 counselling connect
counseling on connecte



Proof of Concept

February 2022

Table of Contents

3

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

7

INTRODUCTION

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE COUNSELLING CONNECT MODEL

10

EASE OF ACCESS & CLIENT CHOICE

13

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

14

EFFICIENT SERVICE DELIVERY

16

EQUITY FOCUS

19

DIGITAL HEALTH DELIVERY

KEY LEARNINGS FROM THE COUNSELLING CONNECT MODEL

20

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF SERVICE DELIVERY

23

A STEPPED CARE APPROACH TOWARDS
SUPPORTING CLIENTS

27

SERVICE DELIVERY WITHIN AN ONTARIO HEALTH
TEAMS ENVIRONMENT

32

CONCLUSION

33

BIBLIOGRAPHY

34

LIST OF PARTNERS

Executive Summary

Counselling Connect – Counseling en connecte is an initiative of the Ottawa Health Team-Équipe Santé Ottawa. It is a web-based platform that provides easy access to free phone or video counselling in Ottawa and the surrounding area. In response to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, more than twenty community organizations collaborated to develop one website with an easy online booking feature to seamlessly connect people to brief counselling supports. The resulting platform has met the rising need of Ottawa area residents coping with mental health and addictions challenges.

Before the pandemic, many community services provided free in-person walk-in counselling services. These services were shut down due to COVID-19 restrictions, creating a critical need for quick and easy access to virtual counselling. Allied mental health and addictions service providers immediately began working to find a solution, leading to the inception of Counselling Connect.

Counselling Connect has provided **17,000** counselling sessions since its launch in May 2020, and has proven itself to be a critical and effective resource for individuals with mental health and addictions concerns. The platform has shown impressive results through client satisfaction and post-session outcome data, and was recognized with the **2021 Transformative Change award** by the Alliance for Healthier Communities.

This report details the key elements comprising the Counselling Connect network, and outlines how the platform is making significant impacts on both the health and social services sector, and on the lives of thousands of individuals living in the Ottawa area.

Five Key Elements of the Counselling Connect Concept

#1: Ease of Access & Client Choice

Counselling Connect's online platform provides clients with increased access to mental health and addictions counselling supports. Almost **95%** of clients indicated that the wait time for services was reasonable, and **about one-third** of clients were able to get an appointment by the following day at a time that worked for their schedule. This online platform has increased access to mental health and addictions supports, with **21%** of clients indicating that they would not have sought any support without Counselling Connect's services.

#2: Community Collaboration

The Counselling Connect network has helped to break down silos between service providers, increasing access to a wider range of supports for clients. More than **one-third (35%)** of all appointments booked by staff were for appointments hosted by another participating organization, and the online platform's backdoor referral function has made it much easier for service agency staff to connect clients to services provided by other partner organizations.

#3: Efficient Service Delivery

Counselling Connect has become an important part of a *stepped care approach* towards mental health and addictions supports. It provides access to highly effective counselling sessions for a wide range of needs, supporting clients with mild to moderate mental health challenges and clients requiring rapid supports while they wait for admittance to more clinical services. The online platform also provides a high value of service with an average cost of **\$142** per visit and helps to divert demand for care away from other parts of the health care system. Without access to Counselling Connect, **27%** of clients would have gone to their family doctor or a general practitioner for care, while **7%** would have gone to a hospital emergency room.

#4: Equity Focus

Counselling Connect services have been designed with a strong equity lens, with specific counselling streams set up for clients identifying as LGBT2SQ+, African, Caribbean, or Black, or Indigenous. The provision of virtual counselling services has also pivoted to serve more communities in need. Most recently Counselling Connect began providing services in Arabic alongside English and French, and delivered about **650** counselling sessions in Arabic between February and December 2021. This strong equity focus has increased access to counselling services for many equity-seeking groups in the Ottawa area. A total of **46%** of clients identified as belonging to an equity-seeking group, meaning that Counselling Connect provides about **4,600** appointments to members of equity-seeking groups each year. Without access to Counselling Connect, **18%** of clients identifying as Black and **23%** of clients identifying as Arab said they would not have spoken to anyone about their mental health and addictions challenges. Over a 12-month period about **1,300** clients from equity-seeking groups access counselling services for the first time due to this platform.

#5: Digital Health Delivery

The Counselling Connect model effectively uses a digital health delivery approach to expand access to mental health and addictions supports. The platform facilitates rapid access to counselling sessions while protecting the privacy of clients. **96%** of clients said it was easy to book an appointment, while **94%** said they felt their personal information was safe and secure on the online platform. Participating in this new approach has also increased collaboration between participating service providers, with **1,500** cross-agency referrals taking place between February and December 2021.

Three Key Learnings from the Counselling Connect Model

#1: Counselling Connect is driving change within the landscape of mental health and addictions service delivery

Counselling Connect is changing who can access care for mental health and addictions challenges, and how they access it. **One-third** of clients accessed counselling for the very first time through Counselling Connect's online platform, and high satisfaction rates show that clients have responded positively to this new avenue for accessing care. Service providers have collaborated in unprecedented ways, exemplifying a level of inter-agency partnership strongly aligned with the emerging Ontario Health Teams approach towards delivering health care. Counselling Connect has also positioned participating service providers as local experts in the delivery of digital health care. The platform has also provided effective counselling sessions that not only lessen demand on other parts of the health care system, but deliver preventative interventions that can mitigate a client's need for more intensive supports later in their *lifespan*.

#2: Counselling Connect has become an important part of a stepped care approach towards mental health and addictions supports

The Counselling Connect online platform fits extremely well into a *stepped care approach* towards mental health and addictions challenges while supporting a more integrated and efficient health care system. The platform has proven itself to be a strong first point of care for clients with mild to moderate mental health and addictions needs. It also provides rapid counselling supports for clients with more severe mental health challenges waiting for intensive clinical supports. The Counselling Connect platform has generated significant positive results, often after just one session. Prior to a counselling appointment, **85%** of clients were concerned or very concerned about their mental health or an addictions issue. After one online session with Counselling Connect, the percentage of clients with this level of concern dropped by **52%**. Furthermore, the percentage of clients not coping well with a mental health or addictions-related challenge decreased by **40%** after speaking with a counsellor.

#3: The Counselling Connect model represents a crucial part of the future delivery of mental health and addictions supports within an Ontario Health Team environment

There is a high need for mental health and addictions supports currently in the Ottawa region, and Counselling Connect continues to see an upwards trajectory in the number of clients served each month. The online platform is projected to continue to serve a high monthly number of clients, and has shown its ability to support Ottawa area residents through challenging events, such as COVID-19 public health restrictions and the recent convoy protests in downtown Ottawa.

Counselling Connect has facilitated collaboration between service agencies to respond to emerging needs while expanding access to counselling supports for more clients, especially those from equity-seeking groups. **36%** of clients identifying as Black and **45%** of clients identifying as Arab spoke with a counsellor for the first time using the Counselling Connect platform. In addition to facilitating cross-agency referrals, Counselling Connect continues to further integrate with other service providers across the entire health care system. Work is underway to increase integration of services with other organizations and service providers such as Ontario 211, AccessMHA.ca, 1call1click.ca and the Ottawa Paramedic Service.

Counselling Connect is an essential part of an integrated approach towards mental health and addictions support in the Ottawa region. With continued funding, this network will continue to improve access to care for clients while facilitating a high level of inter-agency collaboration. These elements make Counselling Connect an essential part of the emerging Ontario Health Teams approach towards delivering health care in Ontario.

Introduction

Counselling Connect – Counseling en connecte (CC-CoC) is a web-based platform providing brief counselling supports on the phone and by video to residents living in Ottawa and the surrounding area. The network is an initiative of the Ottawa Health Team-Équipe Santé Ottawa and was originally created at the beginning of the pandemic to continue providing counselling services to residents when it became no longer possible to operate walk-in clinics or scheduled in-person counselling appointments. To respond to the need for a continuation of these critical counselling services, organizations across the Ottawa region collaborated to develop one website with centralized counselling services and an accessible appointment booking platform.

The platform simplifies booking a counselling appointment and clients can review and select available appointments set up to serve youth, families, individuals, and members of equity-seeking groups. The platform is an open API hosted by Caredove, and is fully compliant with PHIPA privacy regulations. The process of confirming an appointment is quick and confidential and provides rapid access to a counselling session with a trained staff member from a partner organization. Virtual supports such as Counselling Connect have shown to provide effective support for issues such as anxiety and depression.[1]

Since its inception in May 2020, the platform has continued to grow in terms of the number of local agency partners, services offered, and clients served. To date, we are proud to have reached 17,000 bookings and continue to see this service used by more individuals each month. We also continue to improve the platform to increase access to brief counselling services for more people in the Ottawa region with a strong focus on equity and positive outcomes for clients.

