation, consultation, and informing was put into practice in the development of an IYS hub network.

1. Co-Create:

For the creation of new resources at the IYS hub network, the IYS Youth Engagement Lead worked to build a resource committee of youth. Recruitment happened through outreach in schools, universities, community organizations, and religious places, ensuring a diverse representation.

The **first hour meeting (team building + building trust)** focused on helping youth get to know each other, engage in relationship-building, and establish comfort with the Engagement Lead. This created a welcoming foundation for open collaboration.

In the **second hour meeting (shared vision)**, the Engagement Lead presented the goals and purpose of the wellness hub. Youth were asked to reflect on the project, discuss what resources they wanted to create, and share their own strengths and challenges. Their input guided the direction of the hub.

To strengthen **ownership and responsibility**, each youth member was given a small **task before the next meeting (leadership in practice)**, such as brainstorming resource ideas or drafting content. At following sessions, youth shared their work with the group, received constructive **feedback (mentorship)**, and refined their projects based on collective discussion. When ideas weren't feasible, youth were invited to explain their thought process, which allowed the Engagement Lead to suggest adjustments while respecting their contributions.

This process empowered youth to feel **valued, supported, and capable of leading meaningful change**.

2. Consult:

Beyond the committee meetings, the IYS Youth Engagement Lead created space to **consult youth (open dialogue)** by checking in regularly and encouraging members to share peer feedback gathered from their wider networks.

To strengthen collaboration, youth were invited to **form groups or pairs based on shared interests (inclusive representation)** or by selecting the specific project they wanted to pursue. Each group worked on their chosen initiative and then

presented progress at **biweekly meetings (peer accountability)**. These sessions created opportunities for groups to **consult and share their plans with other groups (cross-learning)**, receive feedback, and refine their work collectively.

This group-based structure not only ensured **diverse resource development (shared ownership)** but also fostered an environment where youth could **learn from one another (peer mentorship)** while contributing to the wellness hub's overall vision.

3. **Inform:**

The Engagement Lead emphasized **informing youth (accountability + recognition)** by showing them how their contributions were directly shaping the new wellness hub. Instead of treating their work as one-off projects, youth were told clearly: **the hub will be using the resources they create (real-world application)**.

At each follow-up, meeting recaps highlighted which group resources had been integrated and how they would be applied in the hub's programming. This transparency allowed youth to see the **collective impact (visibility + empowerment)** of their work.

To deepen engagement, the IYS Youth Engagement Lead also asked youth a key reflective question:

"Are there other ways you'd like the resources you build to be used—for example, as workshops, training sessions, presentations, or in another format?"

This open-ended reflection gave youth the chance to influence not just the creation of resources, but also their **practical implementation (ownership + innovation)**.



Advice from the YWHO Youth Advisor Team: Strengthening Connections Between Youth Advisors and Organizational Leadership

The YWHO Youth Advisor Team emphasized that meaningful youth engagement depends on strong relationships not only within formal IYS governance structures, but also with other organizational leadership tables that may have influence on how IYS are planned and developed. Creating these connections helps ensure that youth voices are reflected across the broader ecosystem of partners and decision-makers who shape the direction of IYS.

When youth advisors have opportunities to connect with the senior leadership of IYS partner or lead organizations, they gain insight into how decisions are made, and leaders gain a deeper understanding of youth priorities and lived experiences. Leaders also get a deeper understanding of youth needs and skills. This mutual exchange strengthens trust, accountability, and shared purpose, and helps ensure that youth perspectives actively inform decisions that affect them and their communities.

Here are three practical ways youth recommend bringing youth advisors and leadership closer together:

1. **Empower youth to take on leadership roles.** Support your youth advisors to elect representatives who can participate in organizational governance structures, such as boards of directors of hub network leads, and ensure they have voting rights where appropriate. This demonstrates that youth voices carry real weight in shaping decisions that affect them.
2. **Host “mixers” or informal meet-and-greets between YAC members and hub leadership.** These gatherings don't have to be formal. A casual dinner with some icebreaker activities and time for conversation can go a long way. The goal is to build relationships before talking about the work. Once people know each other, collaboration and mentorship come more naturally.
3. **Co-design with youth.** Invite youth advisors to help co-design key IYS resources, such as annual reports and equity and inclusion frameworks. Facilitate their participation in analyzing annual data that informs the development of these materials. Youth bring valuable perspectives on what information is most relevant and how it should be presented. Provide the context and background they need to engage meaningfully and make the process accessible by breaking down complex information. When resources are developed and written *with* youth and *for* youth, they become more transparent, relevant, and accountable to the communities they represent.

6.3 Collaborative Decision-Making

Integrated governance is about ensuring that decisions are made in ways that are transparent, equitable, and aligned with shared values. In most cases, decisions will be made by all partners represented in the governance structure. At the same time, not every decision requires the full table. Some may appropriately be delegated to sub-committees or designated roles, provided the process remains transparent, inclusive, and consistent with agreed-upon principles.

Resource: Collaborative Decision-Making Tool

This tool is designed to help integrated governance tables identify who should be involved, choose an approach that aligns with shared values, and document the process for transparency and accountability. It includes both guiding steps and a [Decision-Making Record](#) template to capture who was involved, the rationale, and when the decision will be reviewed.

Step 1: Define the Decision – Clarify what decision is being made and why it matters.

Guiding Questions:

- What is being decided?
- What is the scope and expected impact?

Step 2: Decide who needs to be involved – Consider who should participate for the decision to be fair, effective, and accountable.

- Who will experience the consequences of this decision?
- Who holds accountability for implementing or overseeing the decision?
- Who is contributing financial, human, and other resources?
- How many parties should be involved for it to be equitable and effective?
- Do the parties already have established trust and relationships with each other?
With youth?
- Which decision-making approach best aligns with our shared values?

Step 3: Balance Efficiency and Inclusivity – Match the process to the nature of the decision.

- Efficient (smaller group): Faster processes, best for operational or time-sensitive matters.
- Inclusive (broader group): Best for decisions with long-term implications or high impact on multiple partners and youth.

Guiding Questions:

- What would be the consequences if we moved ahead with fewer voices at the table?
- Are there perspectives, particularly from youth, families, or equity-deserving groups, that might be missing if we choose a smaller group?
- How urgent is this decision, and do we have time to broaden participation without causing harm or unnecessary delay?
- Will the people most affected feel the decision was made fairly and transparently?
- Could this decision strengthen relationships by involving more partners?
- Is there a way for a smaller governance table to share back decisions to a larger structure?

Step 4: Document and Review – Ensure accountability and transparency by capturing how the decision was made.

Actions:

- Record the decision, rationale, and participants using the Decision-Making Record on the next page.
- Set a timeline to review and evaluate both the decision and the process used.

Resource: Decision-Making Record

This Decision-Making Record is a practical tool to help track and document decisions made within your IYS governance or working groups. It supports transparency and accountability by recording who was involved, what was decided, and the rationale for those decisions. The resource also includes examples of completed records to guide communities in adapting the tool for their own context.

Table 6. Decision-Making Record Template and Examples

Decision	Who was involved in the decision?	Who is affected?	Who is accountable?	Trust level among partners	Approach	Rationale and Outcome	Review date
Examples							
Establishing a shared meeting schedule and format for Interim Planning Group	Representatives from three core service organizations, youth advisory rep, family advisor	All current and future partners, youth and families participating in governance	Interim Planning Group	Moderate (relationships still developing)	Inclusive (partners & youth/family advisors)	Needed an agreed rhythm and structure to build trust and ensure consistent participation before moving to formal governance	3 months
Setting the honorarium amount for youth and family representatives	Interim Planning Group (see above)	Youth and family representatives	Interim Planning Group, with input from lead organization's(s') finance division	Moderate (agreement on principle, but sensitivity about resources)	Inclusive (youth/family voices prioritized)	Honoraria are essential to value lived/living expertise. Need to balancing fair compensation with limited early-stage budgets. Decision: \$50/meeting. Agreement to revisit as new funding streams emerge.	6 months

6.4 Exploring Collective Financial Resources for Integrated Governance

Because youth, family, and partner collaboration is at the heart of integrated governance, collaboration itself requires resources. In the early stages, it is important to invest in the people, spaces, and processes that allow youth and partners to participate meaningfully in governance and decision-making. Partners may need to pool funds to support activities such as:

- Coordinating governance tables and decision-making structures.
- Supporting project management or backbone coordination.
- Providing youth and family honoraria to ensure meaningful engagement.
- Covering early practical needs like meeting facilitation, communications, or shared planning tools.

These foundational investments as part of your integrated governance structure signal commitment, create the conditions for trust, and lay the groundwork for later phases of IYS development.

Inspiration from YWHO Hub Networks: Innovative Approaches to Fundraising

YWHO Hub Networks have experimented with a range of creative strategies to build sustainability:

- Organizing community walk-a-thons and partnering with local charities to raise funds and awareness.
- Embedding a culture of sustainability by diversifying fundraising activities and making them a regular part of operations.
- Applying for grants through primary care and other networks to expand funding opportunities for collaboration.

These examples show that fundraising doesn't need to rely solely on traditional donations. By blending community events, collaborative grant applications, and strong local partnerships, your community can build long-term sustainability.

Resources

Title	Description	Reference
34+ Easy & Fun Youth Sports Fundraising Ideas	A list of easy and fun youth sports fundraising ideas.	Porter, J. (2023). 34+ Easy & Fun Youth Sports Fundraising Ideas https://eventpipe.com/blog/youth-sports-fundraising-ideas
Best Fundraising Ideas for Youth Group	This collection offers over fifty creative, youth-friendly fundraising ideas ranging from trivia nights and sports tournaments to bake sales and art showcases. It's a practical starting point for communities looking to spark inspiration and adapt ideas that match local context and youth interests.	Betterworld. (n.d.). <i>Best Fundraising Ideas for Youth Group</i> . https://betterworld.org/blog/sports-teams/best-fundraising-ideas-for-youth-group/
Do It Yourself (DIY) Fundraising Toolkit for Teens and Students	A short, engaging toolkit that highlights easy-to-organize fundraising activities, such as competitions, challenges, and social media campaigns, that teens can lead with minimal resources. It's designed to empower young people to take initiative while keeping efforts fun and manageable.	Crohn's & Colitis Foundation. (n.d.) Do It Yourself (DIY) Fundraising Toolkit for Teens and Students https://www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/TeenDIY%20Toolkit-5%201.pdf
Youth-Friendly Fundraising Toolkit	The Resource Hub contains all CHOICE's resources about meaningful and inclusive youth participation (MIYP), sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) or youth-led advocacy.	Choice for Youth & Sexuality. <i>Resource Hub</i> . https://www.choicefor-youth.org/resource/tools

6.5 Reflection Questions



1. How are we building the trust and shared purpose needed to move from informal collaboration toward integrated governance?
2. Do our current governance structures (e.g., tables, roles, agreements) reflect equitable participation from youth, families, and diverse partners?
3. What mechanisms do we have in place to ensure transparency, accountability, and shared decision-making across partners?
4. Where are we on the journey from collaboration to governance, and what supports or capacity-building are needed to take the next step?

7.0 Beyond the Foundations: The Full YWHO Model

Section Summary:

Integration is at the heart of IYS. It ensures that youth and families experience care as seamless, coordinated, and responsive to their needs. Communities move toward integration at their own pace, progressing along a partnership continuum and weaving integration across governance, space, services, and processes.

This section introduces integration as a guiding framework, then highlights four additional YWHO core components that support adoption of its IYS model:

- **Accessibility** – why it matters for early, equitable entry/connection to services; strategies to reduce barriers such as location, co-location, and remote access; and key practices for creating welcoming, youth-friendly spaces.
- **Inclusive and Culturally Diverse Services** – the importance of equity, cultural safety, and responsiveness to diverse youth populations; approaches to embedding anti-oppressive practices; and examples of inclusive service design.
- **Integrated Service Delivery** – why seamless service pathways matter; models for shared intake, and joint care planning; and practices that foster collaboration across sectors.
- **Measurement-Based Care** – the role of data and feedback in improving quality; how outcome monitoring supports continuous learning; and key practices for integrating measurement into day-to-day service delivery.

This section is designed for communities that want to build on the foundations established through youth and family engagement, and partner collaboration/integrated governance that were discussed in the earlier sections of this guide. Many communities share YWHO's vision of IYS and want to move closer to it, even if they are not adopting all core components of the YWHO model. Communities can therefore make meaningful progress toward a fulsome IYS approach by using YWHO's model as both inspiration and a practical guide.

In earlier sections, we explored two foundational core components (**Youth and Family Engagement** and **Partner Collaboration and Integrated Governance**) that help establish the relationships, trust, and shared purpose necessary for IYS. Building on these foundations, we begin this section with an overview of **integration**: what it means in practice, how communities move along a continuum of integration, and the domains where integration becomes visible. These frameworks can help communities reflect on their current stage and prepare for the work ahead.

We then describe four additional core components of YWHO's IYS model, along with tips and advice from established YWHO Hub Networks that you can adapt to your own context:

- Accessibility
- Inclusive and Culturally Diverse Services
- Integrated Service Delivery
- Measurement-Based Care

Whether implemented all at once or built gradually over time, these components offer a blueprint for delivering care that is equitable, integrated, youth-centred, and grounded in the strengths and populations of each community; and can be adopted and adapted by communities (even without formal YWHO designation) to improve service coordination, responsiveness, and positive outcomes for young people.

7.1 Integration in IYS

Integration is a central to all aspects of IYS. It involves aligning people, processes, and resources so that youth and families experience care as seamless, coordinated, and responsive to their needs.

Integration in YWHO

involves a commitment to providing seamless, continuous, and wholistic care through within- and cross-sectoral integration.

In the context of IYS, integration means:

- **A unified experience for youth and families.** Rather than being shuffled between disconnected services, young people encounter youth-friendly entry points where their needs are assessed and supported across sectors.
- **Shared ownership among partners.** Health, social, educational, and community partners move beyond parallel work to joint planning, decision-making, and accountability.
- **Blending of formal and informal supports.** Integration values both professional expertise and community assets such as peer support, cultural practices, and grassroots organizations.
- **Continuous improvement.** Integrated systems use data, feedback, and evaluation to adapt in real time, closing gaps and reducing barriers for youth.

Integration is not a one-time achievement but an **ongoing process of alignment and trust-building**. Communities evolve toward integration at their own pace, moving along a continuum from informal networking to fully shared governance, staff, space, and resources, as presented on the following page.

Domains of IYS Integration

As partnerships move further along the partnership continuum, integration becomes visible in multiple domains of practice. In IYS, integration is not only about co-location but also about weaving together governance, services, and processes so that youth and families experience care as seamless and coordinated.

The domains of IYS integration include:

- **Governance:** Formalized structures (e.g., MOUs, joint agreements) that establish shared accountability and collective decision-making.
- **Space:** Shared environments with common workspaces that foster collaboration and informal consultation.
- **Services:** Integrated service delivery models such as co-facilitated treatment groups, coordinated outreach, peer support, and care navigation, ensuring youth can access multiple supports through a single-entry point.
- **Processes:** Practical tools like joint consent forms, shared records, and cross-team meetings that streamline care and reduce duplication.

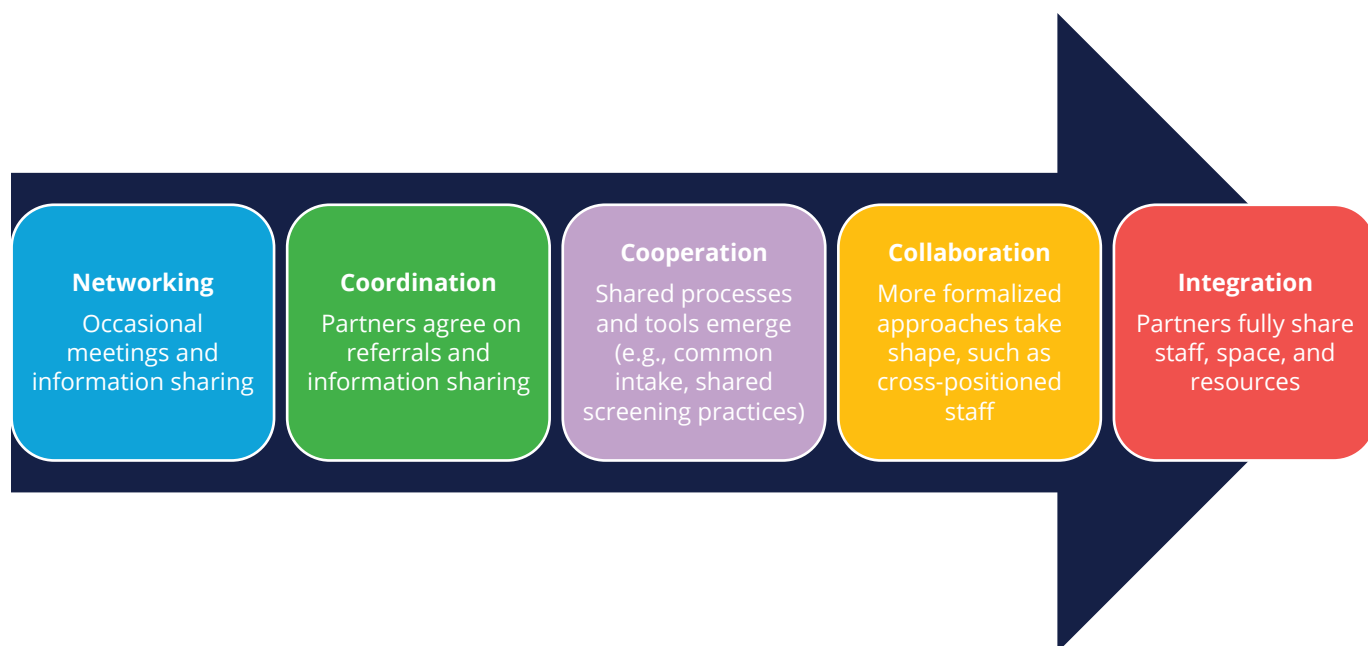
By considering both the continuum and the domains of integration, communities can better understand their current level of collaboration, recognize progress, and set priorities for moving forward. These domains are explored in more detail in the next section in the context of YWHO's core components.

Resource: The Partnership Continuum

Partnerships evolve over time. Communities rarely move directly from informal networking to full integration in one step. Instead, they progress along a **partnership continuum**, shaped by local needs, trust, and capacity, as presented in Figure 16.

Importantly, this evolution is **not always linear**. Partnerships may advance, pause, or even step back depending on leadership changes, shifting priorities, or resource pressures. This is normal, and reflects the reality of complex, community-driven work.

Figure 16. The Partnership Continuum



Understanding where your partnerships currently sit on the continuum helps to:

- **Mark your starting point.** Identifying your stage gives you a shared language to describe how you are currently working together.
- **Clarify expectations.** Recognizing your stage helps keep the current and future expectations of partners realistic.
- **Identify next steps.** Each stage suggests practical opportunities for deepening collaboration (e.g., moving from information-sharing toward shared processes or co-designed activities).
- **Monitor progress.** Small steps forward, such as agreement on referral pathways or implementing a standard consent form, are important markers of growth.

Resourcing Integration

Resourcing IYS is less about securing new funding for services and more about transforming how existing services are used. That said, resources are still required to sustain the infrastructure, staffing, and systems that make integration possible. As partnerships mature, the focus shifts from resourcing engagement activities to ensuring that the operational backbone of IYS is supported so that services remain accessible, coordinated, and responsive to youth and families. Pooling funds, expertise, and in-kind contributions provides the foundation for this sustainability.

Common areas of collective investment include:

- Creating or adapting space for youth-friendly, integrated service delivery.
- Developing backbone functions such as data platforms, evaluation, or quality improvement supports that benefit all partners.
- Embedding specialized staff within hubs (e.g., rotating clinicians, cultural navigators, or peer support workers).



Quick Tip: Philanthropy, government grants, and local fundraising can also supplement the foundational resources that partners contribute (see also [Section 6.4](#)).

Guiding Principles for IYS Collective Resourcing:

- **Resource the foundations/basics first:** Ensure early collaboration activities, like governance, and youth engagement, are adequately supported.
- **Be flexible:** Financial, in-kind, or time-limited resources each adds value.
- **Plan for equity:** Ensure under-resourced and grassroots partners are not left behind; collective resources should strengthen, not strain, diverse organizations.
- **Think infrastructure:** Shared systems (like data platforms or evaluation supports) are critical infrastructure that directly support service delivery.
- **Build sustainability together:** Resource planning should be embedded in governance, so that decisions about contributions, priorities, and new opportunities are made transparently and collectively.

Example: The Power of Collective Contribution

One of the most powerful ways that collective resourcing shows up in IYS is when partners collaborate to address a gap that none could address on their own. By combining contributions (e.g., financial, staffing, or space) communities can create new services that are both more sustainable and more responsive to youth needs.

Here's an actual YWHO example of how three partners transformed the idea of facilitating youth access to a nurse practitioner (NP) into a sustainable service:

- *Hospital*: reallocated budget to fund the NP's wages.
- *Community Health Centre*: provided reception and scheduling support.
- *Recreation Centre*: contributed clinic space and equipment.

By working together, the partners turned a shared vision into a service that none could have sustained alone. Beyond filling an immediate gap, this success demonstrated the power of collaboration to build trust, strengthen relationships, and open the door to new opportunities for youth care.

Resource: Budget Planning Template

As IYS moves from planning into sustained operations, budgeting becomes a tool for collective resourcing. Table 7 provides a template to help partners identify ongoing financial and in-kind contributions, such as staff time, space, data systems, and evaluation supports, that are essential for the long-term functioning of IYS. It also provides a way to track new investments and ensure accountability across partners.

Table 7. Budget Planning Template

Labour Costs	FTE [FY]	[FY]	FTE [FY]	[FY]	Notes
Required Roles					
Mental Health and Addiction Clinician		\$		\$	
Nurse Practitioner		\$		\$	
Intake Coordinator		\$		\$	
Peer Support Worker		\$		\$	
Care Coordinator		\$		\$	
Other Hub Staff					
Service Contracts (Labour)		\$		\$	
		\$		\$	
Total Salaries		\$		\$	
Benefits		\$		\$	
Total Labour Costs		\$		\$	
Non-Labour Costs					
Travel & Accommodation		\$		\$	
Meeting Expenses		\$		\$	
Materials & Supplies		\$		\$	
Operating Expenses		\$		\$	
IT & Computer		\$		\$	
Training		\$		\$	
Service Contracts		\$		\$	
Total Non-Labour Costs		\$		\$	

Total Project Costs			\$		\$	
Non-Labour Breakdown						
Travel and Accommodation		2023/24		2024/25		
Youth Travel & Accommodation		\$		\$		
Family Travel & Accommodation		\$		\$		
Staff Travel & Accommodation		\$		\$		
Stakeholder Travel & Accommodation		\$		\$		
TOTAL Travel and Accommodation		\$		\$		
Meeting Expenses						
Youth Advisory Honoraria		\$		\$		
Family Advisory Honoraria		\$		\$		
Food		\$		\$		
TOTAL Meeting Expenses		\$		\$		
Materials and Supplies						
Hub Specific: Office Supplies		\$		\$		
Hub Specific: Program Supplies		\$		\$		
Hub Specific: Printing & Marketing		\$		\$		
Other		\$		\$		
TOTAL Materials and Supplies		\$		\$		
Operating Expenses						
Rent & Utilities		\$		\$		
Minor Capital		\$		\$		
Administrative Overhead (10% of actuals)		\$		\$		
Communications		\$		\$		
Other		\$		\$		
TOTAL Operating Expenses		\$		\$		

IT & Computer					
Computer Purchases		\$		\$	
Software Licences		\$		\$	
Website Development & Support		\$		\$	
Other		\$		\$	
TOTAL IT and Computer		\$		\$	
Training					
Staff Training		\$		\$	
Other Training		\$		\$	
TOTAL Training		\$		\$	
Service Contracts (Non-Labour)					
		\$		\$	
		\$		\$	
		\$		\$	
TOTAL Service Contracts (Non-Labour)		\$		\$	
NON-LABOUR DETAIL TOTAL		\$		\$	

7.2 Additional YWHO Core Components

Accessibility

Accessibility in YWHO's IYS model goes beyond an accessible physical location. It is also about creating seamless, low-barrier pathways for youth to get support when and how they need it. At YWHO, accessibility is achieved by co-locating a broad range of services in a youth-friendly space, complemented by flexible virtual options. The aim is to reduce common barriers such as wait times, confusing referral processes, and fragmented care, while replacing them with coordinated, developmentally-appropriate, and culturally-safe supports.

Accessibility also means visibility, welcoming design, and meaningful youth involvement. Whether attending a drop-in art class, meeting a peer support worker, or seeing a clinician, young people should encounter spaces that are stigma-free, inclusive, and easy to navigate.

Why Accessibility Matters

Accessible services are essential to meeting young people where they are (literally and developmentally). They contribute to:

- Earlier access to care, preventing issues from escalating.
- Reduced service fragmentation, especially for youth with multiple or complex needs.
- Improved equity through design that reflects diverse realities and preferences.
- Stronger relationships with providers in consistent, welcoming spaces.
- Better outcomes when services are timely, wholistic, and youth-centred.
- Barrier reduction aligned with regulations and standards such as Ontario's *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*⁵⁰ (AODA) and the *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1*.⁵¹

Key Aspects of Accessibility

The following design features help make services accessible:

- **Service co-location** – As many mental health, substance use and primary care services; social supports; well-being activities; and peer programming as possible

are offered in one setting (that meets AODA standards) to foster collaboration and make navigation easier.

- **Youth-friendly design** – Quiet areas, social spaces, private rooms, and culturally relevant spaces (e.g., for smudging or creative activities), informed by youth input, with attention to physical accessibility, lighting, acoustics, and sensory needs.
- **Strategic location** – Centrally located, transit-accessible, and situated where youth already spend time. Site selection is youth-informed, with attention to stigma and safety.
- **Virtual and remote access** – Flexible options (e.g., video, phone, chat) meeting *WCAG 2.1 Level AA standards*, with supports for youth who need devices, broadband, or private space.
- **Low-barrier entry points** – Drop-in programming, walk-in clinical services and group-based activities provide informal ways to connect, supported by language interpretation and translation as needed (see YWHO's service pathways on page 118).
- **Flexible hours** – Extended, youth-friendly hours, such as evenings, before school, over lunch hours and weekends, to accommodate school, work, and caregiving schedules.
- **Outreach** – Mobile and virtual service options to meet youth where they are and to extend reach to surrounding communities.

Tips and Reflections Regarding Accessibility from YWHO Hub Networks

- **Involve youth and partners in defining accessibility** – To ensure that key aspects of accessibility (see above) reflect their understanding, needs, and preferences.
- **Bring youth directly into the space design process** – By meeting with architects and interior designers, doing walkthroughs, and reviewing mock-ups together.
- **Design for flexibility** – Use modular seating for multi-purpose spaces, and make use of outdoor areas (e.g., gardens, art exhibits) alongside quiet, reflective spaces.
- **Plan for limitations, but stay creative** – Use rotating services, pop-up programming, or mobile outreach when space or funding are constrained to increase awareness and accessibility of services.
- **Maximize available space** – Design for multiple providers on-site simultaneously, while ensuring quiet, private, and culturally safe areas, as well as appropriate rooms for clinical and primary care services.

- **Create a range of welcoming entry experiences** – While YWHO Hub Networks operate as a single, integrated access point for services, communities can design multiple ways for youth to first connect (e.g., “chill” spaces, drop-in groups, or wellness activities). These informal entry experiences can serve as natural pathways into the full continuum of supports.
- **Build trust through visibility and design** – Clear signage, welcoming reception, inclusive artwork, and representative staff help youth feel safe and seen. Collaborate with YACs to embed youth-led branding and identity throughout the space.
- **Monitor accessibility regularly** – Include structured check-ins at integrated governance meetings and youth advisory sessions; treat accessibility as a journey of continuous improvement.
- **Empower all groups to act** – Give youth and family advisory groups, staff, and governance partners defined roles in identifying, reviewing, and acting on accessibility issues.
- **Leave intentional room for growth** – Ensure spaces can evolve as community/hub needs and youth priorities change.

For more on how to identify and evaluate the accessibility of potential service locations, see the location mapping guidance and template in [Section 5.3](#).

Inclusive and Culturally Diverse Services

Inclusive and culturally diverse services recognize, reflect, and actively respond to the cultural identities, health beliefs, and lived/living experiences of all youth. In IYS, inclusion means centring the experiences of youth from equity-deserving communities, including Indigenous, Black, racialized, 2SLGBTQIA+, Francophone, newcomer, and neurodiverse youth, and addressing the systemic barriers they face.

Cultural responsiveness is not an “add-on” component. It is core to how IYS are designed, delivered, and evaluated. This requires examining whose voices are included, what assumptions shape practice, and how equity data and community input drive continuous improvement.

Why Inclusive and Culturally Diverse Services Matter

When services reflect the cultural and social realities and identities of youth, care improves. Inclusive services:

- Build trust and safety, especially for youth who have faced stigma or systemic discrimination.
- Support culturally meaningful engagement, healing, and identity development.
- Reduce service disparities, including misdiagnosis and underutilization.
- Improve outcomes and satisfaction through continuous feedback and learning (see section that follows on measurement-based care).
- Advance equity, truth, and reconciliation within health and social service systems.

Inspiration from YWHO Hub Networks: Creating Inclusive and Culturally-Diverse Services

YWHO Hub Networks are finding creative ways to ensure services reflect the diversity of their communities. Some highlights include:

- **Equity-focused spaces:** At several YWHO Hub Networks, youth can gather in identity-affirming cafés and drop-in groups designed specifically for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, neurodiverse youth, and other equity-deserving groups. These programs provide safe places for connection, support, and celebration.
- **Culture in action:** YWHO Hub Networks are making Indigenous cultural practices part of everyday programming, such as hosting Pow Wows and rites of passage ceremonies to offering smudging circles. These activities not only honour tradition but also bring families and communities into the Hub in meaningful ways.
- **Design that tells a story:** Murals, youth-created art, and other design elements transform YWHO Hub Network walls into reflections of local culture and identity, helping young people see themselves in the space the moment they walk through the door.
- **Representation in staffing:** By hiring staff who speak the languages and share the cultural backgrounds and other lived/living experiences of local youth, YWHO Hub Networks are building stronger connections, creating safe entry points, and reducing barriers to care.
- **Community partnerships:** Collaborations with grassroots and equity-deserving organizations have opened the door to specialized, culturally responsive programs and have ensured that youth can access supports that resonate with their lived/living experience.
- **Youth at the centre:** In some YWHO Hub Networks, youth have not only co-designed programs but have led cultural activities themselves, helping to shape spaces and services that are authentic to their identities and experiences.

These approaches show how inclusion is not an “add-on.” It is woven into the way Hubs are built, the programs they run, and the people who lead them. The result: spaces where all youth feel represented, valued, and supported.

Integrated Service Delivery Model

At the heart of IYS is a commitment to delivering fully integrated, youth-centred, and developmentally appropriate services through a single, low-barrier access point. Instead of navigating a fragmented system, youth can access the supports they need, regardless of whether they are offered on-site or virtually through a coordinated network that brings together mental health, substance use, primary care, social supports, and wellness programming. Services are coordinated, seamless, and matched to each youth's goals and level of need. **This level of integration is only possible through strong partner collaboration, youth engagement, and shared governance that helps to align resources and decision-making to support a more accessible and supportive service experience for young people.**

Why Integrated Service Delivery Matters

Young people often face barriers such as long waitlists, confusing referral pathways, criteria restrictions, or difficult transitions between youth and adult systems. An integrated service delivery model addresses these challenges by:

- Reducing transitions between providers and between sectors.
- Facilitating early intervention through walk-in, drop-in, and low-barrier options.
- Meeting youth needs along a continuum of care by providing evidence-based and evidence-generating mental health and substance use treatment for youth.
- Offering multiple services concurrently (e.g., accessing mental health, primary care, and social supports in one place).
- Streamlining access through shared processes, such as a single common consent form.
- Promoting equity by co-locating culturally responsive services.
- Engaging youth and families as active partners in care planning.
- Supporting wholistic wellness through connections to social, educational, and cultural resources.

Key Design Features

YWHO Service Pathways

As described in [Section 3.4](#), YWHO offers three interconnected service pathways that ensure young people can access all the right supports they need in one integrated space: clinical, community and social support, and skills and well-being activities. Services offered within these pathways are designed to be flexible, coordinated, and responsive to youth needs.

YWHO's Continuum of Care

At YWHO, services are organized to offer a full continuum of care that adapts to each young person's needs, goals, and circumstances. The aim is to deliver the right care, at the right time, in ways that intentionally provide the best level of care needed to support youth based on their level of need and goals and the resources available within the IYS network. Service planning is also guided by youth readiness, collaborative dialogue, data collection, and clinical judgment, so that interventions are evidence-based or evidence-generating and aligned with what matters most to youth.

This continuum spans low, moderate, and high levels of service intensity. Low- and moderate-intensity services are a core focus within Hub Networks to ensure early and timely support in youth-friendly settings. Higher-intensity services are supported through Hub Network resources and partnerships, with some delivered on-site and others offered through well-established relationships with specialized services and community partners. In other words, although low and moderate intensity services may be more commonly available at Hubs, high intensity services may also be available on site or through well established community partnerships. Table 8 illustrates examples of supports available across these levels of service intensity, demonstrating how YWHO Hub Networks tailor interventions to meet the diverse and changing needs of young people.

Table 8. Examples of Supports Across YWHO's Levels of Service Intensity

Service Intensity	Examples of Supports
Low	Psychoeducation Solution-focused brief therapy Motivational Enhancement Therapy (MET) or Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) (1-5 sessions)* Individual or group peer support Care navigation

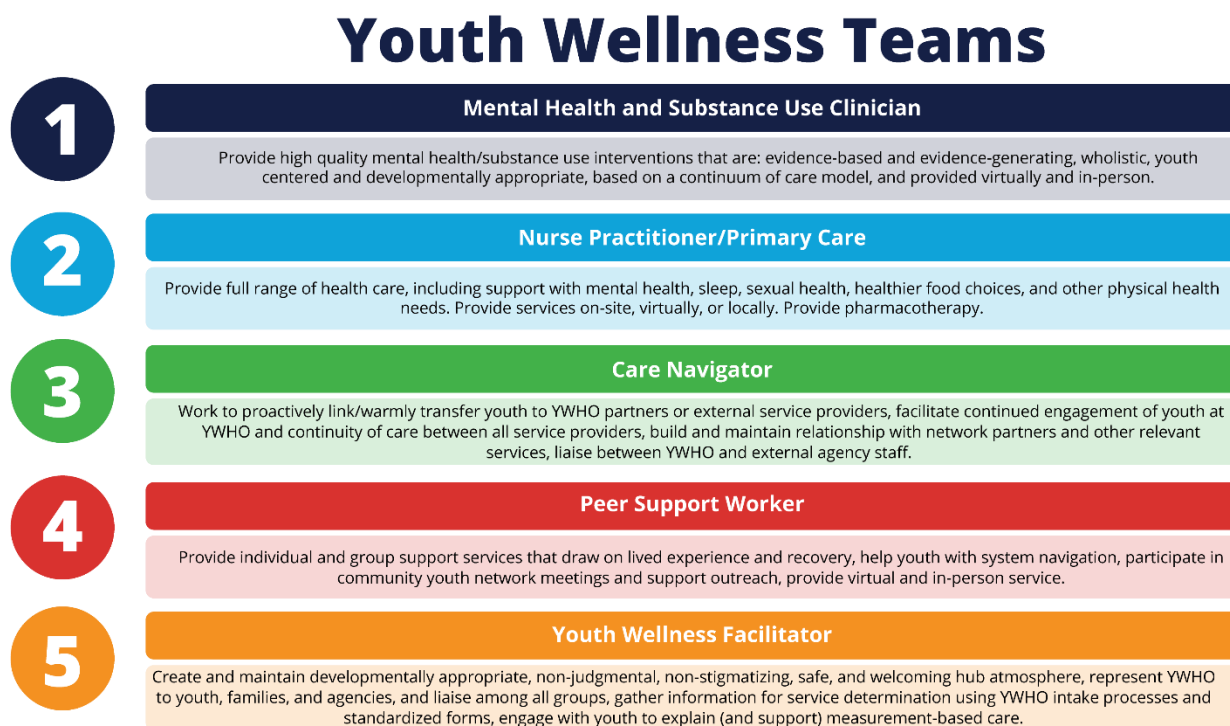
Moderate	Evidence-based structured psychotherapy for mental health concerns (Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT) skills, CBT; 6-12 sessions)* Evidence-based group treatment for substance use/concurrent disorder concerns (MET, CBT, DBT; 6-12 sessions)* Family support Supported education/employment/housing, if relevant
High	Psychiatric response (telepsychiatry or in-person) Medication consult Access to crisis supports Supported linkage to higher intensity services (e.g., long term psychotherapy, day treatment, inpatient, addiction medicine, specialist addiction treatment, withdrawal support)

* Please note that YWHO's levels of service intensity framework does not limit the number of sessions that youth can receive for available supports. Rather, it guides the number of sessions that are typically appropriate for each level on the continuum.

