

Mental Health

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Dialogue

Ann Dale

Welcome everyone to our e-panel on mental health, a challenging subject and one that touches the lives of most Canadians. Before we start with our first question, could I please ask everyone to introduce yourself and your interests in this topic.

Peggy Taillon

I started working in a psychiatric hospital when I was 16 years old after my brother had attempted suicide. We lived in small town northern Ontario. He was gay, not yet out of the closet, isolated, shy and often bullied. When I started working in the hospital I was struck by how psychiatric labels, diagnoses, essentially stripped people of their personhood and their human rights. It was life changing for me and I have since been on a long journey to bust stigma and make mental health and other health and human services more person-centred.

Ann Dale

Welcome, Peggy, who is among other things, the head of the Canadian Council on Social Development and previously a Vice-President with the Ottawa Hospital Group.

Ashlee Cunsolo Willox

Hi everyone! My name is Ashlee Cunsolo Willox and I am a Canada Research Chair (Tier II) in Determinants of Healthy Communities and Assistant Professor in Community Health in the Departments of Nursing and Indigenous Studies at Cape Breton University on beautiful Cape Breton Island. Broadly, my work focuses on the intersection of place, health, culture, and environment, and how our connections with and exposure to the natural environment impact our physical and mental health. One of my main areas of focus is climatic and environmental change and mental health. I have had the great pleasure and privilege of working with Inuit communities for six years on issues related to climate change and its impacts on life, livelihoods, and culture in the North, and how this affects mental health. I am especially interested in the connection between mental health and sustainability, how fostering one can have positive feedback loops on the other (and of course, vice versa), and how citizen action and dialogue can contribute to flourishing internal and external environments. Thanks to Dr. Ann Dale for the great invite to join you all here today. I'm really looking forward to seeing where this dialogue takes us!

Ann Dale

Welcome, Ashlee, Cape Breton has a piece of my heart. And I am sure Paul Alison will have a lot to add on the importance of place and health.

Paul Allison

Greetings Ann. Hello my fellow e-panel, my name is Paul Allison and I am Supervisor of Gardens and Grounds at Royal Roads University and Hatley Park National Historic Site. However, I have been involved in the use of Gardening and Gardens as a therapy for the past 30 years.

I recently returned from Japan working as a technical advisor to evaluate the psychosocial programming using horticulture therapeutic gardening programs run by a non-profit group called AmeriCares.

The programs were designed for the survivors of the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami in the Tohoku region. As well as helping with the evaluation process I also delivered several horticultural therapy workshops for survivors and community groups while in the region.

Jodi Mucha

I am the Executive Director of BC Healthy Communities (BCHC) and I believe that for any community to be 'healthy' it needs to start from the inside out, meaning, healthy people make up healthy communities. If we are not supporting individuals to have quality of life and love and support as well as good living conditions then anything else we are doing at the large scale within the system is somewhat inauthentic.

Thriving people living lives that allow them to grow and prosper in the places they live, work, learn and play in create conditions for a healthy community. Of course, they go hand in hand however attention to overall mental health and wellbeing is a very critical factor.

Dennis Foon

I'm Dennis Foon, a playwright and screenwriter living in Vancouver. The bulk of my writing has dealt with family dysfunction as a microcosm of our overall societal problems. If we can't look at ourselves, what happened to us as children and confront our past traumas we are forced to create a mythologized version of ourselves and our history. What Jung would call the Persona. This form of denial or blindness is a coping mechanism to deal with stuff that's just too painful or overwhelming to address. A

mechanism that is perfectly echoed by much of society's inability to rationally deal with issues like poverty and the environment, things that seem so completely overwhelming. Just like with our planet, our unresolved/unexamined issues are a time bomb that may destroy us.

That gap between the persona and the pain experienced is the turf of the writer. For example, I'm creating a dramatic series right now for CBC about a family of longshoremen. While the children were growing up, their father was an out of control alcoholic and his behaviour affected them deeply. Each of the kids developed personas that enabled them to cope with the pain of those years, but haven't truly dealt with the deeper problems and feelings. So now, as young adults who are still close to their father (some even work with him) the cracks are starting to appear; they are each, in their own way, starting to unbuckle.

Robert Newell

Hi everyone, my name is Rob Newell. I work with Ann as a researcher in the Canada Research Chair in Sustainable Community Development program.

Peggy Taillon

I have been involved and have led mental health reform processes in Ontario and Canada for more than 20 years. As I reflect on that work and where we have landed especially with respect to stigma, I am more convinced than ever that we have taken the wrong approach or placed emphasis on the wrong things. I say this with humility as I led many of those processes. Focusing on the system and not on the person and their lived experience has limited any meaningful dialogue and action on stigma.