There remains a strong need today for the supports provided by the Counselling Connect online platform. Clients have indicated that challenges relating to anxiety, depression, parenting stress and work stress are key factors (among many others) that are leading them to turn to Counselling Connect for support. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues,



The journey of care for Counselling Connect clients.

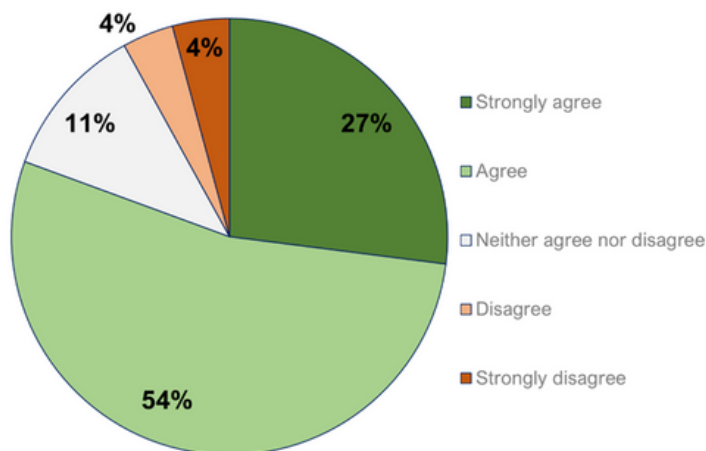
17,000
Clients served
to date

many individuals are also struggling with isolation and loneliness and need someone to talk to about their challenges. We also know that these challenges are pressing for many individuals in the Ottawa region; **85%** of client survey respondents indicated that they were either “concerned” or “very concerned” about the severity of their mental health and addictions challenges when they booked their appointment. For many across the local region Counselling Connect has become an important resource, providing critical and timely counselling interventions when they are needed most. Almost **95%** of clients indicated that the wait time for service was reasonable, and more than **eight-in-ten** clients (**81%**) have said that the care they received helped them deal more effectively with life’s challenges.

Anxiety	Depression	Relationships	Parenting	Isolation and loneliness	Work stress	Drugs and/or alcohol
50%	32%	21%	18%	15%	11%	3%

Leading reasons for clients booking appointment with Counselling Connect.

This platform has proven to hold many benefits beyond supporting residents through the pandemic. The platform increases access to care, facilitates greater collaboration between community partners, provides a strong value-for-service model for program delivery, brings a strong equity approach towards mental health and addictions supports, and leverages a digital health approach to improve both the client and provider experience. These program elements have improved the overall infrastructure of supports for mental health and addictions needs by reducing waitlists, improving cost



"The care I have received through Counselling Connect has helped me deal more effectively with life's challenges."

of providing care, and delivering rapid services that help people get the right amount of care at the right time.

The Counselling Connect model has helped transform the landscape of providing care to clients, and in the process has demonstrated the strong benefits of a collaborative and integrated approach towards mental health and addictions services. This report showcases how Counselling Connect is contributing to the creation of an efficient and effective health care model that is strongly aligned with the emerging Ontario Health Teams approach towards care. With continued funding, the Counselling Connect network can continue to deliver high quality care while continuing to expand its innovative approach to more residents in the Ottawa region.

Key Elements of the Counselling Connect Model

Counselling Connect is an innovative approach towards providing the right type of care at the right time for many individuals in the Ottawa region coping with mental health and addictions issues. This section highlights five key elements that not only make Counselling Connect unique as a new avenue of care, but establishes the platform as a critical part of the wider infrastructure of health care supports.

5 Key Elements of the Counselling Connect Model:



This section also highlights how the key elements of Counselling Connect are in strong alignment with the Quadruple Aim focus, showing that this platform improves the patient and caregiver experience, improves patient and population health outcomes, improves the provider experience, and provides better value for service. Icons associated with the Quadruple Aim will be shown throughout this section of the report to represent alignment with the Counselling Connect model.

The Quadruple Aim Model



Key Element #1: Ease of Access & Client Choice

The Counselling Connect model is structured to provide an approach with a strong focus on making counselling services more accessible by offering sessions that are easy to book and available throughout the day. This helps to transcend access barriers towards care, ensuring that individuals can easily find and book an online counselling session.

Counselling Connect's online platform provides clients with increased access to mental health and addictions counselling supports



Patient Experience

Accessing counselling services can be an intimidating process, especially for those who have not spoken to a counsellor before. Stigma around mental health and addictions, appointment fees, language barriers and availability of culturally relevant services are all barriers that can prevent someone from getting the care they need.[2] Counselling Connect helps to break down these barriers by providing an online platform that makes the booking process quick, easy, confidential, and secure. By making an online platform that is easy to navigate, this network has created a brand-new avenue to reduce access barriers to these important services.

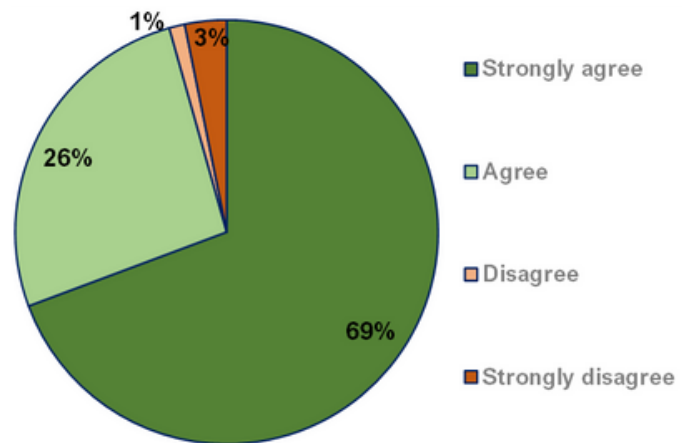
"Excellent service! I was so pleased to see how easy and timely it was to book."
- Counselling Connect Client

"Counselling Connect has increased the availability of short-term counselling support via rapid access and has helped in reducing the stigma associated with needing mental health support in general. Additional feedback indicates that the recipients appreciate the high quality of the interventions over traditional telephone-based supports. CC [Counselling Connect] has allowed people to tap into our services [which] they would not normally have access to."

- Counselling Connect Partner Organization

Clients reported that the Counselling Connect platform was accessible and easy to navigate, with **96%** agreeing that it was easy to book an appointment. The platform also provides short wait times for appointments, **94%** of clients said that wait times were reasonable for meeting with a counsellor. About **one-in-three clients (30%)** were able to secure an appointment by the next day and **70%** of clients were able to see a counsellor **within 5 days or less**. This allowed many clients to successfully book appointments on their own; almost **60%** of clients booked their appointments independently, with remaining appointments booked by a staff member from a partner organization or an external referring agency.

Sessions were made available throughout the day and on all days of the week, allowing clients to access counselling supports at a time that worked for their schedule. About **82%** of sessions were booked during the week, while the remaining **18%** of sessions were booked on weekends. While the lunch hour and early afternoon had the most bookings (about one-third of total appointments started between noon and 2 p.m.), the timing of appointments was distributed throughout the day with many appointments starting as early as 7 a.m., or as late as 8 p.m.



"It was easy to book an appointment through Counselling Connect"

Time Period	Percentage
Early Morning (7-9am)	15%
Late Morning (10-11am)	19%
Early Afternoon (12-2pm)	33%
Late Afternoon (3-5pm)	23%
Evening (6-8pm)	10%
Other Hours (9pm-6am)	0%

Session bookings by time

Weekdays	Weekends
82%	18%

Session bookings by weekday vs. weekend

Providing online appointments also reduces financial and access barriers that may prevent clients from seeking or obtaining care. [3] Securing childcare, taking time off work, and finding transportation are all barriers that prevent individuals from accessing counselling, especially for clients without leave and benefits provided by an employer. By providing a free online option with flexible availability, Counselling Connect significantly reduces barriers to accessing important counselling supports in the Ottawa region.

"There are many folk who can not travel, those who are intimidated by in person session or many whom are younger who simply prefer an online/virtual option. Many clients who may not have accessed services in the past are now being served."

- Counselling Connect Partner Organization

Approximately **one-third** of individuals used Counselling Connect to speak with a counsellor for the first time, which equates to approximately **5,000** individuals accessing counselling services for the first time due to the platform. Without access to Counselling Connect, **more than one-in-five** clients would not have spoken to anyone about their mental health and addiction challenges. Instead, **22%** of clients would have relied on friends and family for support, **27%** would have consulted their family doctor or a general practitioner, and **7%** would have gone to a hospital emergency department.

Approximately
5,000
individuals accessed support for the first time through Counselling Connect

GP or family doctor	Private counsellor	Friends or family	Nowhere	Telephone crisis support	Workplace-related counselling	Community agency	Hospital emergency department	Religious or spiritual support
27%	23%	22%	21%	18%	11%	10%	7%	4%

"If you had not been able to access services through Counselling Connect for this concern, where would you have gone for support?"

Counselling Connect supports the needs of clients requiring either a single appointment or a small number of counselling sessions over a short period of time



Health Outcomes

The Counselling Connect model is well-positioned to support individuals who require short-term counselling supports for mild to moderate mental health and addictions needs. Most clients only accessed one counselling appointment through Counselling Connect, with about 22% of clients being booked in-session for an additional appointment. Clients were also provided with additional supports during their session, 31% were given additional information on other available services, 30% were provided with resources, and 4% were referred directly to another service.

Counselling Connect provides the right level of care at the right time for clients. While some individuals require more clinical or emergency interventions, Counselling Connect provides a strong level of support to clients in need of short-term counselling resources, with over 80% of clients reporting that the care they received helped them deal more effectively with life's challenges. Counselling Connect provides the right mental health and addictions supports at the right time, providing early and effective care that helps prevent the need for more serious clinical interventions later in an individual's *lifespan*.

The Lifespan

Many mental health challenges start in adolescence and progress along a somewhat defined trajectory, with gradual increases in the severity of the issue and frequency at which it occurs. Through the perspective of a "lifespan" approach, individuals will need varying types of supports and interventions as they progress through life, and as their mental health and addictions needs change. In accordance with this understanding, the provision of supports at the onset of a mental health challenge can have substantial long-term benefits, preventing the need for more clinical supports later in an individual's lifespan.[4]

Key Element #2: Community Collaboration

Counselling Connect is a collaborative approach for providing mental health and addictions supports. The Counselling Connect model brings together more than **20** service provider organizations to provide clients access to a range of counselling services delivered by more than **100** trained mental health professionals. This approach has helped to break down silos between service provider agencies while providing clients with access to an increased range of counselling supports.

Counselling Connect helps to break down silos between service providers, increasing the ability for clients to access a wider range of supports



*Health
Outcomes*



*Provider
Experience*

The Counselling Connect platform allows for service provider staff from one partner organization to use a backdoor referral process to directly refer clients to appropriate counselling supports at another partner organization. This functionality allows service provider staff to directly support clients by helping them to book a counselling session that best suits their needs.

Between February and December 2021, about **42%** of total counselling appointment bookings were made by a service provider staff member. Of these bookings, **over one-third (35%)** were inter-agency referrals between organizations participating in Counselling Connect. As an example, **about 16%** of counselling sessions provided by Jewish Family Services of Ottawa were booked by staff from the Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region. The Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region staff also referred clients to other partner agencies within the Counselling Connect group. These referrals made up about **10%** of counselling sessions provided by both Family Services Ottawa and Centretown Community Health Centre. These cross-agency referrals demonstrate the impact of the Counselling Connect platform in creating a clear pathway for agency staff to make both internal and cross-agency referrals. This ensures clients are provided with a counselling session that meets their direct needs, serves them in their primary language, and is culturally appropriate.

More than

100

trained mental health professionals
provide counselling services through the
Counselling Connect Platform

Key Element #3: Efficient Service Delivery

An individual will require varying types of mental health and addictions supports depending on their place across the lifespan. Counselling Connect plays an important role in supporting individuals requiring short-term counselling for mild to moderate mental health and addictions challenges. With a focus on delivering short-term supports, the Counselling Connect platform supports clients while offering an efficient cost per service model that helps reduce strain on other agencies.

Counselling Connect has become an important part of a stepped care approach towards mental health and addictions supports, supporting clients across the lifespan



Health
Outcomes



Better
Value

Counselling Connect provides an appropriate level of support for many clients with mild to moderate mental health and addictions challenges. These clients often only require a single or a small number of sessions. Counselling Connect's services are largely based upon a prevention model where a single session is often sufficient to address most clients' concerns.[5] [6] Where some individuals may require more clinical interventions for severe mental health and addictions concerns or emergencies, Counselling Connect provides accessible and adequate short-term counselling supports to a large proportion of the client population requiring help for mental health and addictions needs. As shown further on in this report, Counselling Connect contributes strongly to a *stepped care approach* towards mental health and addictions supports.

The Stepped Care Approach

A "stepped care" approach to health care delivery is based on the provision of a series of evidence-based intervention stages. Following an assessment of a client's needs, the most effective and least intensive level of care is provided. Care is then either stepped "up" or "down" depending on the client's needs, preferences, and the outcomes of treatment. This approach ensures that clients are provided with a level of care that is highly responsive to their direct needs.[7]

The Counselling Connect model is a cost-efficient approach for providing mental health and addictions supports, and eases pressure on other support providers



The resources provided through the Counselling Connect platform are an important part of a stepped care approach towards mental health and addictions care in the Ottawa region. Not only are these resources highly effective for clients with mild to moderate concerns, but they also provide a strong value for service compared to alternative avenues of care.

Without access to the Counselling Connect online platform, many clients indicated that they would have gone to their family doctor or a general practitioner (GP) for care, visits that represent a high total cost for the health care system. For the Ottawa Health Team-Équipe Santé Ottawa attributed population during the 2019-2020 fiscal year, general practitioner physician fee expenses for visits relating to neurosis, anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder were **\$6,680,566**. Costs for visits relating to drug/alcohol abuse or dependence without significant comorbidities were **\$2,102,924**, while visits to a GP for concerns relating to depression cost a total of **\$1,999,897**.^[i]

Many Counselling Connect clients also indicated that they would have presented to a hospital emergency department for care without access to the platform. Over the 2019-2020 fiscal year, visits to emergency departments for concerns relating to neurosis, anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder were **\$1,846,890**, and visits relating to depression carried a total cost of **\$789,822**. Visits for drug/alcohol abuse or dependence without significant comorbidities had a total expense of **\$951,159**.^[ii]

\$142

The average cost of a Counselling Connect session

In contrast, the average counselling session provided by Counselling Connect costs **\$142**, providing a high value for service in comparison to mental health supports provided by a visit to a GP or hospital emergency room.

While primary care and emergency care remain critical supports for many clients facing mental health and addictions challenges, the supports provided by Counselling Connect offer a high value for service option to support clients with less severe needs who may be best served through a short-term counselling approach.

[i] Health care expense data for visits to general practitioners and hospital emergency departments provided by the Ontario Ministry of Health. Population groups are derived using the Canadian Institute for Health Information's Health Population Grouper methodology, which categorizes patients by their most clinically relevant Health Population Group.

[ii] Health care expense data provided by Ontario Ministry of Health.

Key Element #4: Equity Focus

There have historically been many barriers for members of marginalized communities to access mental health and addictions supports. The Counselling Connect platform applies a strong focus on equitable outcomes by providing counselling services specifically designed to support individuals from a range of equity-seeking groups.

Counselling services have been designed specifically for equity-seeking groups



Client Experience

From its beginning in the spring of 2020, Counselling Connect has approached providing counselling supports with a dedicated equity lens. Organization partners have worked together to ensure that inclusive supports are available for equity-seeking groups, including clients identifying as Indigenous, LGBT2SQ+ and African, Caribbean, and Black.

Between February and December 2021, Counselling Connect made available a total of over **900** counselling sessions for Indigenous clients, almost **600** sessions for clients identifying as LGBT2SQ+, and about **850** sessions for individuals identifying as belonging to African, Caribbean, and Black communities.

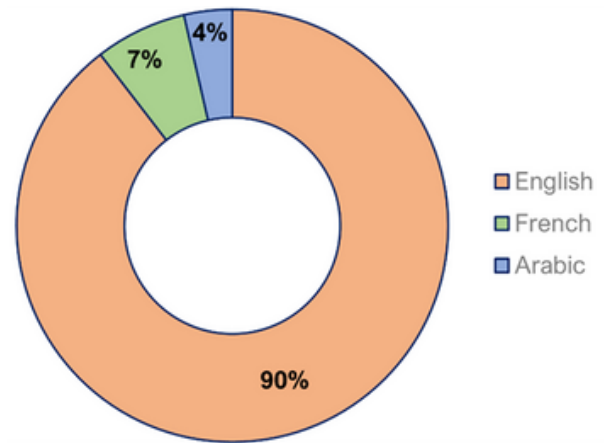
"This service is especially important in serving the ACB (African, Caribbean, and Black) population which is often underserved in mainstream mental health systems. The private, no-cost care from dedicated ACB mental health professionals is a critical entry point for clients to access a broader range of needed supports."

- Counselling Connect Partner Organization

Counselling Connect has also demonstrated flexibility in meeting emerging needs by including additional services. The Counselling Connect platform started offering counselling sessions in Arabic in February 2021 to provide support for a large and underserved population of residents in the Ottawa region. Since appointments became available in Arabic in February 2021, **about 650** sessions have been posted on the online platform. A flexible program model and an equity-informed program planning process have ensured that Counselling Connect is structured to support equity-seeking groups while continuously evolving to better support emerging needs.

650
Counselling
sessions
offered in
Arabic since
February 2021

In addition to providing counselling supports for different equity-seeking groups, Counselling Connect provides counselling supports for various demographic groups, providing services for adults, youth, and families with children. Between February and December 2021, about 6,900 general appointments were made available for adults, almost 1,200 appointments were available for young adults and youth, and over 3,000 appointments were made available for children and family counselling. This range of supports ensures that counselling supports are fully available for individuals across their lifespan.



Counselling sessions by language (between February-December 2021)

Available Appointments By Age Group February - December 2021		
Age Group	Total Number	Percentage of Total Appointments
Adults	9236	68%
Youth & Young Adults	1181	9%
Children (and Families)	3039	23%

Available appointments by age group

“We are so grateful that you offer FREE counselling for children. It would’ve made it very challenging to pay for this privately. We hope this service extends beyond the pandemic! It’s so needed!”

- Counselling Connect Client

Counselling Connect has proven to be an innovative model for bringing organizations together to support clients. This level of collaboration has created an unprecedented level of collective impact, leading to more equitable levels of access to mental health and addictions services for clients in the Ottawa region.

Counselling Connect has helped to expand access to counselling supports for members of equity-seeking groups



Client Experience



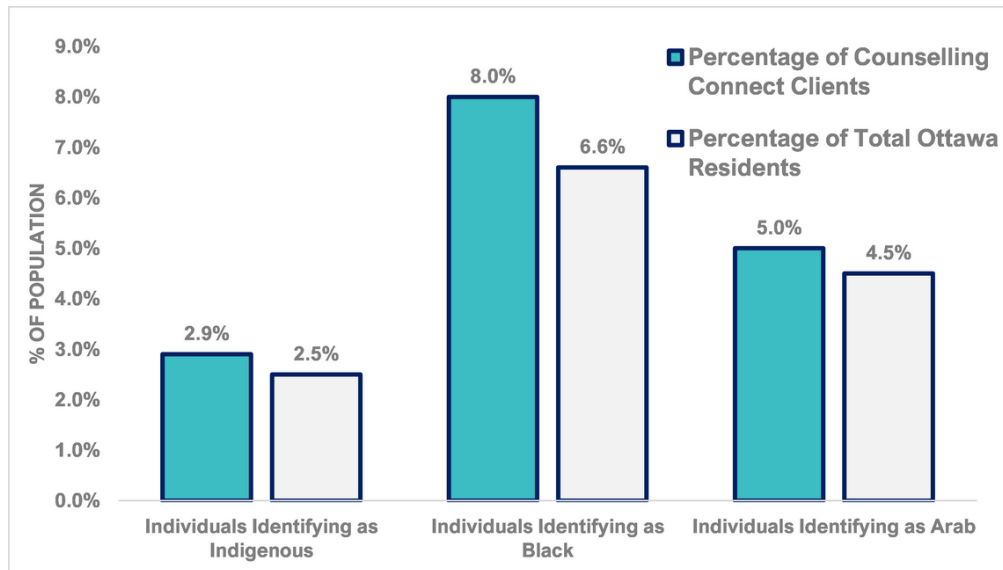
Health Outcomes

The provision of counselling services for members of different equity-seeking groups and linguistic groups has led to expanded access to mental health and addictions supports for residents across Ottawa.

Between February and December 2021, 8% of individuals accessing Counselling Connect services identified as Black, 5% identified as Indigenous, and 5% identified as Arab.

Newcomers, or immigrants to Canada, also comprised 12% of total clients. As illustrated in the relative rate comparison graph below, Counselling Connect has been successful in providing supports to members of equity-seeking groups.

Approximately
1,300
clients from equity-seeking groups accessed counselling for the first time through this platform



Counselling Connect client demographic data compared to City of Ottawa demographic data from 2016 census. [8]

Counselling Connect has also provided access to counselling supports for individuals with a range of gender identities and sexual orientations. Clients identifying as female made up 68% of the total client population, while 20% identified as male, 5% identified as non-binary, and 3% identified as trans. In terms of sexual orientation, 71% of clients identified as straight (heterosexual), while 29% of clients identified as either asexual, bisexual, gay, lesbian, pansexual, queer, questioning (or unsure) or with another identity.

Counselling Connect has also proven to be an important resource for individuals living with a disability in the Ottawa region. Between February and December 2021, almost one-quarter (24%) of clients using the online platform self-identified with a disability.

In total, 46% of clients identified as belonging to an equity-seeking group, which equates to approximately 4,600 appointments provided within a 12-month period. Almost 30% indicated that this was their first time meeting with a counsellor. This means that about 1,300 clients from equity-seeking groups each year access counselling for the first time due to the Counselling Connect platform.

4,600
Counselling sessions offered annually to clients from equity-seeking groups

Key Element #5: Digital Health Delivery

The Counselling Connect platform was originally launched to support the continuation of counselling appointments during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the platform's launch, it has created a viable, effective, and popular new method for increasing access to support.

The Counselling Connect model effectively uses a digital health delivery approach to expand access to mental health and addictions supports



Client Experience

Clients accessing the online Counselling Connect platform indicate that navigating the site to book an appointment was a seamless experience with a short wait time. This short wait time builds trust in an online approach towards care and is especially important given that **85%** of clients indicated that they were either concerned or very concerned about their mental health and addictions issue when booking their appointment.

In addition to a short wait time for service and easy booking process, it is also crucial for clients to feel that their personal information is kept confidential when booking an online counselling appointment. A total of **94%** of clients strongly agreed or agreed that they felt their personal information was safe and secure using the Counselling Connect platform.

94%

of clients felt their personal information was kept safe and secure

The Counselling Connect model effectively leverages a digital health approach to support collaboration between agencies to improve care



Client Experience



Health Outcomes

While the Counselling Connect model provides an easy and effective method to access counselling services, it has also served to improve the ability of service provider agencies to collaborate with one another to support the mental health and wellbeing of clients. Between February and December 2021 alone, **almost 1,500** cross-agency referrals were made between service provider agency staff.

Counsellors are able to easily refer clients on to other organizations for relevant services.”
- Counselling Connect Partner Organization

The Counselling Connect platform also allows participating service organizations to increase their efficiency in how appointments are made available and booked. Organizations can post available appointments both on Counselling Connect's online platform and internally through their own organizations' booking systems. This allows local organizations to be more efficient in using resources, while allowing providers more flexibility in setting their availability to deliver counselling sessions.

Key Learnings from Counselling Connect

The Counselling Connect model provides important lessons for improving access to care for mental health and addictions challenges. The provision of online counselling has made positive improvements in how clients access important resources, and helps to prevent the need for more clinical and emergency interventions later in their lifespan. These key findings not only detail some of the positive impacts Counselling Connect has had to date on transforming the service provision landscape but offer insight into the longer-term benefits and opportunities that are possible with a continuation of funding for this innovative network.

Key Learning #1: Counselling Connect is driving a changing landscape of mental health and addictions service delivery

The Counselling Connect platform was originally set up to allow for the continuation of counselling supports during the COVID-19 pandemic. During its operation, this network has changed the local counselling services landscape by using an online platform to expand access to important resources with a higher value for services compared to visits to hospital emergency departments or a family doctor. This platform has also allowed service providers to collaborate with one another to provide care and become local experts in e-health delivery. Through these innovative approaches Counselling Connect is changing the mental health and addictions services landscape in the Ottawa region.

A. Counselling Connect provides expanded access to mental health and addictions supports, helping to provide access to care for more clients.

Counselling Connect's online platform makes booking an appointment quick and straightforward. This ease of access allows clients to quickly and securely book an appointment that provides a high level of care at a time and date that works for their schedule. This approach towards accessing mental health and addictions resources has expanded the availability of timely care, providing important brief counselling supports which act as a preventative measure. This in turn reduces the likelihood that untreated conditions will require more intensive mental health and addictions supports later in a client's lifespan.

“CC (Counselling Connect) has helped community members in need to access short term counselling. It has increased our reach as an organization.”

- Counselling Connect Partner Organization

B. The Counselling Connect model is a strong example of the role of digital healthcare in the delivery of mental health and addictions supports.

The Ontario Health Team model also places a strong focus on the role of digital healthcare methods to provide comprehensive and integrated care to clients. The Counselling Connect platform provides an excellent example of how digital healthcare delivery can expand access while delivering a high level of care. While an array of similar brief counselling services were in operation before the launch of Counselling Connect, this online platform has generated significant collective impact among the local mental health and addictions supports sector by empowering organizations to leverage a digital healthcare approach and broaden their reach of support.

In the process, service agencies involved with Counselling Connect have become local experts in using digital healthcare delivery strategies to support clients. Counselling Connect's role as a leader in digital health delivery has been recognized by the health sector; the network was a **2021 recipient of the Transformative Change Award** from the Alliance for Healthier Communities, and other organizations from across Canada such as [Community Connect YYC](#) in Calgary and [Family Services Saskatchewan](#) have started to provide counselling supports using low-barrier online platforms.

C. Counselling Connect is a strong value-for-service model that can provide expanded care with a lower cost per service compared to visits to hospital emergency rooms and general practitioners.

The Counselling Connect model has expanded access to services, increased inter-agency cooperation and has developed local expertise in digital healthcare delivery. It also has provided a high level of value for service for clients with mild to moderate mental health and addictions challenges. This strong level of value for service presents a strong opportunity for Counselling Connect to assist in diverting non-urgent patients away from unnecessary visits to a hospital emergency department or general practitioner.

"I will recommend this service and turn to it again in the future if I ever feel as desperate and despondent again. This service helped me and kept me out of the emergency room."

- Counselling Connect Client

Hospital emergency departments are critical supports for individuals in a state of crisis, and primary care continues to be an important resource for supporting clients with mental health and addictions issues. The services provided by Counselling Connect do not serve to replace these important health care resources but complement them by providing a resource with a high value for service for clients who would be well served by brief counselling supports.

In addition, there are significant and positive long-term benefits to invest in the preventative mental health interventions provided by Counselling Connect. As highlighted by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, programs that help individuals access treatment earlier in their lifespan can prevent the need for more intensive clinical supports later in life. If the number of people experiencing a new mental illness decreased by just 10% in a given year in Canada, it is estimated that within 10 years the national economy would be saving **\$4 billion per year** in health and social care costs.[9] Furthermore, a study located

21%
of clients would not
have sought support
without Counselling
Connect

in the United Kingdom estimated that improving the management of mental health in workplace settings including prevention and early action to reduce stress and other mental health concerns could decrease lost productivity costs by up to **30%**, resulting in an annual savings of almost **\$400,000** for an organization of 1000 employees.[10] We also know that over **20%** of Counselling Connect clients would not have sought support for their mental health or addictions concern; these concerns would have gone untreated, likely leading to negative health outcomes for clients and increased needs for intensive supports later in their lifespan.

Key Learning #2: Counselling Connect has become an important part of a stepped care approach towards mental health and addictions supports

The *stepped care approach* is comprised of a series of evidence-based interventions to provide the most effective and least intensive treatment to clients. This approach ensures that clients are receiving care that is highly effective and responsive to their current needs based on where they are in their lifespan. By filling a previously unmet need for many clients, Counselling Connect has demonstrated that its unique model fits extremely well into a stepped care approach towards a larger mental health and addictions support strategy. In addition to improving client outcomes, this network has helped to reduce stress on other parts of the mental health and addictions supports infrastructure while contributing to stronger collaboration between agencies to improve client service.

	Population MHA Needs	Core Service Categories
Lowest Volume, Highest Cost	5 Severe or Complex Need	Highly specialized, intensive
	4 Moderate to Severe Need	Intensive and Specialized
	3 Moderate Need	Targeted to moderate MHA needs
	2 Low Need	Early intervention & self-management
Highest Volume, Lowest Cost	1 General Population	Population-based health promotion & prevention

Adapted from core services framework created by Mental Health and Addictions Centre of Excellence, Ontario Health [11]

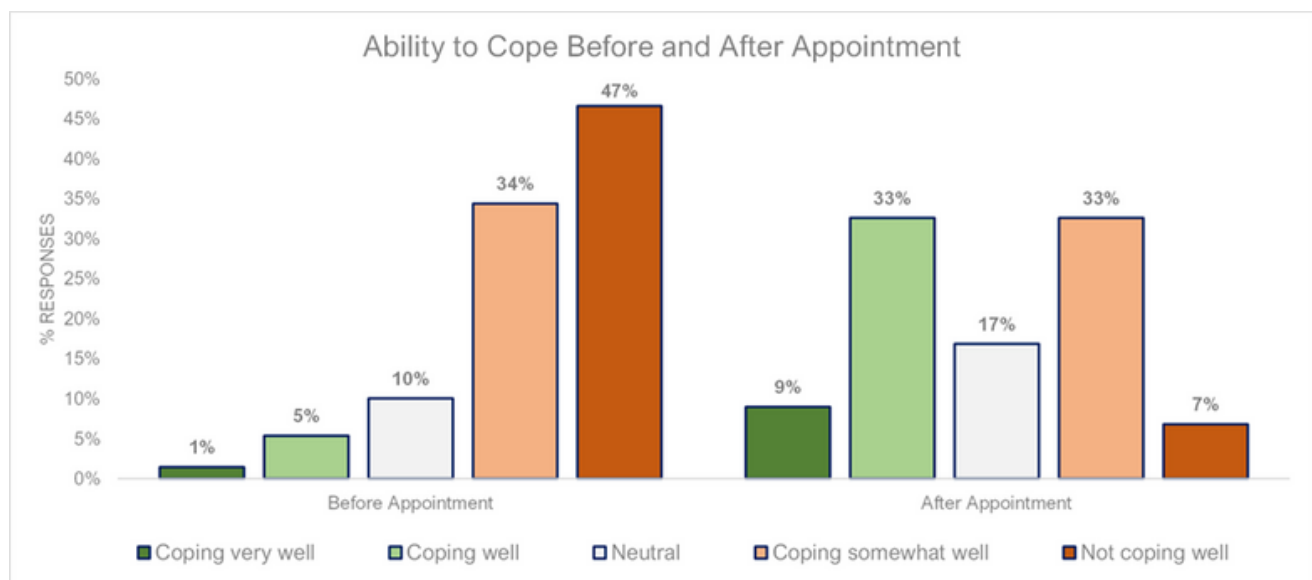
Counselling Connect can support clients represented by all levels of the Stepped Care model.

Many clients who require brief counselling services will likely be in the Low Need and Moderate Need categories, however clients within the General Population level may also require some supports when dealing with a crisis. Counselling Connect also supports clients in the Moderate to Severe Need and Severe or Complex Need groups by providing some immediate supports while they wait to receive additional clinical supports from other parts of the healthcare system. With all that in mind, Counselling Connect serves clients across the Stepped Care model whenever, providing immediate support to resolve a mental health or addictions concern, and linking to coordinated access mechanisms through established pathways when more specialized/intensive supports are needed. For many equity seeking groups, Counselling Connect as a low-barriered, culturally responsive service is often the first point of contact with the mental health and addictions system and in these situations, Counselling Connect is well positioned to bridge to other community and health services as needed.

A. The Counselling Connect model provides an effective level of care for clients with mild to moderate mental health and addictions concerns.

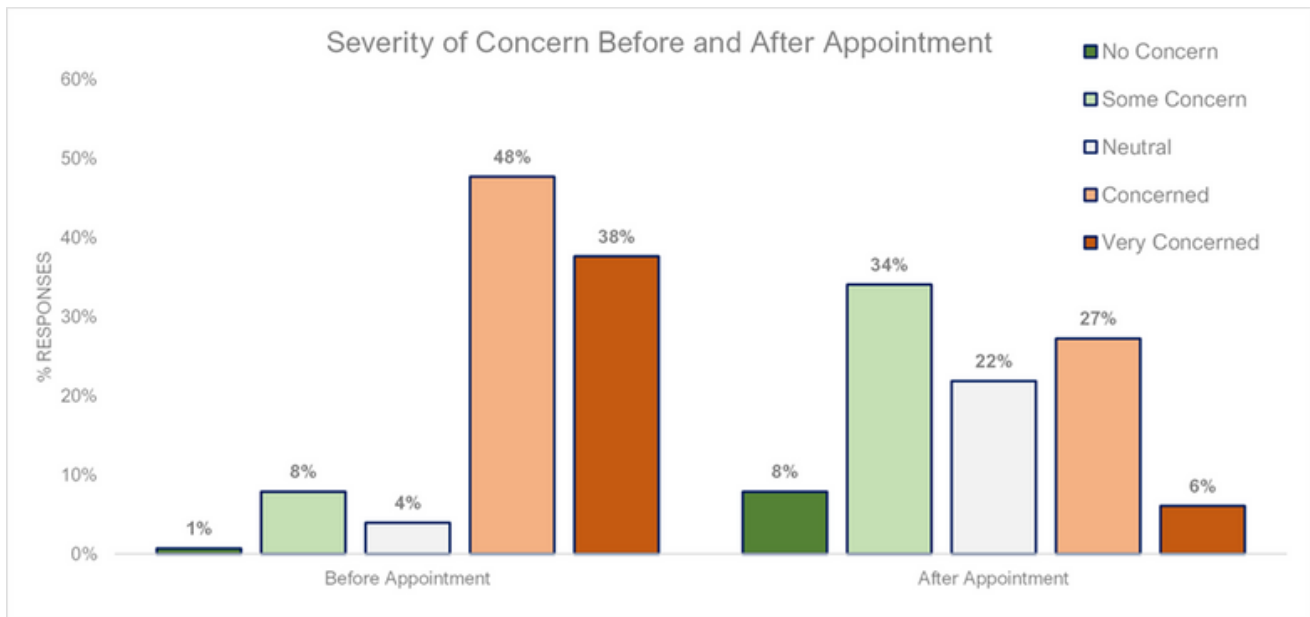
The Counselling Connect model of care is centred on brief counselling supports, and providers are trained in single-session narrative therapy and/or single-session solutions focused therapy. These brief counselling approaches hold the position that treatment “should not extend one session longer than necessary and should not stop one session short of what people need”. [12] This approach allows counselling interventions to be uniquely tailored to the need of each client, without taking up unnecessary resources to provide additional sessions where they are not needed. Brief, single-session counselling has been shown to be an economically effective approach that provides strong clinical outcomes. [13] [14] This approach of using brief, single-session counselling provides an effective level of care for individuals with mild to moderate mental health and addictions concerns over a short period of time.