Youth Wellness Teams

Each YWHO Hub Network is anchored by a multidisciplinary Youth Wellness Team that includes core-funded positions that reflect the continuum of care model and ensure timely, coordinated care. These teams provide integrated, evidence-based, and youth-centred services across health, mental health, substance use, peer support, navigation, and social supports. Even when hosted by different organizations, Youth Wellness Teams function as one integrated unit. Figure 17 illustrates the five core roles that make up a Youth Wellness Team and their key functions.

Figure 17. Composition of YWHO Youth Wellness Teams



Common Consent Form

A key design feature of IYS at YWHO is the use of a common consent form. YWHO's common consent form, developed in collaboration with youth and families, ensures that youth only need to provide their consent once to access a broad range of services within the Hub Network. By using a common consent form, Hubs reduce duplication, support smoother service pathways, and reinforce trust with youth and families through clarity and transparency.

The following are some features of YWHO's common consent form/consent process. This list is not exhaustive. Requirements for informed consent and confidentiality in Ontario are set out in provincial legislation, organizational policies, and professional college standards. Service providers and organizational partners are responsible for consulting these sources to ensure compliance.^{vii}

- Listing all agencies and organizations that may be involved in the youth's care, along with a brief description of the services each provides.

^{vii} This guide is not a substitute for legal or regulatory advice.

- Outlining when, how, and why youth information will be shared among members of the Hub care team, including clear limits to confidentiality and data sharing.
- Presenting the form to youth when they first seek services related to clinical or community and social support needs. Consent must be obtained, either in person or remotely, before any intake forms or clinical tools are completed.
- Reviewing consent periodically throughout ongoing treatment to confirm youth still understand and agree with how their information is being used.

Written (express) consent from youth should be obtained again if:

- New organizations, agencies, or service providers join the youth's circle of care.
- Referrals are made to external agencies.
- A young person returns to YWHO services after leaving, at the discretion of the Hub.

Hub Networks are expected to adapt YWHO's common consent template to their local context while maintaining its core features. Transparent communication with youth about how their information will be used is required throughout their entire care journey.

Branding

Branding is the process of creating a clear and consistent identity through visuals, language, and experience to signal what an organization stands for and how it should be recognized.⁵² A clear and consistent brand is an important design feature of integrated service delivery because it helps young people recognize services, feel a sense of belonging, and know what to expect when they walk through an IYS door. A strong brand builds trust by signaling safety, inclusivity, and accessibility. For communities, it creates coherence across diverse partners and reinforces that services are part of a unified, youth-centred system.

It is important to note that while connected communities who are not formally funded as a YWHO Hub Network cannot use the YWHO brand itself, they are still encouraged to invest in developing their own clear, youth-friendly local brand for their IYS.

Key practices:

- **Co-create branding with young people:** Engage youth directly in developing local names, visuals, and messaging to ensure the brand feels authentic, welcoming, and reflective of their community.
- **Ensure consistency across sites and partners:** Use common visual identity elements (logo, colours, typography, tone) so that youth and families can easily identify IYS services wherever they are offered.
- **Reflect core values:** Branding should signal values such as youth focus, inclusivity, low-barrier access, equity, and collaboration.

- **Balance local and system identity:** Materials can reflect local culture and community but should align with the broader IYS brand so that services are seen as connected and coordinated.

Putting an Integrated Service Delivery Model into Practice: Tips from YWHO Hub Networks

- Define integration locally – Take time with partners (including youth and families) and/or your integrated governance structure to co-develop what integration looks like in your context.
- Engage early – Introduce the IYS model early to partners and co-design workflows, spaces, and service pathways.
- Leverage local data – Use data to identify gaps and bring in new partners to fill them with needed services.
- Build governance capacity – Use governance structures to decide how roles are distributed across organizations and to resolve integration challenges.
- Be explicit and transparent – Develop clear pathway documents and orient partners to YWHO's continuum of care.
- Learn from others – Connect with other communities adopting YWHO's IYS model to exchange lessons and share learnings and tools.
- Plan for sustainability – Anticipate budget impacts and plan for long-term funding of human resources through core allocations, in-kind support, or local fundraising.

Measurement-Based Care

Measurement-based care (MBC) refers to the routine and systematic use of standardized tools to screen and assess youth needs, experiences, and outcomes throughout their engagement in care. In YWHO's IYS model, MBC supports youth-centred care by using real-time data to guide individual care decisions, inform program and service planning, and drive continuous quality improvement across the provincial Network. MBC is recognized as a **core clinical practice** that enables service providers to collaborate with youth in aligning care to their goals, needs, and experiences.

Why MBC Matters

MBC ensures that youth receive care that reflects their needs, goals, and progress over time. It helps complete the loop between what youth share, what providers observe, and what action is taken to foster accountability, trust, and youth engagement. When implemented well, MBC contributes to:

- Collaborative decision-making between youth and providers
- More responsive, personalized, and effective care
- Improved continuity and service quality
- Equity, by identifying disparities in access, experiences, and outcomes
- Stronger therapeutic relationships through active youth feedback
- Real-time learning and system improvement – central to YWHO's role as a learning health system
- Increased youth engagement in their care

"Measurement-based care has allowed our team to provide more personalized services to meet the specific needs of the youth coming through our doors. This has helped to empower youth and engage them as partners in the care they receive. Overall, our team and the youth we serve have found enormous value with MBC, with a goal of enhancing the quality of services we offer and providing improved outcomes."

—Hub Manager, Chatham-Kent Youth Wellness Hub

Key Elements of MBC in Practice

The following are common elements involved in an MBC approach:

Tools/Forms

- **Standardized and personalized tools:** Intake, progress monitoring, and outcome measures (e.g., symptom checklists, functioning scales, satisfaction surveys) are completed regularly by youth, with personalized tools reflecting youth-defined goals. Refer to [Appendix E](#) for a list of examples from the YWHO Minimum Data Set for Youth.
- **Youth-friendly consent form:** A standardized common consent form is used to ensure that young people understand what information is being collected, how it will be used, and with whom it may be shared. Consent forms should be written in clear, accessible language, emphasize choice and transparency, and support ongoing trust between youth and providers.

Data and Infrastructure

- **Data governance practices:** Clear agreements define ownership, stewardship, consent, and ethical use of MBC data, including principles of Indigenous data sovereignty and Black health data governance.

- **Secure and accessible data platforms:** Platforms must support timely collection, analysis, and reporting, align with partner security standards, and accommodate both standardized and personalized tools.

Note on Data Governance:

Effective use of MBC depends on strong data governance. Communities and organizations should ensure that governance frameworks explicitly address ownership, stewardship, and the ethical use of MBC data. This includes integrating principles related to Indigenous and Black data governance, such as OCAP® (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession) for First Nations data and the EGAP (Engagement, Governance, Access, and Protection) frameworks that guides data analysis and management within Black communities. Aligning MBC practices with these principles and broader organizational values and policies helps ensure that data use supports equity, transparency, and trust.

Learning and Continuous Quality Improvement Processes

- **Individual-level feedback:** Findings from MBC tools are shared back with youth and their care team in real time to support collaborative decision-making, transparency, and trust.
- **System/Sector- and governance-level reporting:** De-identified, aggregated MBC results are shared with Hub Network staff, partners, and governance bodies to inform planning, evaluation, and continuous quality improvement.
- **Closing the loop:** Both individual- and system-level feedback are communicated clearly and consistently, so youth, families, staff, partners, and funders understand how MBC findings shape care and service design.

Inspiration from YWHO Hub Networks: Innovative Approaches to MBC

YWHO Hub Networks are experimenting with using creative strategies to further embed MBC into everyday practice:

- Using **creative, youth-friendly feedback methods** such as a “feedback wall” (e.g., using sticky notes or QR codes linked to the Hub website) and **storytelling sessions** to capture youth perspectives in informal, engaging ways. Results from measurement tools are also shared back with youth to close the loop.
- Leveraging strong **Youth Wellness Facilitators** to champion the use of screening tools and ensure MBC is consistently integrated into care pathways.
- **Ensuring time is allocated before and/or during appointments** for routinely completing measures and/or reflecting on results.

These examples highlight how MBC can be woven into service delivery in flexible and youth-friendly ways, ensuring data is meaningful, timely, and actionable.

Activities to Advance IYS MBC

- **Start small and build confidence:** Your community may begin with a core set of measures and expand over time.
- **Communicate the value of MBC to youth and staff:** Be clear about how MBC supports better care, not just reporting. Include a focus on MBC in staff onboarding/training (see resource on the next page).
- **Choose a supportive data platform:** Select a platform that can securely collect, store, and share MBC data in real time. The platform should be aligned with privacy and governance standards, ideally interoperable with other applicable electronic health records, integrate smoothly with existing clinical workflows, and be easy for youth and providers to use. It should also have built in flexibility to adapt to evolving MBC practices.
- **Ensure feedback is visible:** Let youth know how their data is making a difference in shaping services.
- **Integrate into workflow:** Embed MBC into intake, clinical check-ins, and team discussions so it becomes part of routine practice.
- **Leverage MBC Champions:** Identify individuals within your network or integrated governance model who can champion MBC practices. Champions can ensure that youth and family perspectives are represented in how data are interpreted, help

governance tables use MBC results to guide decisions, and keep MBC aligned with accountability and equity goals across your network.

- **Use MBC to elevate equity:** Look closely at who is being served, what tools/measures are being used, who is benefiting, and where there are gaps.
- **Adapt collaboratively:** Co-develop local MBC processes with youth and service providers to support buy-in and long-term sustainability.

Resources

Title	Description	Reference
Mindsense Video on Youth Engagement in MBC	This short, animated video follows <i>Marion</i> —a 17-year-old balancing school, sports, and mental health care—as she learns about MBC. It explains in clear, relatable terms how questionnaires and other tools can be used to track progress, guide treatment decisions, and make care more responsive to youth needs. By showing MBC through the eyes of a young person, the video highlights the importance of engaging youth as active partners in their care, helping them feel more involved, empowered, and supported in their mental health journeys.	Dunstan, B., Linares, I., & Prebeg, M. (2025). Enhancing Youth Engagement in Mental Health Treatment Through Measurement-Based Care https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZJYVOJ3P3rDpBn44myf5VWS8Hyq0JugG/view
The MBC Pocket Guide	<i>The MBC Pocket Guide</i> is a co-designed, youth-friendly resource that explains measurement-based care in plain language and engaging visuals. It helps youth understand what MBC is, why it matters, and how they can play an active role in their care. With tools like goal-setting worksheets, reflective prompts, and tips on rights and privacy, the guide encourages collaboration with providers and supports youth in feeling more	Dunstan, B., Linares, I., & Prebeg, M. (2024). Making sense of Measurement-Based Care (MBC): Developing a by-youth-for-youth MBC counselling pocket guide. Prepared for Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario. Toronto, Canada: Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario,

	empowered in their mental health journey	Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. ^{viii}
Measurement-Based Care (MBC) For Youth Service Providers	This course supports learning about MBC and increasing your confidence to use it in ways that are relevant, respectful, and effective for youth. It will help you explore and understand key concepts, see examples in action, and hear directly from young people with lived/living experience. Over the course of an overview and four modules, you will learn content based on an evidence-based MBC approach involving four phases of introducing MBC to youth, gathering relevant information, sharing results with young people, and making collaborative care decisions.	YWHO. To register: https://nvtcaproauth.novurant.com/realms/ywho/protocol/openid-connect/auth?response_type=code&client_id=web-lms&redirect_uri=https%3A%2F%2Fywholearn.novurant.com%2Fprotected%2Fcompetency%2Fassessment%2Fregister%2Fcompetency_register_optionally%2F920c238e-ad08-4220-bb67-e47280fc9b98&state=f722d15f-6068-4fd1-81c4-d02bd36cecc8&scope=openid&nonce=qhQhYwC0Gd69yTOT6xX9Bbck1WRaMgRPpXCh293zdB8

^{viii} Contact inquiries@ywho.ca for information

7.3 Review and Reflect

Building an IYS model requires both organizational and community readiness and ongoing reflection about how core components are being implemented. This reflection is not a one-time step; it should occur throughout the process of developing IYS.

Importantly, youth and families should be included in this reflection, either through their direct participation at integrated governance tables or through dedicated engagement mechanisms.

This section offers two complementary resources to support communities in this work. The *Six Dimensions of Readiness* tool helps your community consider whether the necessary conditions are in place to begin or deepen IYS development. The *Core Components Self-Assessment* provides a practical way to reflect on how well your community is putting YWHO's IYS model into practice across key areas such as accessibility, engagement, equity, and governance. Together, these tools are designed to spark honest conversations, highlight strengths, and identify areas where additional capacity-building may be needed.

Resource: Six Dimensions of Readiness

The Hexagon Tool, developed by the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN),⁵³ is a widely used framework that helps organizations (or in the case of IYS, communities) assess the fit and feasibility of new or existing programs. It considers six key factors (need, fit, capacity, evidence, usability, and supports) to guide decision-making. In this resource, these factors have been tailored specifically to the IYS context to support communities to reflect on whether the conditions are in place to begin or deepen IYS development and to identify concrete next steps.

Use the tool below (Table 9) to reflect on your community's readiness for IYS. For each dimension, note current strengths, areas for growth, and possible next steps.

How to use this tool:

- Discuss each dimension together as a group.
- Capture examples of strengths and areas that need attention.
- Decide on a few practical next steps.
- Revisit the tool periodically to track progress as partnerships evolve.

Review Date: _____

Partners Involved: _____

Table 9: Reflection Tool – Six Dimensions of Readiness

Dimension	Guiding Questions	Current Strengths	Areas for Growth	Next Steps/ Actions
Need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do we agree there is a clear need/youth service gap that justifies working differently? What local data, stories, or lived/living experiences highlight this need? 			
Fit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How well does IYS align with all of our mandates, policies, and organizational cultures? Where could conflicts or friction arise? 			
Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What people, space, infrastructure, or funding can partners contribute? Where are the gaps in resources? 			
Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do we share an understanding of how IYS improve access and outcomes? What evidence builds confidence in this approach? 			
Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What external resources (e.g., training, facilitation, provincial supports) could help? Can we sustain supports over the long-term? 			
Usability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it be feasible to implement the core components of IYS in ways that fit our local context? If not, what are the barriers? Will we have supports in place to monitor fidelity to the core components of the IYS model? 			

Resource: Self-Assessment for YWHO's Core Components

This self-assessment explores readiness for adopting YWHO's six core components: two foundational components of the YWHO model explored in detail in this guide: **Youth and Family Engagement** and **Integrated Governance and Partner Collaboration**, as well as the following four YWHO core components into practice that, together, represent the foundations of IYS.

- **Youth and Family Engagement** – Empowers youth and families to make decisions about their care by embedding their voice at all levels.
- **Integrated Governance and Partner Collaboration** – Strategic collaboration between youth and service provider network to manage resources and organize service delivery.
- **Accessibility** – A comprehensive array of services offered in a wholistic model of care.
- **Inclusive and Culturally Diverse Services** – Services that respond to the health beliefs, practices, and cultural and linguistic needs of diverse youth.
- **YWHO Integrated Service Delivery Model** – Co-located and integrated services across a continuum of care accessible through a youth friendly access point.
- **Measurement-Based Care** – Standardized screening tools, equity data use, and clinical outcome monitoring to improve care for youth.

The following indicators are intended to help your community reflect on how these principles are being put into action locally.

Youth and Family Engagement

- ☐ Youth and families are meaningfully involved from the beginning; not added on later.
- ☐ Opportunities are co-created with youth and families, rather than designed for them.
- ☐ Participation is flexible: youth and families may engage at different levels of intensity and through different formats, from casual conversations to formal advisory councils.
- ☐ Spaces and processes feel safe, welcoming, and accessible to everyone.
- ☐ Honoraria, training, and supports are in place so that participation is fair, accessible and equitable.

- ☐ Goals, roles, and expectations are clear and transparent.
- ☐ Diverse voices are present and valued, including youth ambassadors as well as those from equity-deserving and other groups that may not have been previously engaged.
- ☐ Feedback loops ensure youth and families know how their input shaped decisions.
- ☐ Engagement grows deeper over time and becomes part of integrated governance, leadership and service design.
- ☐ Power is shared: youth and families help shape decisions, not just conversations.

Integrated Governance and Partner Collaboration

- ☐ All partners share a clear purpose and vision for supporting youth and improving youth outcomes.
- ☐ Diverse partners, including youth, families, service providers, and community and health sector organizations and leaders, are at the table.
- ☐ Roles, responsibilities, and expectations for shared accountability are clearly defined and transparent.
- ☐ Trust and relationships are built through regular dialogue and joint activities.
- ☐ Power is shared: all partners, including youth and families, have a meaningful voice in decisions.
- ☐ Equity-deserving individuals and smaller grassroots organizations are actively included.
- ☐ Resources (e.g., time, funding, staff, space) are equitably pooled or coordinated to support IYS work.
- ☐ Mechanisms exist to address conflict and sustain collaboration over time.
- ☐ Partners regularly reflect on what's working and adapt as needed.

Accessibility

- ☐ Services are accessed through a centralized point of entry to minimize barriers for youth.
- ☐ The IYS space is youth-friendly, safe, welcoming, and accessible (e.g., physically, digitally, and culturally).
- ☐ Youth have helped shape the space design, signage, and service flow.
- ☐ Remote/virtual service options are available, equitable, and responsive to youth needs.

- ☐ Equity barriers (e.g., transportation, devices, broadband, safe spaces, hours of operation) are actively addressed.

Inclusive and Culturally Diverse Services

- ☐ Programs and services reflect the cultural and social diversity of youth in the community.
- ☐ Anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and decolonizing practices guide service development and delivery.
- ☐ Data on population needs and equity inform planning and evaluation.
- ☐ Diverse partners, providers, and organizations are helping to address gaps in culturally-specific supports.
- ☐ Youth and families from equity-deserving groups are meaningfully involved in shaping programs and services.

Integrated Service Delivery Model

- ☐ Youth can access a range of supports (e.g., mental health, primary care, substance use, social supports, skills and well-being activities) of various intensities seamlessly.
- ☐ Care pathways are clear, coordinated, and tailored to youth needs.
- ☐ Services are delivered by a collaborative, cross-sector team.
- ☐ Warm handoffs and shared care approaches are standard practice.
- ☐ Youth experience services as integrated and wholistic, not fragmented.
- ☐ A common consent form is used so that youth need only provide their consent once to access a broad range of services within the Hub Network.

Measurement-Based Care (MBC)

- ☐ Standardized tools and youth-reported outcomes are used to inform care.
- ☐ Data are shared back with youth to guide their own care goals and plans.
- ☐ MBC results inform program design, staffing, and service improvements.
- ☐ Organizational data governance includes principles of MBC and equity (including those reflected in OCAP and EGAP (described in [Section 7.2](#))).
- ☐ Network Lead(s), Hub Network service providers, and members of IYS governance tables, including youth and families, actively champion MBC, demonstrating commitment to its use and ensuring it is embedded across all levels of care and decision-making.
- ☐ MBC is part of a culture of continuous learning and quality improvement and integrated care for youth.

If many of these statements feel true in your community, you are well on your way to embedding YWHO's IYS core components into practice.

Resource:

Title	Description	Reference
Community Readiness Assessment Tool	This is a practical tool that can be used for assessing a community's readiness to engage with change, especially in health, social, or service-delivery initiatives. It is rooted in Indigenous worldviews and wholistic approaches, and provides structured interview protocols, scoring dimensions (e.g. leadership, community climate, resources), and stage-based strategy guidance to help communities tailor their approach according to readiness levels.	The Canoe Project. (2019). <i>Community readiness assessment tool: Assessing community readiness for change in Indigenous communities</i> (Revised ed.). The Canoe Project / Dr. Peter Centre. https://www.drpeter.org/media/Community%20Readiness%20Assessment%20Tool%20PDF.pdf

8.0 Pathways to IYS: The Big Picture

Adopting an evidence-based IYS approach using the YWHO model is a developmental process that unfolds over time and with intention. Each community will move through the phases at its own pace, depending on local context, strengths, resources, and needs. What matters most is not the speed of progress, but the depth of engagement with youth, families, and partners at every stage.

8.1 Phases of IYS Adoption

As a summary, the table below (Table 10) provides a [high-level overview of the phases of IYS adoption based on the YWHO model](#). It shows how the different components described throughout this guide fit together into a bigger picture. This roadmap offers:

- A narrative description of each phase.
- Key activities communities may undertake.
- Direct links back to earlier sections of the guide for more detail.
- References to the practical resources and tools provided, as well as external resources.

Taken together, this roadmap is intended to help your community see the IYS journey as a whole as well as its component parts and to know where to find the detailed supports you may need along the way.

Table 10. Phases of IYS Adoption Based on the YWHO Model

Phase/Key Activities	Content/Resources in this Guide
Exploration Phase Communities begin by building partnerships with youth, families and other community partners to explore whether and how IYS could work locally. This involves developing a shared vision for IYS and assessing resources, needs, and local readiness.	
Meet with the YWHO Community Outreach and Engagement Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 3.0– Provides background on YWHO, the IYS model, and supports available from the YWHO Provincial Office. • Section 8.0 – Outlines supports and role of the Provincial Office during adoption.
Get to know youth and families in your community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 4.0 – Highlights youth and family engagement as a core component of IYS • Section 4.2 – Describes principles of youth and family engagement • Section 4.3 – Describes processes to get to know youth in your community • Section 4.4 - Mechanisms for youth and family engagement • Resource (p. 33) - Sample questions for gathering youth and family perspectives • Resource (p. 38) - Example structure for a youth-focused town hall^{ix} • Resources (p. 41) - Using social media to engage/connect with youth • Resource (p. 45) - Terms of reference for a Youth Advisory Council – Sample governance document to guide youth advisory structures^{vi} • Resource (Appendix D) - Adult ally tip sheet - practical strategies for adult allies to support meaningful youth engagement • Resource (p. 50) – Do’s and don’ts of youth and family engagement
Build trusting partnerships and generate a shared vision for IYS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 5.0 – Describes the foundational importance of partnerships grounded in trust and a shared vision

^{ix} Developed by YWHO Youth Advisor Team

Phase/Key Activities	Content/Resources in this Guide
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 5.1 – Provides guidance on creating safe, inclusive spaces for connection and dialogue with partners. Prompts to guide collaborative discussion among partners • Resource (p. 59) - Partnership-building template – aligning values and relationships • Section 5.2– Provides guidance for how to build your partnership network; specific focus on partnerships with diverse communities • Resource (p. 66) - IYS partner mapping inventory and mapping examples • Resources (p. 67) - Partnerships with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities • Resources (p. 69) - Partnerships with rural and remote communities
Map existing services and spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 5.3 – Mapping community service resources • Resource (p. 77) - Integrated community service mapping template • Resource (p. 80) - IYS service location mapping template
Assess readiness to adopt IYS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 7.2 – Review and reflect • Resource (p. 128) - Six dimensions of readiness • Resource (p. 130) - Self-Assessment for YWHO's core components
Installation Phase Communities move from planning to putting foundational structures in place. This includes onboarding teams, creating governance structures, and developing service pathways.	
Establish integrated governance table(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 6.1 – Overview of domains of IYS integrated governance and governance structures • Resources (p. 86) - Practical tools and overview of principles supporting integrated governance • Resource (p. 87) - Terms of reference template for IYS integrated governance structure

Phase/Key Activities	Content/Resources in this Guide
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 6.2 – Empowering youth and families in governance structures • Resource (p. 91) - Guidance from YWHO Youth Advisor Team for youth voices in integrated governance^x • Resource (p. 92) - Case study: Youth voices in action^{vii} • Section 6.3 – Collaborative decision making: How to make decisions in ways that are transparent, equitable, and aligned with shared values • Resource (p. 95) - Collaborative decision-making tool • Resource (p.97) - Decision-making record
Develop financial resources for IYS adoption and sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 6.4 – Exploring collective financial resources for integrated governance • Resources (p. 99) – Fundraising ideas involving youth • Resource (p. 108) - Budget planning template
Establish your IYS service network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 2.0 – IYS Integrated Service Delivery Model (YWHO Service Pathways) • Section 7.2 – IYS Integrated Service Delivery Model (YWHO Continuum of Care) • Section 7.2 – Common consent form • Section 7.2 - Branding
Identify clinical processes for measurement-based care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 7.2 – Measurement-Based Care • Resource (p. 125) – MBC Resources and Curriculum

^x Developed by YWHO Youth Advisor Team)

Phase/Key Activities	Content/Resources in this Guide
Initial Implementation Phase	
Communities begin delivering integrated services while continuing to adapt and refine. Focus is on piloting, testing tools, and using data to inform decision-making.	
Launch IYS integrated service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Section 2.0 – IYS Integrated Service Delivery Model (YWHO Service Pathways)• Section 7.2 – IYS Integrated Service Delivery Model (YWHO Continuum of Care)• Section 7.2 – Measurement-based care• Section 8.2 – YWHO is Here to Help
Assess services based on MBC data	
Build quality improvement structures and systems	
Full Implementation & Sustainability Phase	
The hub is fully operating and work shifts to fidelity, continuous learning, and sustaining integrated services.	
Use data for quality improvement and accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Section 8.2 – YWHO is Here to Help
Continue to strengthen community partnerships	
Expand services, hours, or partnerships	
Share learnings from youth, staff, other communities	

8.2 YWHO is Here to Help

YWHO is committed to supporting connected communities across Ontario to explore, plan, and adopt IYS. We recognize that every community is unique, and our goal is to provide responsive, equitable, and practical support to help you move forward at your own pace.

Through our **Community Outreach and Engagement (CO&E)** efforts, we have connected with over 35 communities to date. These conversations have brought together youth, families, service providers, and organizational leaders to:

- Share information about the YWHO IYS model and its core components.
- Gather insights about local priorities, strengths, and challenges.
- Support communities in assessing their IYS readiness and need and building capacity.
- Highlight the role of current YWHO Hub Networks as part of a LHS that contributes to ongoing evaluation, quality improvement, and shared learning across Ontario and Canada with the goal of improving outcomes for young people.

For connected communities, YWHO offers a range of supports to help strengthen local efforts which may include:

- Advice and guidance from the Co&E team.
- Opportunities to participate in a Community of Practice with other interested communities.
- Access to tailored resources, guides, and materials that support IYS exploration and planning.
- Webinars, meetings, and learning sessions to share knowledge and build capacity.
- Support with networking and connections across Ontario's IYS landscape.

No matter where your community is on the IYS journey, from early exploration to active planning, **YWHO is here to help**. We are grateful for your interest in IYS and for everything you do to improve outcomes for young people, families, and communities across Ontario.

For more information or to connect with our CO&E team, please contact us at inquiries@ywho.ca.

9.0 Conclusion

Across Ontario, communities are stepping forward with courage and vision to reimagine how young people access care, connection, and opportunity. The work of building IYS is not always easy. It requires commitment, trust, and the willingness to work together in new ways. But as this guide has shown, it is also beneficial, necessary and deeply rewarding. When youth, families, service providers, and community partners unite around a shared purpose, they create pathways that are more seamless, more equitable, and more hopeful and advantageous for young people.

YWHO was built on this very belief: that we can design services *with* youth, not just *for* them, and in doing so, remove barriers that have too often kept young people from the care and support they deserve. The core components of YWHO's evidence-based IYS model (youth and family engagement; partner collaboration and integrated governance; accessibility; inclusive and culturally-diverse services; integrated service delivery; and measurement-based care) are more than structural features. They are commitments to transformation. They remind us that every interaction with a young person is an opportunity to build trust, foster belonging, support their growth, and improve their lives.

Communities will take different journeys to build upon their own strengths and respond to their local needs. Some may be laying the first stones of partnership while others may already be operating as integrated networks. Wherever you are on this path, know that you are part of a larger movement across Ontario, Canada, and beyond; a movement that recognizes that the health and well-being of youth are not only a matter of service delivery, but of justice, inclusion, and possibility.

The task ahead is urgent. Too many young people continue to wait, to struggle in silence, or to navigate systems not designed with them in mind. Yet the momentum is real, and the lessons learned from communities already embracing IYS show us that change is not only possible, it is happening. With persistence, humility, and partnership, we can build systems that respond to youth in real time, that honour their voices, and that walk alongside them as they move toward brighter futures.

10.0 Appendix

Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

Please note that the definitions below evolve continuously. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion language shifts, based on an increased shared understanding and empowerment of diverse community participants and partners.^{xi}

Connected Communities

Communities that are connected to YWHO for information, guidance, support, and/or peer and partner connections as they explore or begin moving toward an IYS approach. While not formally funded as part of the YWHO provincial network, connected communities are an important part of YWHO's broader provincial outreach and engagement movement to increase integrated services for youth.

Developmentally appropriate

Developmentally appropriate services meet youth where they are at, emotionally, cognitively, and socially. Developmental appropriateness must also consider cultural context, trauma history, and intersecting identities. Services should be flexible and responsive, avoiding one-size-fits-all approaches and instead tailoring support to each young person's unique journey.^{54 55}

Equity-deserving groups

Equity-deserving groups are communities that experience significant barriers to equal access, opportunities, and resources due to systemic discrimination and oppression. These groups include, but are not limited to, Indigenous peoples, racialized communities, people with disabilities, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, and others who have been historically and persistently marginalized. The term emphasizes that these

^{xi} Thanks are extended to Gordan Thane (Manager of YWHO Equity and Engagement) and Laya Lakkaraju (Community Health and Engagement Specialist) for their contributions to the development of this glossary.

communities are not inherently vulnerable, but are made vulnerable by systemic inequities. The term “equity-deserving” is preferred over “equity-seeking” because it shifts the responsibility for change from the individual to the system.^{56 57}

Health Equity

The principle that everyone should have a fair opportunity to achieve their best possible health, regardless of their identity, background, or circumstances. Achieving health equity requires addressing systemic barriers and social determinants of health.

Integrated Governance

A shared decision-making structure that brings together youth, families, and partner organizations to plan, oversee, and guide integrated youth services. Integrated governance emphasizes collaboration, accountability, and transparency across all partners.

Integrated Youth Services (IYS)

Integrated Youth Services (IYS) bring together a range of supports, including mental health, substance use, primary care, education, employment, housing, and more, into a single, youth-centered system. Services are typically in one spot, and young people do not have to tell their stories over and over. The service providers work as a team to make it easy for young people to get the services they need. IYS prioritize equity and inclusion in service integration, ensuring that services are not only co-located but also culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and anti-oppressive. IYS models are grounded in meaningful youth engagement and reflect the diverse needs of youth, particularly those from equity-deserving communities.^{58 59 60}

Learning Health System (LHS)

An LHS is a health system that collects internal evidence-based and evidence-generating data and experience and uses that knowledge to improve practice of care. This results in higher quality, safer, more efficient service delivery. LHS should also be transparent and accountable, with mechanisms for community input and feedback, especially from those most affected by health inequities. Equity is integrated in data collection and use, meaning intentionally designing and applying data practices that ensure marginalized and underserved populations are accurately represented, and not excluded.^{61 62 63}

Measurement-Based Care (MBC)	The routine and systematic use of standardized tools to screen and assess youth needs, experiences, and outcomes throughout their engagement in care. In YWHO's IYS model, MBC supports youth-centered care by using real-time data to guide individual care decisions, inform program and service planning, and drive continuous quality improvement across the provincial Network. MBC is recognized as a core clinical practice that enables service providers to collaborate with youth in aligning care to their goals, needs, and experiences.
Youth-Friendly Services	Youth-friendly services are designed with a comprehensive understanding of, and respect for, young people's rights, identities, and lived experiences. These services are co-designed with youth and are accessible, acceptable, equitable, developmentally appropriate, and effective. Youth-friendly services are grounded in an understanding of intersectionality whereby young people may hold multiple, overlapping identities (e.g., racialized, queer, disabled) and services must be responsive to these intersecting identities and experiences. Youth-friendly services must also be confidential, non-judgmental, and culturally safe. ^{64 65}
YWHO Core Components	<p>The YWHO IYS model has six core components. Core components are the essential functions, principles, and activities required for an intervention to achieve its desired outcomes. Through research and direct practice, the YWHO team has been able to determine the critical and observable features that need to be in place for YWHO Hub Networks. Anti-racism, anti-oppression, equity, engagement, and inclusion of all youth and family voices are integrated across all components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth and Family Engagement • Integrated Governance and Partner Collaboration • Accessibility • Inclusive and Culturally Diverse Services • Integrated Service Delivery • Measurement-Based Care
YWHO Hub	A central, youth-friendly access point, co-designed with youth and families, where young people can connect with multiple integrated services in-person or virtually.

YWHO Hub Network	A funded network of service providers, organizational partners, and Youth and Family Advisories in a community that designs and delivers integrated youth services based on the YWHO model.
YWHO Hub Network Partners	Service providers and organizational partners who have a memorandum of understanding with the lead(s) of the Hub Network and work collaboratively with the full Hub Network to deliver coordinated, population-specific, and culturally-appropriate services.
Wholistic	A wholistic approach to services or care considers every aspect of a person's health and psychological well-being, taking into account the range of social determinants of health that influences an individual's overall wellness. When addressing any health issues, wholistic care means treating or providing services to a person as a whole in the context of their social and physical environment. A wholistic approach reflects Indigenous worldviews that emphasize the interconnectedness of all aspects of life—mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual. ⁶⁶

Appendix B: Resources

The following is a consolidated list of external resources that are provided in this guide.

Title	Description	Reference
Building Partner Capacity for Youth Engagement		
Quality Standard for Youth Engagement	<p>The Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health collaborated with youth, families, service agencies, and researchers to co-develop a set of system-level quality standards for youth and family engagement.</p> <p>It outlines evidence-informed principles and benchmarks that can guide organizational practices and systems in holding youth as partners—not just consultees.</p>	<p>Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health. (2021). <i>Quality Standard for Youth Engagement</i>. Ottawa, ON.</p> <p>https://cop.kdehub.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/quality_standard_for_youth_engagement_wcag.pdf</p>
Quality Standard for Family Engagement	<p>This standard, developed by the Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health, outlines evidence-informed standards to guide meaningful and equitable family engagement within child and youth mental health systems. It defines best and emerging practices to ensure that families are recognized as essential partners in planning, delivering, and evaluating mental health services. It also offers practical implementation tools, indicators, and examples for organizations seeking to strengthen collaboration with families at service, organizational, and system levels.</p>	<p>Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health. (2021). <i>Quality standard for family engagement</i>. Knowledge Development and Exchange (KDE) Hub.</p> <p>https://cop.kdehub.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/quality_standard_for_family_engagement_wcag.pdf</p>

Meaningfully Engaging Youth	This is a resource to help communities and organizations strengthen youth engagement. It outlines principles and practices that foster authentic youth participation, emphasizes the value of relationships, equity, and shared decision-making, and provides tools to support communities in creating meaningful roles for young people.	Tamarack Institute. (2020). Guide: Meaningfully Engaging Youth. https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Resources/Publications/Guide%20-%20Meaningfully%20Engaging%20Youth%20EN.pdf
Walking the Talk: A Toolkit for Engaging Youth in Mental Health.	This toolkit aims to build greater understanding of how youth engagement can directly benefit youth, service areas and communities in Ontario's child and youth mental health sector. It highlights the benefits, provides guidance to implement youth engagement initiatives at the agency-level and showcases the many youth engagement success stories and examples from across the province.	Knowledge Institute on Child and Youth Mental Health and Addictions. (2016). Walking the Talk: A Toolkit for Engaging Youth in Mental Health. https://youthrex.com/toolkit/walking-the-talk-a-toolkit-for-engaging-youth-in-mental-health/
Leveraging Social Media for Youth Engagement		
Starter Guide. Engaging with Youth on Social Media.	This guide is a practical tool designed to help programs assess the degree of youth participation. It provides a framework and set of indicators to evaluate the quality of engagement, including youth voice, decision-making, and inclusion. The guide supports organizations to strengthen authentic youth partnerships through regular reflection and assessment.	University of Michigan. (2020). <i>Starter Guide. Engaging with Youth on Social Media.</i> https://www.etr.org/index.cfm/_api/render/file/?method=inline&fileID=D95BB6D0-8A8C-4594-A16A0EFA4AFDD5B1
Tips for adults on engaging youth through social media.	This guide provides practical advice to help adults engage youth in meaningful ways on digital platforms. The resource highlights approaches that are youth-friendly, inclusive, and respectful, and	Government of Canada. (2021) Tips for Adults on Engaging Youth Through Social Media. https://www.canada.ca/e

	offers guidance on building trust, encouraging participation, and supporting youth voice in online spaces.	n/public-health/services/national-child-day/tips-for-adults-engaging-youth-social-media.html
Supporting Youth Engagement and Partnership		
Takeover Guide: a guide to supporting youth takeover experiences; virtually and in person.	According to this guide, a takeover is when “adults move aside and intentionally provide space and opportunities for a young person to share the power and platforms that are typically reserved as adult spaces. By doing so, the voices and perspectives of young people are amplified. This experience ideally contributes to youth feeling valued, heard, and included, which ultimately increases their sense of belonging.” This guide provides practical resources to plan your own youth takeover, including suggestions for facilitating both virtual and in-person takeovers.	Children and Youth Planning Table. 2021. Takeover Guide: A Guide to Supporting Youth Takeover Experiences; Virtually and in Person. https://childrenandyouthplanningtable.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Takeover-Guide.pdf
Adult Ally Tip Sheet	Adult allies play an important role in creating meaningful youth engagement. Being an ally means moving beyond a traditional mentor role and working with youth as equal partners. The <i>Adult Ally Tip Sheet</i> highlights the benefits of adult-youth partnerships for youth, adults, and organizations, and outlines the key characteristics of effective allies—such as active listening, interrupting adultism, and creating safer spaces. This practical resource can help adults reflect on their role, build stronger partnerships with youth, and foster	Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario. Appendix D

	organizational cultures that truly support youth voice.	
Guidance for Land Acknowledgements		
<i>Guidance for Honouring the Land and Ancestors Through Land Acknowledgements</i>	This guide was published by a subcommittee of the CAMH Reconciliation Working Group. It offers practical direction on how to craft and deliver land acknowledgements in ways that honor Indigenous Peoples, the histories and relationships connected to place, and the ongoing commitments of reconciliation. The guide includes considerations such as when and where acknowledgements should occur, who should deliver them, how to prepare, and protocols for developing local acknowledgements.	CAMH Reconciliation Working Group Land Acknowledgement Subcommittee. (2022). <i>Guidance for honouring the land and ancestors through land acknowledgements</i> . Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. https://www.camh.ca/-/media/files/camh-landacknowledgements-2022.pdf
Partnerships with Diverse Communities		
A Pathway for Indigenous Community Engagement.	The <i>Pathway for Indigenous Community Engagement</i> infographic developed by the University of Manitoba provides a guide for respectful, relationship-based engagement with Indigenous communities. It describes five stages of a journey that is grounded in ongoing engagement, trust, reciprocity, and respect.	University of Manitoba. (2021). A Pathway for Indigenous Community Engagement. https://umanitoba.ca/sites/default/files/2021-05/a-pathway-for-indigenous-community-engagement-infographic.pdf
Principles of Engagement with Indigenous Communities.	This social media resource describes seven key overarching principles that guide all levels of engagement with Indigenous communities, while still allowing for different approaches for individual, community, and system levels of engagement.	Julie Gerrard. (2022). Principles of Engagement with Indigenous Communities. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/principles-engagement-indigenous-communities-cms-ns

Protocols for Engaging with Indigenous Peoples & Communities.	<i>Protocols for Engaging with Indigenous Peoples</i> sets out guidance to “build respectful relationships” and to engage “in ways that recognize and respect Indigenous rights, histories, and traditions.” It highlights the importance of “respect, reciprocity, and responsibility” as the foundation for meaningful engagement.	The Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund. (2021). <i>Protocols for Engaging with Indigenous Peoples & Communities</i> . https://downiewenjack.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Protocols_for_Engaging_with_Indigenous_Peoples_2021.pdf
Working with Elders	<i>Working with Elders</i> is a guideline published by the First Peoples’ Cultural Council (FPCC) that offers best practices and considerations when engaging Elders and Knowledge Keepers in projects, events, and cultural initiatives. The resource covers respectful communication, planning, supports for Elders, and adapting engagement when in-person gatherings are limited.	First Peoples’ Cultural Council. (2021). <i>Working with Elders</i> (Guidelines). First Peoples’ Cultural Council. https://fpcc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/FPCC-Working-with-Elders_FINAL.pdf
Engaging with Rural Communities: Tips and Best Practices for Researchers and Practitioners in Implementation Science	The Consortium for Cancer Implementation Science developed this set of tips and best practices to build capacity among implementation scientists and practitioners who want to work with rural communities to improve population health.	Consortium for Cancer Implementation Science Community Participation in Implementation Science Action Group. (2023). <i>Engaging with Rural Communities: Tips and Best Practices for Researchers and Practitioners in Implementation Science</i> . https://cancercontrol.cancer.gov/sites/default/files/2023-10/43637_DCCPS_IS_CCIS_Public_Good_Engaging_R

		ural Communities v06 RELEASE_508.pdf
Governance Models and Structures		
Rapid-Improvement Support and Exchange (RISE) OHT (Ontario Health Team) Resource Hub	RISE provides evidence-based support to OHTs, using a 'rapid learning and improvement' lens.	Rapid-Improvement Support and Exchange (RISE). <i>Rapid-Improvement Support and Exchange (RISE) OHT (Ontario Health Team) Resource Hub</i> . https://www.mcmasterforum.org/rise
Nine Pillars of Integrated Care	The International Foundation for Integrated Care's <i>Nine Pillars of Integrated Care</i> defines the essential elements of integrated care. The resource outlines nine interconnected pillars—from shared values and population health management to workforce, financing, and digital solutions—that organizations can use as building blocks for planning, implementing, and evaluating integrated service models. It offers a clear, evidence-informed structure to guide local collaboration and system transformation.	International Foundation for Integrated Care. (n.d.). <i>Nine Pillars of Integrated Care</i> . https://integratedcarefoundation.org/nine-pillars-of-integrated-care
Fundraising		
34+ Easy & Fun Youth Sports Fundraising Ideas	A list of easy and fun youth sports fundraising ideas.	Porter, J. (2023). 34+ Easy & Fun Youth Sports Fundraising Ideas https://eventpipe.com/blog/youth-sports-fundraising-ideas

Best Fundraising Ideas for Youth Group	This collection offers over fifty creative, youth-friendly fundraising ideas ranging from trivia nights and sports tournaments to bake sales and art showcases. It's a practical starting point for communities looking to spark inspiration and adapt ideas that match local context and youth interests.	Betterworld. (n.d.). <i>Best Fundraising Ideas for Youth Group</i> . https://betterworld.org/blog/sports-teams/best-fundraising-ideas-for-youth-group/
Do It Yourself (DIY) Fundraising Toolkit for Teens and Students	A short, engaging toolkit that highlights easy-to-organize fundraising activities—such as competitions, challenges, and social media campaigns—that teens can lead with minimal resources. It's designed to empower young people to take initiative while keeping efforts fun and manageable.	Crohn's & Colitis Foundation. (n.d.) Do It Yourself (DIY) Fundraising Toolkit for Teens and Students https://www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/TeenDIY%20Toolkit-5%201.pdf
Youth-Friendly Fundraising Toolkit	The Resource Hub contains all CHOICE's resources about meaningful and inclusive youth participation (MIYP), sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) or youth-led advocacy.	Choice for Youth & Sexuality. <i>Resource Hub</i> . https://www.choiceforyouth.org/resource/tools
Measurement-Based Care		
Mindsense Video on Youth Engagement in MBC	This short animated video follows <i>Marion</i> , a 17-year-old balancing school, sports, and mental health care, as she learns about MBC. It explains in clear, relatable terms how questionnaires and other tools can be used to track progress, guide treatment decisions, and make care more responsive to youth needs. By showing MBC through the eyes of a young person, the video highlights the importance of engaging youth as active partners in their care,	Dunstan, B., Linares, I., & Prebeg, M. (2025). Enhancing Youth Engagement in Mental Health Treatment Through Measurement-Based Care https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZJYVOJ3P3rDpBn44myf5VWS8Hyq0JugG/view

	helping them feel more involved, empowered, and supported in their mental health journeys.	
The MBC Pocket Guide	<i>The MBC Pocket Guide</i> is a co-designed, youth-friendly resource that explains measurement-based care in plain language and engaging visuals. It helps youth understand what MBC is, why it matters, and how they can play an active role in their care. With tools like goal-setting worksheets, reflective prompts, and tips on rights and privacy, the guide encourages collaboration with providers and supports youth in feeling more empowered in their mental health journey	Dunstan, B., Linares, I., & Prebeg, M. (2024). Making sense of Measurement-Based Care (MBC): Developing a by-youth-for-youth MBC counselling pocket guide. Prepared for Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario. Toronto, Canada: Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. ^{xii}
Measurement-Based Care (MBC) For Youth Service Providers	This course supports learning about MBC and increasing your confidence to use it in ways that are relevant, respectful, and effective for youth. It will help you explore and understand key concepts, see examples in action, and hear directly from young people with lived/living experience. Over the course of an overview and four modules, you will learn content based on an evidence-based MBC approach involving four phases of introducing MBC to youth, gathering relevant information, sharing results with young people, and making collaborative care decisions.	YWHO. To register: https://nvtcaproauth.noverant.com/realms/ywho/protocol/openid-connect/auth?response_type=code&client_id=web-lms&redirect_uri=https%3A%2F%2Fywholearn.noverant.com%2Fprotected%2Fcompetency%2Fassignment%2Fregister%2Fcompetency_register_optionally%2F920c238e-ad08-4220-bb67-e47280fc9b98&state=f722d15f-6068-4fd1-81c4-d02bd36cecc8&scope=openid&nonce=qhQhYwC0Gd69yTOT6xX9Bbck1WRaMgRPpXCh293zdB8

^{xii} Contact inquiries@ywho.ca for information

Appendix C: Reflection Questions

Youth and Family Engagement

- How are youth and families meaningfully involved from the beginning—not added on later?
- In what ways are opportunities **co-created** with youth and families, rather than designed for them?
- How are we ensuring participation is **flexible**, allowing youth and families to engage at different levels and through a variety of formats—from casual conversations to formal advisory roles?
- How are we creating **safe, welcoming, and accessible spaces and processes** that enable all youth and families to contribute their perspectives?
- What **supports** (e.g., honoraria, accessibility measures, training, dedicated roles) are in place to make participation fair, equitable, and sustainable?
- How are **goals, roles, and expectations** defined and communicated clearly and transparently with youth and families?
- How do we ensure that **diverse voices** are intentionally included and valued—particularly youth ambassadors and those from equity-deserving or under-represented groups?
- In what ways is **power shared**, ensuring youth and families help shape decisions, not just conversations?
- How are youth and families meaningfully engaged in **governance, leadership, and service design**?
- What **feedback loops** are in place to show youth and families how their input has influenced decisions and next steps?
- How are we supporting engagement to **deepen over time**, becoming embedded in integrated governance and collaboration?
- How are we **learning from engagement**—celebrating successes, identifying gaps, and adapting our approaches as youth and family needs evolve?

