

HEADSTRONG PROGRAM OVERVIEW



**LA TÊTE HAUTE
HEADSTRONG**



**PRENEZ COURAGE BE BRAVE
TENDEZ LA MAIN REACH OUT
DITES-LE SPEAK UP**



The Mental Health Commission of Canada's HEADSTRONG program is a national evidence-based mental health leadership program for youth aged 12 and up.

Launched in late 2014, HEADSTRONG has inspired thousands of students across Canada to BE BRAVE, REACH OUT, and SPEAK UP for mental health and wellness in their schools and communities.

Mental Health Commission of Canada

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) was formed in 2007 to research and develop strategies to eliminate stigma, advance mental health, and improve access to mental health services for all Canadians. With funding from Health Canada, the MHCC has developed numerous products including the National Strategy for Mental Health, Evergreen, the National Strategy for Youth Mental Health, and the National Strategy for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace. The MHCC has become a world leader in research, education, and effective programming on issues related to mental health. For more information, please visit the MHCC website at www.mentalhealthcommission.ca.



What is **HEADSTRONG?**

HEADSTRONG is an initiative built to inspire youth to become leaders in their schools. HEADSTRONG leaders challenge stigma, raise mental health awareness, and promote mental wellness and early help-seeking.

The program was developed by the MHCC after five years of research with educators and students.

The MHCC recognizes that young people bring great passion, courage, and empathy to efforts to tackle important social issues.

HEADSTRONG knows that youth are an important influence on their peers and can use this power to generate positive and permanent change.

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Why do we need a program like HEADSTRONG?

Seventy per cent of mental illness in adults begins in childhood or adolescence. Teachers and support staff report anxiety and depression amongst students in their care. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people aged 19 and under in Canada and globally. **HEADSTRONG empowers youth to recognize that it's okay to ask for help.** The program also stresses that young people can take proactive steps to enhance their mental wellbeing, even if they are impacted by distress, and they can appropriately support others in need. HEADSTRONG provides powerful examples of resilience and a strength-based approach to mental wellness that students can use to benefit themselves, their peers, and the wider community.



How does HEADSTRONG work?

The success of HEADSTRONG is rooted in a carefully structured two-part program. Part one is a HEADSTRONG Summit, either an in-person or virtual event where youth from different schools participate in thought-provoking activities, hear inspiring personal stories of recovery from mental illness or addiction, and create a plan of positive action for social change. With that plan in hand, students undertake part two of HEADSTRONG, taking the lead as champions for change in their schools and communities. Ongoing action by students through regular activities keeps mental health in focus for everyone. Goals of student activities are to challenge negative attitudes, increase empathy and understanding for people experiencing mental health problems or illnesses, build resilience and promote mental wellness as a lifelong practice. Activities can be relatively simple, like a display of helpful resources, or more complex, like a whole school presentation. Regardless of the action taken, it's the continued highlighting of mental health throughout the school year that's central to the success of student leadership. When students, teachers, and families see messages about mental health and wellness delivered by young leaders who are committed to sharing both accurate information and hope, the experience changes attitudes and behaviours for the long term.

Does it cost anything to implement HEADSTRONG?

HEADSTRONG has limited funding to help support Summits. We invite communities to connect with us and apply for the HEADSTRONG program using our simple online process.

How do schools or communities access more information or connect with the HEADSTRONG team?

Contact the HEADSTRONG team at headstrong@mentalhealthcommission.ca or access our website www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/resources/training/headstrong



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