Receiving care quickly is extremely important for individuals struggling with mental health or addictions concerns. Most clients book a counselling session while experiencing a heightened state of concern about a mental health or addictions challenge. Over 85% of clients indicated that they felt either “concerned” (48%) or “very concerned” (38%) about the challenge they were facing when they booked an appointment. About half of these clients (47%) said that they were not coping well at the time of booking, a further 34% said they were coping “somewhat well.” Just 6% of total respondents reported that they were coping either well or very well when scheduling their session. The vast majority of clients (70%) were able to get an appointment within five days of booking.



Client ability to cope with challenges before and after one appointment

Although clients were struggling to cope with their mental and addictions challenges when reaching out to Counselling Connect, many found significant support through the brief counselling interventions provided by the platform. More than **80%** agreed that the care they received helped them deal more effectively with life’s challenges. Following a counselling appointment, the percentage of clients indicating that they were “concerned” or “very concerned” about their challenges dropped by **52%**. Just **6%** of clients reported they were still “very concerned” after receiving supports from Counselling Connect. Similarly, the percentage of clients who were not coping well with their concerns dropped by **40%** after a brief counselling intervention.



Client severity of concern before and after one appointment

Each person accessing supports from Counselling Connect is unique in both the type and severity of their mental health and addictions concerns. Some require additional, more clinical supports, while others will be well served by a short series of counselling. Most clients found the support they needed with just one appointment, only **22%** of clients booked a follow-up appointment with a counsellor.

almost
80%
of clients only
required one
counselling
session

The fundamental principle behind the brief counselling approach, that support should fit everyone’s specific level of need, positions Counselling Connect as an important part of the Ottawa Health

Team-Équipe Santé Ottawa’s mental health and addictions support strategy.

B. The Counselling Connect model may reduce pressures on other mental health and addictions service providers.

The previous section has shown that Counselling Connect provides an effective level of support tailored to each client. However, this approach also brings the additional benefit of reducing pressure on other critical pillars of the mental health and addictions supports infrastructure.

Counselling Connect's model is designed to provide rapid access support to clients with mild to moderate mental health and addictions challenges. There are many services in the Ottawa region designed to support a more severe level of need, however, these supports require a more clinical intervention, and current wait times present a barrier for clients to receive care. For these clients, Counselling Connect fills an additional need, providing temporary rapid supports for clients while they wait for more clinical supports from other parts of the mental health and addictions supports infrastructure, such as AccessMHA.ca and 1Call1Click.ca (see the next report section for more information about these services). In addition, clients contacting these agencies for support have been referred to Counselling Connect if they do not require a more intensive clinical level of care.

Many clients in distress facing mental health and addictions issues also attend hospital emergency departments as a first point of contact for care. Very often these clients could have been adequately served in a non-emergency setting by a platform such as Counselling Connect.

Between April 2020 and March 2021, about one-third (32%) of patients attributed to the Ottawa Health Team-Équipe Santé Ottawa attended a hospital emergency department as their first point of care for a mental health and addictions related concern, a total of over 1,700 individuals.[iii] Furthermore, between April 2016 and March 2019, a total of 3,331 visits to The Ottawa Hospital emergency room were recorded for a non-urgent mental health and addictions related concern.[iv]

While a hospital emergency department is well suited for critical mental health and addictions emergencies, many of these visits could be instead diverted to platforms like Counselling Connect which is designed specifically to provide brief and responsive counselling sessions that can provide positive outcomes for many of these patients.

32%
of patients attributed to the Ottawa Health Team attended a hospital emergency department as their first point of care for a mental health and addictions issue

[iii] Data provided by Ontario Ministry of Health, collaborative Quality Improvement Indicator data for 2020-2021.

[iv] Data provided by The Ottawa Hospital. Number of visits to the emergency department for a mental health related primary concern and a Canadian Triage and Acuity Scale (CTAS) rating of 4-5, indicating a lower level of urgency.

Key Learning #3: The Counselling Connect model represents a crucial part of the future delivery of mental health and addictions supports within an Ontario Health Teams environment

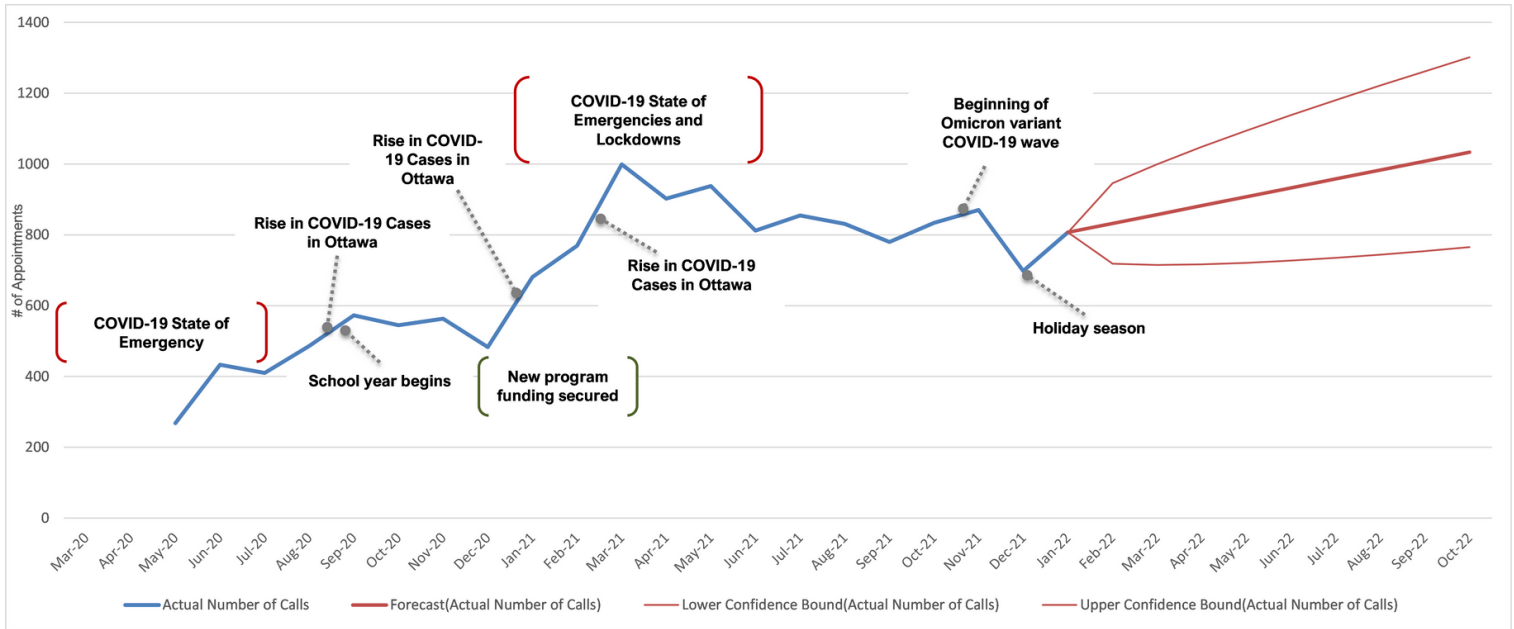
Counselling Connect has become an important part of a stepped care approach towards mental health and addictions supports in the Ottawa region and is an important initiative within the Ottawa Health Team-Équipe Santé Ottawa. The platform increases access to care for clients, delivers highly effective support, provides a high level of value for service, and facilitates collaboration between health service providers. As the network moves into its third year of operation, there is strong rationale to continue funding for this critical platform while exploring further opportunities to collaborate with new partners to further improve the delivery of care.

A. There is a high need for mental health and addictions supports in the Ottawa region, and Counselling Connect is continuing to see an upwards trajectory in terms of number of clients served.

There continues to be a high level of need for mental health and addictions supports in the Ottawa region, and this need for services has been reflected in the continuing rise in appointment bookings through the Counselling Connect platform. Since the network began, there has been a steady increase in the number of appointments offered, from **433** appointments in June 2020 to **807** in January 2022.[v] Over the duration of its existence, Counselling Connect has continued to see a rise in use, as individuals have turned to this online platform for supports throughout the multiple waves of the COVID-19 pandemic.