Partner Collaboration

- What mechanisms are we using to build and sustain trust between partners?
- Have we taken time to explore shared values, priorities, and ways of working before moving into formal structures?
- How are we ensuring that collaboration reflects our shared purpose rather than individual organizational goals?
- How are youth, families, and partners meaningfully included in decision-making?
- Are meeting practices—including facilitation, timing, and follow-up—designed to value participants' time and contributions?
- In what ways are power imbalances identified and addressed within our collaboration?
- How do we ensure equitable participation and decision-making among organizations of varying size, capacity, or influence?
- How do we maintain awareness of how privilege and positional power may shape whose voices are heard or prioritized?
- What kind of leadership is most needed at this stage (e.g., connector, strategist, facilitator)?
- Who has the resources, support, and characteristics to lead well?
- Could leadership roles be shared, and what might that look like?
- What step can I take to support leadership in my community—even if I'm not the one leading?
- How are the insights from our partner and location mapping activities being used to guide collaboration, decision-making, and next steps?
- How are we learning from our collaboration—celebrating what works, identifying barriers, and adapting together?
- How do we assess whether our collaborative efforts are improving experiences and outcomes for youth and families?

Integrated Governance

- How are we building the trust and shared purpose needed to move from informal collaboration toward integrated governance?
- How do all partners share a clear and unified vision for supporting youth and improving youth outcomes?

- How are relationships and trust maintained through regular dialogue, communication, and joint activities?
- Do our current governance structures (e.g., tables, roles, agreements) reflect equitable participation from youth, families, and diverse partners?
- How do we ensure that power is shared, so all partners—including youth and families—have a meaningful voice in decisions?
- How are equity-deserving individuals and smaller grassroots organizations actively included and supported in governance processes?
- What mechanisms are in place to ensure transparency, accountability, and shared decision-making across partners?
- How are resources (e.g., time, funding, staff, space) equitably pooled or coordinated to support IYS work?
- What supports or capacity-building efforts are needed to strengthen our governance and take the next step toward integration?
- What mechanisms exist to address conflict, sustain collaboration, and maintain healthy governance relationships over time?
- How do partners regularly reflect on what's working and adapt as needed to improve governance and collaboration?

Accessibility

- How are services accessed through a centralized point of entry to minimize barriers for youth?
- How are we ensuring that the IYS space is youth-friendly, safe, welcoming, and accessible—physically, digitally, and culturally?
- In what ways have youth helped shape the space design, signage, and service flow?
- How are remote or virtual service options made equitable and responsive to diverse youth needs?
- How are we identifying and addressing equity barriers such as transportation, access to devices or broadband, safe spaces, and hours of operation?

Inclusive and Culturally Diverse Services

- How do our programs and services reflect the cultural and social diversity of youth in our community?
- In what ways do anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and decolonizing practices guide service development and delivery?

- How is equity and population-level data being used to inform planning, evaluation, and improvement?
- How are diverse partners, providers, and organizations collaborating to address gaps in culturally-specific supports?
- How are youth and families from equity-deserving groups meaningfully engaged in shaping programs and services?

Integrated Service Delivery Model

- How do youth access a range of supports of varying intensity (e.g., mental health, primary care, substance use, social supports, skills and well-being activities) in a seamless way?
- How are care pathways made clear, coordinated, and tailored to individual youth needs?
- How do we ensure services are delivered through a collaborative, cross-sector team approach?
- How are warm handoffs and shared-care approaches embedded as standard practice?
- How do youth experience services as integrated and wholistic, rather than fragmented or siloed?
- How is a common consent form used so youth provide consent once to access the full range of Hub Network services?

Measurement-Based Care (MBC)

- How are standardized tools and youth-reported outcomes used to inform and individualize care?
- In what ways are data shared back with youth to help guide their care goals and plans?
- How do MBC results inform program design, staffing, and ongoing service improvements?
- How are principles of MBC and equity embedded within our organizational data-governance practices?
- How are Network Leads, Hub Network service providers, and IYS governance members—including youth and families—championing MBC to ensure it is used consistently across all levels of care and decision-making?

- How is MBC integrated into a culture of continuous learning, quality improvement, and integrated care for youth?

Community Readiness

- Do we agree there is a clear need/youth service gap that justifies working differently?
- What local data, stories, or lived/living experiences highlight this need?
- How well does IYS align with all of our mandates, policies, and organizational cultures?
- Where could conflicts or friction arise?
- What people, space, infrastructure, or funding can partners contribute?
- Where are the gaps in resources?
- Do we share an understanding of how IYS improve access and outcomes?
- What evidence builds confidence in this approach?
- What external resources (e.g., training, facilitation, provincial supports) could help?
- Can we sustain supports over the long-term?
- Will it be feasible to implement the core components of IYS in ways that fit our local context? If not, what are the barriers?
- Will we have supports in place to monitor fidelity to the core components of the IYS model?

ADULT ALLY

TIP SHEET

The purpose of this tip sheet is to highlight the benefits and characteristics of adult allies, in addition to evidence-based considerations when engaging with youth.



What is an adult ally?

An adult ally can be any adult with an interest in supporting youth.^{1,2}

Adults and youth develop reciprocal relationships that are long-term and involve a personal connection, rather than just a working collaboration.^{3,4,5,6}

This collaboration requires adults to share power and move from an adult-as-mentor role to an adult-as-partner role with the youth they work with.^{7,8,9}

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

The section below provides some benefits of having/being an adult ally, for allies, youth, and organizations.



BENEFITS FOR ADULT ALLIES

- Adults are provided with first-hand knowledge of issues and topics that are important to youth;^{2,10}
- Adults have the opportunity to change the perceptions and stereotypes they may carry about young people;¹⁰
- As adults work closely with youth, the relationship between them and the youth they work with in the community is strengthened.¹⁰



BENEFITS FOR YOUTH

- An adult ally can provide youth with opportunities or identify ways to get more involved in issues that matter to them;¹⁰
- Mentorship opportunities – adult allies have different skills and life experiences that young people can benefit from.^{2,10} This relationship can expand social networks and develop more positive relationships with adults.¹⁰



BENEFITS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

- Supporting staff to act as adult allies can amplify the youth voice in governance structures. Youth are more equipped and empowered to contribute towards program/service creation, which can result in organizations ensuring that services meet the needs of the youth they serve;¹⁰
- Fostering an organizational culture that encourages adults to be allies to the youth they work with increases an organization's credibility of being committed to youth engagement;¹⁰
- By ensuring that youth have adult allies to support them, it strengthens an organization's relationship with their youth clients.¹⁰



CHARACTERISTICS OF AN ADULT ALLY

Below are characteristics of an effective adult ally along with some tips to consider when working with young people. An effective adult ally:

Treats youth as equals

Youth and adults may have different ideas when it comes to communication, strength, and abilities. It's essential for both groups to recognize and embrace these differences.¹¹

Is an active listener

Keep an open mind when working with youth. Actively listen when youth speak about their experiences and opinions. As an adult ally, it's important to not make assumptions or judgements, and to ask questions when unsure.¹¹

Creates safer space for youth

A safer space isn't just about the physical space where youth gather. A safer space is "a supportive, non-threatening environment where all participants feel comfortable to express themselves, and where they may share experiences without fear of discrimination or reprisal."¹² Safer spaces keep youth engaged and allow them to grow and develop skills and relationships, learn, and continue to build their own knowledge.

Interrupts adultism

Adultism is based on the perspective that adults are better than young people.^{8,11,13} Similar to other forms of oppression, adultism is portrayed through an individual's attitude and actions, as well as social norms and traditions.¹¹ Adultism will have a negative impact on the relationship between adult allies and youth.¹³ It promotes relationships that are unequal, unauthentic, and ultimately youth don't grow in the relationship.⁸ As an adult ally, it's important to speak up when observing attitudes or actions that may be seen as adultist, and support other adults in changing these behaviors.

Youth at the centre of decision making

Work to share power with youth, and support them in having ownership over projects and initiatives that they are part of. Avoid taking an authority figure role, instead, support youth to succeed in taking initiative in projects that matter to them.⁹

Co-learns with youth

Youth and adults bring different perspectives to their shared initiatives. It's valuable for adults to learn from youth as they are experts on issues that directly impact them. It's equally important that youth learn from adults, as their experience and knowledge can benefit them as well.¹¹

Uses an anti-oppressive lens

It's critical for adult allies to use an anti-oppressive lens when supporting youth because of the various systems of oppression that may impact the youth they work with. Framing work in this view will also help with understanding the barriers youth face, and how adults can work to lessen the barriers.¹¹

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For more information, please view: Walking the talk: A toolkit for engaging young people in mental health (<http://www.yetoolkit.ca/>)

Appendix E: Examples from the YWHO Minimum Data Set for Youth

YWHO collects a core set of information from youth accessing services to support both measurement-based care (MBC) and continuous quality improvement. By collecting consistent, meaningful data, YWHO can better understand who is accessing services, how youth are engaging, and what supports are making the greatest impact. This data also helps ensure services are equitable, youth-driven, and responsive to the diverse needs of young people across Ontario. This table lists some examples of information collected to help support positive outcomes for youth.

Domain	Examples	Purpose
Youth Identifiers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First and last name • Preferred name and pronouns • Date of birth, age at registration • Contact information • Health card number (optional) • Emergency contact information 	These identifiers help ensure that youth data are linked accurately across visits and services, avoid duplication, and support continuity of care. They also allow follow-up communication when needed while protecting confidentiality.
Socio-demographic Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender identity and sex at birth • Sexual orientation • Racial identity and ethnicity/cultural background • Language preference and interpreter needs • Diverse abilities or prior health conditions/diagnoses • Previous hospitalizations • Education level and student status • Employment status and income sources • Housing situation and length of stay 	This information supports understanding who is accessing services and helps identify equity gaps - such as which groups may be underrepresented or face barriers. It informs service planning, cultural safety, and the tailoring of programs to meet community needs.
Visit Details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date of visit • Reason(s) for visit (e.g., mental health, substance use, housing, school, relationships, physical health, etc.) • How the youth found out about the service • Wait time for first appointment • Type of service (scheduled or unscheduled/walk-in) • Format of service (in person, phone, video, text, group, individual) • Family involvement (yes/no or discussed) • Needs addressed • Forms reviewed in session 	This information shows how youth are using services - what needs are most common, which pathways are effective, and how accessible the space is. It supports quality improvement and coordination across service providers.
Clinical Screening Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Rated Health (SRH) • Self-Rated Mental Health (SRMH) • Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K6) • Global Appraisal of Individual Needs – Short Screener (GAIN-SS) • YWHO Substance Monitoring Form (YSMF) • Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7) • Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) • Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS) • Outcome Rating Scale (ORS) • Goal-Based Outcomes (GBO) 	These tools support MBC, and help youth and providers visualize change, identify needs, and adjust care collaboratively. They measure areas such as general health and mental health, distress, substance use challenges, worry and anxiety symptoms, depression-related symptoms, suicidal ideation and behaviour, life functioning, and progress toward goals most important to youth.
Experience and Satisfaction with Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satisfaction and experience with services, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Satisfaction with session and provider ✓ Perception of safety, inclusion, and relevance ✓ Whether forms were discussed during session ✓ Likelihood of recommending the site to others 	Youth feedback helps ensure services remain youth-driven, safe, and responsive. It identifies areas for improvement and measures whether services are meeting expectations and creating positive experiences.

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