

**Spaces&Places for Healthy Youth:
Youth-led research on mid- and upstream wellbeing supports**

Funder: CIHR Healthy Youth Team Grant
<https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/53529.html>

Brief proposal

The opportunity:

Would the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities be interested in partnering on a 5-year research project focused on promoting Youth Wellbeing across the province?

- The Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities would be situated as the principal knowledge user.
- The principal knowledge user “is likely to be able to use the knowledge generated through research in order to make informed decisions about health policies, programs and/or practices.”
- As the principal knowledge user you would not be asked to make financial or work contributions to the project. All we ask is your partnership in using – as best you can within your remit – some of the information produced from our work.

The project:

As noted in UNICEF’s report card 16, despite Canada’s high ranking of supportive economic, environmental, and social conditions for youth development, we rank poorly in terms of mental health, happiness, physical health and survival. UNICEF’s report card 17 further notes the disconnect between Canada’s natural and economic wealth, and its impact on children’s lived environment and their related well-being. These reports are disconcerting, given the evidence demonstrating the importance of contextual resources and related structural and social determinants of health, mental health and wellbeing. If we truly believe that “When provided with appropriate supports, young people can reach their full potential to the benefit of all Canadians,” and our goal is to establish an environment in which “Every young person should be afforded the opportunity to be the best version of themselves”³⁸ we need to be mindful of how physical and social environments support young people’s mental health and well-being.

Spaces&Places for Healthy Youth responds to this need by

- working with youth, aged 15-24, as co-researchers, across diverse communities of Nova Scotia,
- to understand what contextual factors support their mental health and well-being, and what aspects are absent.
- Using findings to inform policy, shape service delivery, and advocate for the community resources identified as necessary for youth mental health.

It is essential to understand the relational and physical resources available to youth that promote their mental health. Meaningful and relevant contextual resources prevent or reduce onset of mental health challenges and improve prognosis where youth have pre-existing mental health challenges.

By inviting youth to the study who are silenced and living in marginalized conditions within their community, we will enhance equity, diversity, and inclusion in terms of research representation and relevance of resource allocation.

Why should the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities be the principal knowledge user of this project?

Municipalities are best situated to attend to the social and structural determinants of mental health and well-being. Municipalities are the governance authorities that are responsible for the allocation of physical resources (like public transit and parks) and services (like libraries and recreation) implicated in upstream mental health promotion; the resources that can prevent onset of mental illness, or improve prognosis of mental illness where it exists, because of changes to the environment in which individuals and families live, work and play.

1. The Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities facilitates advocacy, bringing municipalities together and advance solutions to shared issues. As rates of mental illness increase, so do the social consequences and related demand on municipal resources. As one of if not the most pressing health issue facing our communities today, working to advance environments that promote wellbeing is a key shared issue for municipalities.
2. The Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities facilitates collaboration, connecting municipalities with each other, with other organizations, other levels of government, and other provincial associations. This kind of interconnected collaboration is going to be central to effective upstream mental health promotion. You are the experts best situated to support this collaboration where necessary, helping to reduce siloed approaches to supporting wellbeing, and reducing the burden on individual municipalities and or organizations.
3. The Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities facilitates education, sharing best practices, exploring creative solutions, and highlighting new opportunities. Partnering on Spaces&Places as knowledge users would provide you with cutting-edge insights into best practice, creative solutions, and new opportunities as established by our youth, for youth.

The current project proposal:

Phase 1 (year 1-2): Existing youth researchers from Halifax and Eskasoni will work with new youth researchers across new provincial locations to answer the following questions:

- What mental health and well-being challenges are youth in your community dealing with?
- What does youth wellbeing look like in your community?
- What community-based resources support youth wellbeing?
- What community-based factors undermine youth wellbeing?
- What community-based resources are needed to support youth in your community?

We will then work with youth to share findings and advocate for upstream interventions (community-based factors that can be changed by local municipalities and organizations to improve the context in which youth live).

Outputs:

- a. A youth-driven conceptualization of youth well-being in Nova Scotia and the upstream factors that support this well-being.
- b. A youth developed strategy for effective youth advocacy for mental health promotion.

Phase 2 (year 3-4): Youth will identify mid-stream resources or interventions (so not formal or clinical interventions but informal supports that can be made available in communities, that are more targeted to specific challenges) that cut across findings from all participating sites, suggesting relevance to youth across the province.

We will work with the youth to develop these resources or interventions and assess their effectiveness. We anticipate that interventions will include peer support groups, books, apps, and texting systems. Faculty from Dalhousie University are included in the grant to assist with the development of these products, as and where necessary.

Anticipated Outputs:

- a. A Nova Scotia Health Youth website containing key resources for youth such as advocacy guides, information on mental health promotion resources, and system navigation tips. The

website's content will be developed by the provincial youth researcher team following Phase 1 of the project.

- b. Mid-stream mental health promotion supports such as facilitated peer support groups (e.g. [Guys Work](#) for young men aged 18-16 who are no longer in school), text supports (e.g. [text4Hope](#) codesigned with youth from Nova Scotia), supportive apps targeting specific groups (e.g. [apps](#) for Indigenous young men living with the effects of intergenerational trauma but are perhaps not ready to reach out for formal help), or affirmation books (such as a [colouring in book](#) for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence or affirmation books for specific groups of youth such as Indigenous youth or [newcomer youth](#)). These are just a few examples of programming that existing youth researchers have either engaged in or noted a need for. Again, following the findings of Phase 1, we will have a clearer understanding of needs within the province and what supports would be helpful in addressing these needs.

Phase 3 (year 5): We will work to establish the sustainability of the youth research and advocacy network and its products.

Annually: Youth will host a youth wellbeing conference. The target audience will include professionals working with youth, policymakers, and researchers, as well as youth and their communities from across the province. The conferences will be designed to foster knowledge sharing by youth, dialogue, and knowledge uptake by the professionals working with youth, policymakers, and researchers. We will also include youth-focused workshops ahead of the conference, where youth will gain skills in community-based research and advocacy, and over time, other skills that are identified as a need through their work. Dalhousie University's Department of Psychiatry will issue certificates to youth who attend these workshops.

The people: The project would be led by a triumvirate including [myself](#) (as academic), a youth from Eskasoni (as the youth lead), and The Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities (as the principal knowledge user).

In addition to this, there is a youth advisory council comprising existing youth researchers from Eskasoni and Halifax. The youth advisory council and future/new youth researchers will be supported by a mentor group. Professor [Claudia Mitchell](#) will serve as the knowledge mobilisation champion for the youth will also have a knowledge mobilization champion.

Other community partners I plan to approach include the [Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq](#), [the Nova Scotia Brotherhood](#), [the Nova Scotia Sisterhood](#), and YMCA groups across the province. I will also be asking these groups to connect our team with others in their networks, expanding our reach.

Finally, I will be inviting the following people (amongst others) to join the academic team: [Ejemai Eborieme](#), [Lori Wozney](#), [Sara Kirk](#), [Vincent Agyapong](#), [Oladapo Oyeboode](#), [Roberta Woodgate](#), [Belinda Agyapong](#), [Debbie Martin](#), [Nancy Ross](#), and [Sherry Stewart](#).

Timelines and Deadlines

Action	Deadline
Funding registration	April 28, 2026
Funding submission deadline	June 16, 2026
Anticipated start date	October 01, 2026