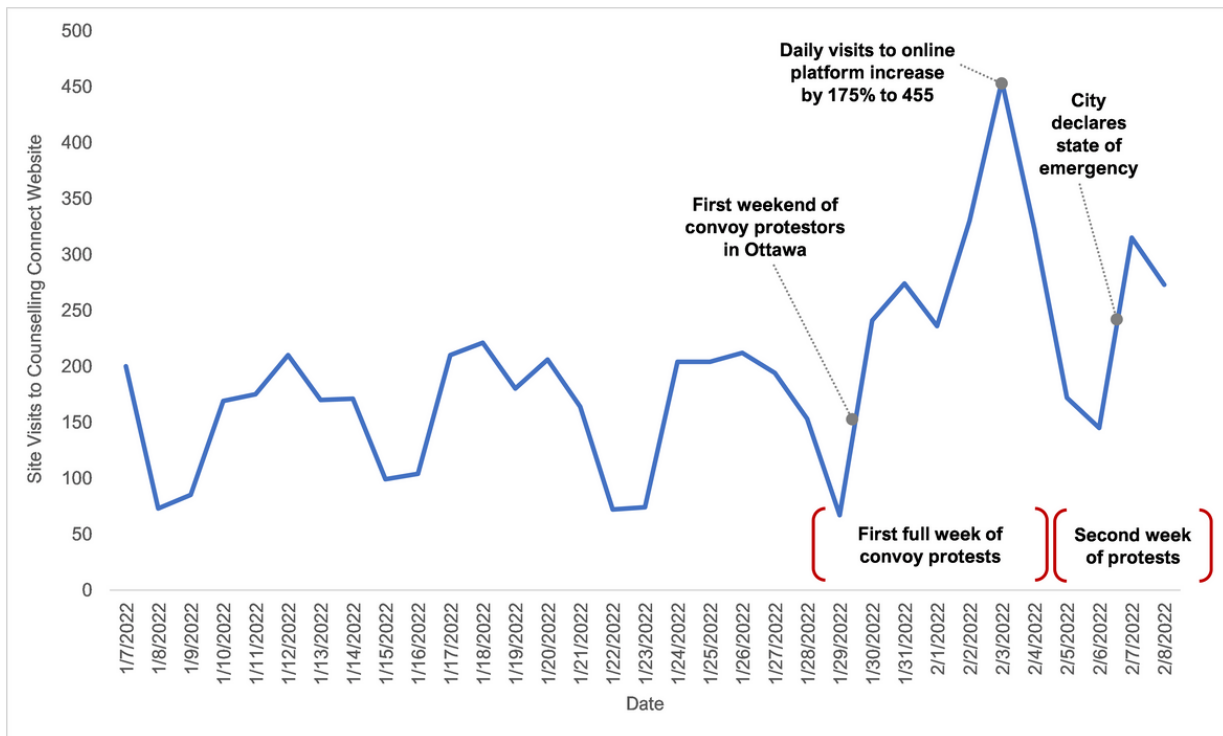
Counselling Connect is forecasted to continue to serve a high number of clients heading into late 2022. To meet this continuing high level of demand, the Counselling Connect platform will require funding security to ensure that the online platform can support new clients while maintaining the ability to provide rapid access to highly effective brief counselling supports. The **sharp rise** in the number of counselling sessions provided between December 2020 and March 2021 following a funding increase shows that Counselling Connect has a proven track record of operationalizing additional funding to significantly scale up its level of operation and serve even more individuals.

[v] While Counselling Connect started providing services in May 2020, data for a full continuous month was available starting June 2020.



Timeline of Counselling Connect appointments by month, and future forecasting to October 2022

Counselling Connect has also proven to be an important resource to help local residents cope with major disruptive events. In late January of this year, a large protest convoy arrived in Ottawa, creating a severe and prolonged period of disruption and distress for many residents. Following the arrival of the convoy on Friday, January 28th, the number of daily visits to the Counselling Connect website increased significantly. By the end of the first full week of protests, the daily number of site visits jumped by 175%, from a daily average of 165 in January to 455 on February 3rd. Similar increases in appointment bookings were seen in 2020 and 2021 throughout several COVID-19 related lockdowns, showing that Counselling Connect has become an essential mental health and addictions support for clients throughout the Ottawa region.



Timeline of visits to Counselling Connect website, mid-January to early February

The Counselling Connect platform also acts as a bridge for many members of equity-seeking groups to access counselling supports, often for the first time. By setting up specific counselling supports for African, Caribbean, and Black clients, LGBT2SQ+ clients, Indigenous clients, and providing sessions in Arabic, French and English, Counselling Connect has made counselling accessible for more individuals who may not have sought support in the past. **More than one-third (36%)** of clients identifying as Black indicated that they had never attended counselling prior to booking through Counselling Connect. For clients identifying as Arab, **almost half of clients (46%)** attended their first counselling session through this platform. Without access to Counselling Connect, **18%** of clients identifying as Black and **23%** of clients identifying as Arab reported that they would not have sought any support for their mental health and addictions challenges.

B. Funding a continuation of this model will allow for a better understanding of the impact of short-term counselling services on emergency department visits for mental health & addictions concerns

Counselling Connect is an important part of a stepped care approach towards mental health and addictions supports in the Ottawa region and plays a strong role in providing upstream, short-term counselling supports that can lessen the impact on more critical and resource-intensive visits to hospital emergency departments.

While there is not currently sufficient data to directly link the impact of Counselling Connect to emergency department visits for non-urgent mental health and addictions issues, we know from the academic literature that brief counselling supports, including the single-session narrative therapy and single-session, solutions-focused therapy used by Counselling

Connect staff have proven to be effective in supporting positive outcomes for patients and preventing more intensive supports later on in their lifespan.[15] We also know from client feedback that accessing the services provided by Counselling Connect offers a viable alternative to visiting a hospital emergency department, and that a vast majority of clients reported a significant positive progression in the severity of their concerns following a counselling session.

Extending funding for the Counselling Connect platform will allow for an opportunity to better understand the connection between the upstream supports provided by Counselling Connect and visits to hospital emergency departments for non-urgent mental health concerns. This will not only have continuing positive impacts for clients in the Ottawa area but will serve to provide quantitative evidence for the role of brief counselling sessions in supporting an efficient stepped care strategy towards mental health and addictions supports.

3,331

patients attended The Ottawa Hospital Emergency Department for a non-urgent mental health and addictions issue between April 2016 and March 2019

C. Counselling Connect contributes to a collaborative Ontario Health Teams environment that encourages agencies to work together to support clients.

Counselling Connect is a partnership of more than twenty local organizations working together to support positive outcomes for individuals facing mental health and addictions challenges. The network's online platform has enabled these organizations to work together and pool resources, expanding the reach of support services in the process.

"...we get more clients seeking mental health support than we have the resource capacity to serve. We use the counselling connect portal to help remedy our resource program gaps."

- Counselling Connect Partner Organization

This level of collaboration between agencies provides a best practice for the inter-agency team environment, which will be at the heart of the emerging Ontario Health Teams model. Through showing the effectiveness of pooling resources with a shared online platform, Counselling Connect has established itself as an early, leading example of how health service providers can work together within an Ontario Health Teams environment to leverage digital health strategies and improve both patient and provider experience.

"It has been easy to refer clients to another partner which was difficult before."

- Counselling Connect Partner Organization

D. There are plans for the integration of existing and new services into the Counselling Connect model.

Counselling Connect serves a critical role supporting individuals with their mental health and addictions challenges. However, there are further opportunities for expanding and integrating this successful approach into the wider service infrastructure. These service collaborations and expansions will allow Counselling Connect to build on its strong successes of using a digital healthcare strategy to expand the reach of care to more clients with mental health and addictions needs.

One enhancement to the Counselling Connect model will be increasing how this platform interacts with other existing regional services to support positive outcomes for clients. On the following page are a few examples highlighting how Counselling Connect is collaborating with other services to provide an integrated and comprehensive approach towards mental health and addictions supports.

Counselling Connect is also working towards adding group counselling supports to the available services on its online platform. This additional service enhancement will further improve the level of care for individuals by providing **psychoeducation and support group sessions**.

Ongoing Service Integration Opportunities

1Call1Click.ca & AccessMHA.ca

[1Call1Click.ca](#) and [AccessMHA.ca](#) are both regional points of access for individuals of all ages and/or families accessing the mental health and addictions/substance use system, providing access through screening, triage, and assessment to a suite of services across varying levels of need and acuity.

[1Call1Click.ca](#), and [AccessMHA.ca](#) are committed to working together with all service providers, including [Counsellingconnect.org](#), to ensure that people seeking services know where to begin, and are able to access the service they need.

Ontario 211

Referral specialists at [Ontario 211](#), a community and social services help line, can now directly book a Counselling Connect appointment for clients calling into their services.

The Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region

[The Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region](#) is a founding partner of Counselling Connect and continues to support this initiative while responding to increased demand at the Distress Centre.

Ottawa Paramedic Service

Counselling Connect is working on an ongoing basis with the [Ottawa Paramedic Service](#) to collaborate on counselling referral options for patients to avoid unnecessary hospital emergency room visits.

