

Towards Flourishing Strategy Overview

The Towards Flourishing (TF) Strategy promotes the mental well-being of parents and their families through the addition of a mental health promotion strategy to Manitoba's Families First Home Visiting Program.

Emotional distress in the perinatal period has been deemed a public health concern because it is highly prevalent and is believed to adversely affect child development. Results from Manitoba's universal screening at birth suggest that 11% to 14% of women experience some degree of post-natal depression or anxiety. TF focuses on positive mental health as well as mental illness and distress. This multilayered Strategy includes simple and practical activities that have been shown to be effective in rigorous evaluation studies.

The main goals of the Towards Flourishing Project are:

1. To improve the mental health and decrease mental illness/distress of parents and their children in the Families First Home Visiting Program.
2. To strengthen public health workforce capacity to address mental health promotion and support collaboration between Mental Health and Public Health systems.
3. To create and sustain mechanisms for effective mental health promotion interventions in community settings across Manitoba.

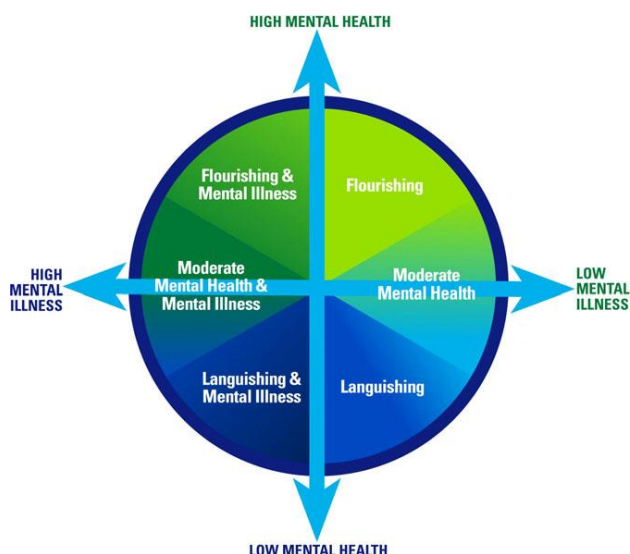
What is Mental Health?

Mental health is the capacity of each and all of us to feel, think and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional, and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice, inter-connections and personal dignity (*Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006*).

The Dual Continua of Mental Health:

Keyes' Model (2002) illustrates that mental health is a complex state and not merely the absence of mental illness symptoms or diagnosis. It is also the presence of something positive.

A critical message of Keyes' work is that maintenance and protection of positive mental health, and not just alleviation of mental distress, is necessary to achieve a mentally healthy population.



Everyday Strategies for Population-based Interventions

Numerous simple strategies have been scientifically proven to have reliable effects on at least one specific behavior (Embry & Biglan, 2008). They are akin to the "active ingredients" found in more complex interventions. According to Embry and Biglan (2008), these evidence-based strategies are appropriate for population-based interventions because they are simple, easy to use, low cost, spread by word of mouth, and produce big results.

The Mental Health Promotion Strategy is an evidence-based strategy designed to provide multiple levels of support to families and public health staff in Manitoba including:

- Mental health education for new parents offered through a new Curriculum introducing topics on mental health and wellness including a menu of simple Everyday Strategies for parents and their families to promote positive mental health and well-being
- Training for public health staff to enhance knowledge of mental health promotion and guide the introduction of new mental health tools for families
- Additional screening for new parents involving a collection of measures of mental health and well-being
- A plan to improve access of families to mental health services, resources and supports and to strengthen collaboration between Public Health and Mental Health systems by streamlining communication, consultation and referral processes
- The role of a Mental Health Promotion Facilitator to enhance public health and community capacity to meet the mental health needs of families by strengthening connections within and between programs, facilitating access to mental health resources and services, and by serving as a resource for mental health promotion
- A Cultural Lens on the Strategy developed collaboratively with community leaders, experts and stakeholders to ensure that it has cultural relevance and reflects the distinct world views of all families in Manitoba with a specific mandate to incorporate the perspective of Manitoba's Aboriginal, Francophone and immigrant and newcomer populations

Evaluation:

The Towards Flourishing Mental Health Promotion Strategy is being rigorously evaluated in two ways:

1. Evaluation of the process and early impacts of the Strategy to learn how well it is working
2. Evaluation of the long term outcomes of the Strategy to learn if it makes a difference in the mental health and well-being of parents and their children



To know more about Towards Flourishing, please visit:

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/towardsflourishing/index.html>

References:

Embry, D. D., & Biglan, A. (2008). Evidence-based Kernels: Fundamental units of behavioural influence. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, published with open access at Springerlink.com

Keyes, C. L. M. (2002). The mental health continuum: from languishing to flourishing in life. *Journal of health and social behavior*, 43, 207-222.

Public Health Agency of Canada (2006) *The Human Face of Mental Health and Mental Illness in Canada*. Ottawa, Ontario: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada.