



Backgrounder:

Changing Lives: Development and Implementation of the interRAI Child and Youth Mental Health Suite of Assessments

Call to Action

The mental wellbeing of children and youth is a serious concern that demands attention. The burden of illness from mental health and addictions has been calculated to be more than 1.5 times that of all cancers, and more than 7 times all infectious diseases. One in five children/youth has mental health issues serious enough to impact their functioning, yet only about a quarter of those identified actually receive the services that they need.

Navigating the mental health service system is often complex for families, resulting in services that are fragmented and requiring families to retell their story. Wait times can be lengthy, and often transitions from one service sector to another, and from child to adult services, are needlessly difficult. This results in an overburdened system with overburdened families.

To help address this need, the Child and Parent Resource Institute (CPRI) partnered with interRAI to develop a suite of mental health assessments for children/youth with mental health and developmental disabilities. CPRI is a tertiary level mental health centre directly-operated by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) located in London, Ontario, working to improve the lives of “hard to serve” clients across the province. interRAI is an international non-profit collaborative of over 85 members in over 40 countries whose mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable populations through a seamless, comprehensive assessment system.

By partnering with interRAI, CPRI recognized the opportunity to address fundamental challenges that the child/youth mental health sector was facing. It was a key opportunity to drive change on a global scale and importantly, to provide comprehensive assessments and evidence-based treatments for children/youth with mental health challenges and their families in Ontario.

Working Together

Creating the interRAI Child/Youth Suite of assessments involved CPRI partnering with over 130 universities, school boards, and service agencies in over 11 countries. In total, five sector-specific tools, two screeners, and two self-report quality of life tools were developed which support streamlined access to services and improved outcomes for children and families. CPRI led a successful research pilot in 2012-2014, involving nine mental health and community health sites, while simultaneously conducting research to test and refine the tools, and gather user feedback. These efforts led to the first two comprehensive tools, the Child and Youth Mental Health (ChYMH) and ChYMH-Development Disabilities (ChYMH-DD), becoming recognized as official interRAI instruments, published, and available for use internationally.

Facing Change

A cultural shift is required to instill enthusiasm and motivation to embrace a world of data driven decision-making, transparency and accountability in the use of evidence-base practice amongst clinicians and clinical organizations who are not accustomed to this monumental and complicated task. For implementation to be successful, it was essential to find resources and change champions who shared the vision. This was a self-funded endeavour for the early years. CPRI realigned priorities, grew research capacity, sought partnerships and obtained grant funding.

As of fall 2016, CPRI has supported the implementation of the interRAI Child/Youth Suite in 57 agencies (and growing) in Ontario by providing in depth training and consultation to agencies across Ontario on the use and utility of the interRAI Child/Youth Suite. This initiative set a new standard for data collection, knowledge mobilization, and evaluation in the child/youth mental health service system.

Added Benefits

The depth of information that results from use of these tools as well as the clinical recommendations that are triggered for identified issues are unlike any tool used in the child/youth mental health system. Innovative products were developed by CPRI to complement the Child/Youth Suite, including:

- Comprehensive evidence-informed guidelines for clinicians, at their fingertips, for issues identified by the assessment
- Easy to read strategies for families to make the complex clinical information understandable
- A health information summary that families can use to share their information with other service providers
- A data framework to enhance the meaning and organization of outcomes at the point of care, the organization level, and the systems level

In addition, CPRI is providing support to develop new pathways to care, seamless transitions between providers, and enhanced services.

Expanding Use

Currently, 57 sites across Ontario are voluntarily implementing an interRAI Child/Youth Suite tool, including 4 hospitals, 14 community health partners, and 38 additional mental health agencies. Service area implementations are occurring in 5 Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) regions across the province. Internationally, there is statewide implementation in Arkansas, Iowa, and New York; and Finland is

currently engaged in a pilot project spanning 7 agencies country-wide. Given the uptake of this tool provincially and globally thus far, it is evident that these instruments fill an enormous gap in helping children.

Positive Outcomes

Over 20,000 assessments have been completed in Ontario, helping to build a consistent clinical profile of child/youth mental health in the province. With widespread implementation of the tools, the story of a family no longer needs to be re-told; it is collected and shared using a common language, highlighting strengths and areas of risk/need. The impact for clinicians includes access to a repository of critical clinical information, guiding treatment decisions and allowing comparison of pre-post treatment measurements. In the near future, agencies will be able to evaluate and compare their programs with others in Ontario and around the world. The system of care can continually improve to ensure our children/youth receive the best care possible.

The cutting-edge work that CPRI has done to develop and implement the tools has already seen system-level improvements internationally in the states of Arkansas (development of a tiered approach to service delivery for children/youth with mental health challenges) and New York (supporting a lifespan approach to data collection and intervention with the developmentally challenged population). The impact of these tools on the lives of children/youth not just in Ontario, but worldwide is becoming evident.