E. There are strong implications for the local mental health and addictions supports infrastructure if Counselling Connect funding is not extended.

The Counselling Connect model has established itself as a valuable and critical pillar of the mental health and addictions support infrastructure in the Ottawa region. There are several significant and negative implications for client health outcomes and agency partnerships if funding is discontinued for this network.

First, discontinuation of funding for Counselling Connect would have a significantly negative effect on the availability of service for attributed clients within the Ottawa Health Team-Équipe Santé Ottawa, and individuals across the wider region. Since its inception, Counselling Connect has provided counselling sessions to 17,000 clients, including many clients from equity-

81%

of clients are able to deal more effectively with life's challenges

seeking groups, including African, Caribbean, and Black clients, LGBT2SQ+ clients, and Indigenous clients. This online platform has provided access to counselling for the first

time to many clients, and these counselling supports have generated strong positive outcomes. 81% of clients indicated that the care they received helped them deal more effectively with life's challenges and 52% reported a decrease in the level of concern about their mental health and addictions challenge. Discontinuation of funding for Counselling Connect would remove an important mental health and addictions resource for many individuals in Ottawa and the surrounding area, including many clients from equity-seeking groups.

“Counselling Connect’s diverse mental health portal provides an accessible space where everyone can feel seen and whole. This has reduced some of the barriers racialized folks voiced about accessing traditional mental health services.”

- Counselling Connect Partner Organization

Second, the discontinuation of Counselling Connect would negatively affect the ability of service agencies to collaborate within an Ontario Health Teams environment by dissolving this shared platform that has been built and operated through collaborative efforts, and now serves as a best practice for bringing agencies together to support client care.

Finally, Counselling Connect has proven itself to be an important part of a stepped care approach towards mental health and addictions supports, lessening the demand on other sectors of the health care system such as hospital emergency departments. Counselling Connect also provides an upstream approach towards care which can lessen the severity of supports an individual requires later in their lifespan. Continuing to invest in Counselling Connect will help make the sector, in general, more responsive to the needs of clients and more cost-effective by providing an effective level of care for individuals with mild to moderate mental health and addictions challenges.

Conclusion

In the spring of 2020, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic pushed organizations to collaborate on an unprecedented level, creating a new innovative approach towards providing counselling supports. Over the past two years, this model has proven to be far more than a temporary solution for individuals coping with the COVID-19 pandemic. The Counselling Connect model has leveraged a digital healthcare strategy and employed a strong equity focus to reduce barriers to care and increase access to effective brief counselling sessions. In the process, this network has increased collaboration between agencies, and has delivered strong positive outcomes for clients with a high-value cost per service model.

Counselling Connect has driven change within the local landscape of mental health and addictions supports. It has proven to be an important part of a stepped care approach towards care and exemplifies providing team-based integrative care in alignment with the Ontario Health Teams model. This network has not only proven to be an essential part of the service fabric for mental health and addictions supports but holds many more opportunities for greater collaboration with other service providers. Continuing the funding for this important platform will ensure that Counselling Connect continues to be there for clients in the Ottawa region and will continue to help build a strong health care system focused on collaboration, innovation, equity, and positive outcomes for all.

Bibliography

- [1] Lamb, T., Pachana, N. A., & Dissanayaka, N. (2019). Update of recent literature on remotely delivered psychotherapy interventions for anxiety and depression. *Telemedicine and e-Health*, 25(8), 671–677. <https://doi.org/10.1089/tmj.2018.0079>.
- [2] Schomerus, G., Stolzenburg, S., Freitag, S., Speerforck, S., Janowitz, D., Evans-Lacko, S., Muehlan, H., & Schmidt, S. (2018). Stigma as a barrier to recognizing personal mental illness and seeking help: A prospective study among untreated persons with mental illness. *European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience*, 269(4), 469–479. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00406-018-0896-0>.
- [3] Hilty, D.M., Ferrer, D.C., Parish, M.B., Johnston, B., Callahan, E.J., Yellowlees, P.M. (2013). The effectiveness of telemental health: A 2013 review. *Telemed J E Health*, 19, 444–454. <https://doi.org/10.1089/tmj.2013.0075>.
- [4] Department of Health and Ageing, Australian Government. (2011). A whole of Life-Span Approach to Mental Health and Mental Illness. Retrieved February 4h 2022 from <http://www.mentalhealthpromotion.net/?i=training.en.bibliography.2292>.
- [5] Hymmen, P., Stalker, C.A., Cait, C. (2013). The Case for Single-Session Therapy: Does the Empirical Evidence Support the Increased Prevalence of this Service Delivery Model? *Journal of Mental Health*, 22(1), 60-71. <https://doi.org/10.3109/09638237.2012.670880>.
- [6] Talmon, M. (1990). *Single-session therapy: Maximizing the effect of the first (and often only) therapeutic encounter*. Jossey-Bass.
- [7] Mental Health Commission of Canada. (n.d.). *Stepped Care 2.0© E-Mental Health Demonstration Project Final Report*. Retrieved February 9 2022 from https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/emental_health_report_eng_0.pdf.
- [8] Statistics Canada. (2016). *Census Profile, 2016 Census Ottawa*. Retrieved 15 February 2022 from <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca>.
- [9] Mental Health Commission of Canada. (n.d.). *Making the Case for Investing in Mental Health in Canada*. Retrieved 15 February 2022 from https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/wp-content/uploads/drupal/2016-06/Investing_in_Mental_Health_FINAL_Version_ENG.pdf.
- [10] National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. (2009). *Promoting mental health at work: Business case*. Retrieved from <http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/live/12331/46023/46023.PDF>.
- [11] Rossi, M. & Kurdyak. (2021, May 6). *Improving Population Outcomes in Mental Health and Addictions, RISE OHT Webinar* [PowerPoint slides]. Mental Health and Addictions Centre of Excellence, Ontario Health. <https://www.mcmasterforum.org/rise/join-events/event-item/a-deep-dive-into-co-designing-care-models-for-your-priority-populations>.
- [12] Duvall, J., Young, K., Kays-Burden, A., Duncan, D., Cohen, N., Kiefer, H. (2012). No more, no less: Brief mental health services for children and youth. *Ontario Centre for Excellence for Children and Youth Mental Health*.
- [13] Duvall et al., *No more, no less*.
- [14] Bloom, B. (2001). Focused Single-Session Psychotherapy: A review of the Clinical and Research Literature. *Brief Treatment and Crisis Intervention* 1(1), 75-86. <http://triggered.edina.clockss.org/ServeContent?url=http%3A%2F%2Fbtci.stanford.clockss.org%2Fcgi%2F reprint%2F1%2F1%2F75.pdf>.
- [15] Department of Health and Ageing, Australian Government., 2011.

Partner Spotlight

Partnership and collaboration are a key part of the Counselling Connect model and success. Outlined here are three collaborations to put a spotlight on.

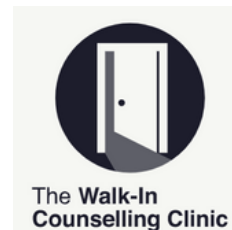


Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition

The African Caribbean and Black (ACB) Community Counselling Portal is the result of extensive collaboration between Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition partners including Centre Le Cap, Britannia Woods Community House and Somerset West CHC. Recognizing the need for culturally adapted ACB specific mental health supports and the importance of leveraging ACB expertise and leadership, the OBMHC and Counselling Connect partnership provides anonymous, safe, low-barrier, no-cost access to mental health counselling in three languages through the ACB portal since February 2021. Since launching the portal, there has been a 70% increase in uptake and expect to see continued increase in use as we build capacity to support Ottawa's diverse ACB communities..

The Walk-In Counselling Clinic

"The Walk-In Counselling Clinic (TWICC) has been the largest provider of single-session services in the Champlain Region for 8 years. The Counselling Connect platform allowed our sites to reach larger crowds and to simplify the access to our services during the pandemic. Going ahead, TWICC would continue to support the platform and intends to increase its integration into our services." Michael Gershuny, Director of Counselling and Mental Health, Jewish Family Services Ottawa



The Walk-In Counselling Clinic offers between 150 to 200 sessions a month on Counselling Connect.

The Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region



The Distress Centre (DC) provides a confidential phone based crisis and suicide intervention service to individuals of all ages. DC supports people in varying degrees of distress and crisis. Services are far reaching, covering both urban and rural areas. Collaboration is one of DC's strengths, as a Counselling Connect partner callers benefit from direct access to Counselling Connect appointments. Each month we connect between 100-115 callers (average over 12 month period) directly into the booking platform.

Beyond the direct bookings we find this resource to play a vital role in supporting callers who may be looking to self-advocate and access the forward facing website themselves.

- Chantal Ladoucer, Director of Client Support and Educational Services



Contact

www.counsellingconnect.org

info@counsellingconnect.org

@CounsellingConnectCounsellingOnConnecte

@CounsellingConx

@counsellingconnect