Jodi Mucha

Wow, what a diverse panel. I'm looking forward to this dynamic discussion and thanks so much Ann for the invitation! These e-Dialogues have been going for a long time — a testament to the value and interest in them :) So glad to be a part of this timely discussion.

Peggy Taillon

Loved what Dennis Foon says about looking at where we come from, our past traumas and the myths we are forced to create for ourselves. I think that our brain, our sprites have a way of protecting us from earlier traumas until we are ready to deal with them. That was certainly my experience after I was sexually assaulted in high school. My brain buried it until I had the tools to deal with it.

Yuill Herbert

Hi,

I'm Yuill Herbert, working with Rebecca, Rob, and Ann on this project called the [Solutions Agenda](#). I am working more and more on urban planning and am particularly interested in the relationship between built environment and mental health.

Rebecca Foon

Hello everyone,

Thank you all so much for participating in this e-Dialogue. I'm Rebecca Foon and I work with Sustainability Solutions Group, I am based in Montreal. SSG collaborates a lot with the Canada Research Chair on Sustainable Community Development and we focus on climate change work, sustainability planning and work around community vitality. I also am a cellist and yoga teacher - and believe that music, art, health, sustainability planning, nutrition, wellbeing, etc. is all deeply interconnected. I am really looking forward to our conversation!

Ann Dale

I remember a quote by Jean Jacques Rousseau, "the hardest thing in life is to see one's own equation written on the wall". I have never understood why people see a physical doctor and yet are more afraid to see a psychologist, or a psychiatrist, or a social worker.

Does this have anything to do with the stigma attached to mental health, why is this so, and how do we overcome this?

Peggy Taillon

Love that quote, Ann. I think that fear has so much to do with stigma. The fear of looking deep into ourselves and saying things out loud that we have been told should not be said. The fear of hurting your loved ones by saying something's not right. The fear of how society will react. A mental health label is often a guarantee that your personhood will be stripped. I think there is a social fear as well - perceived instability of others may lead to unrest, outbursts...messy stuff. The irony of course, life is messy and more interesting the messier it gets!

Jodi Mucha

Peggy, you just said (typed:) what I was thinking exactly! Its like once we are old enough to not continue just being the pure beings we were born as we don a mask and continue to develop ways of being to 'survive' life. We develop strong suits and behaviours to carry us through. Showing our real selves makes us vulnerable.

Ashlee Cunsolo Willox

I completely agree here with Peggy. I think so much of stigma is based around fear, because mental health-related issues often make us feel more vulnerable than physical health issues (not in all cases, but in some). Perhaps, it is easier to approach someone to discuss things that happen to the 'body', because it's not as difficult or getting at such emotionally-challenging things as when dealing with the mind or the emotions?

Paul Allison

Yes there is a stigma around mental health. Perhaps it is the intangible that scares the individual or society.

Dennis Foon

Ann, I believe the stigma attached to mental health is a form of projection. We work so hard to remain blind (as Plato states s eloquently in his Cave Analogy) that when someone "comes out" it's frightening and disturbing. When you consider that around

11% of Americans are on anti-depressants, you know the struggle to maintain the illusion of mental health is gigantic. (Interesting poetic irony on this topic: Prozac dumped in the water supply is increasing the risk of extinction for freshwater mussels.

If I'm already coping with say, depression, and somebody with major depression is not able to cope, it can be an affront – “why aren't they dealing with it, I am!”

Rebecca Foon

Dennis, this is an interesting connection between the ecosystem and mental health. And yes, I totally agree that fear produces stigma. And, sadly the social stigma attached to mental health can make things more challenging, and thus have a negative impact on people's lives. Media reports can also help to perpetuate this stigma. Entertainment frequently features negative images and stereotypes about mental health, and these portrayals have been linked to the development of fears and misunderstanding and can justify behaviour such as bullying.

Ann Dale

Depression is a hard one to deal with, and Dennis, you have hit the nail on the head, “why can't they just pull themselves up and get on with life”. This reminds of Gregory Bateson's chapter entitled Ecology of Mind, I am blanking on the title itself, where he says the paradox of addiction is that people say why can't they control themselves, this is the very essence of the disease, they can't.

Peggy Taillon

Yes when you hear of a friend, neighbour or colleague has been diagnosed with cancer, the response usually is, how can I help? What can I do? Typically not the case when you hear it's a mental health issue.

Ashlee Cunsolo Willox

Yes, absolutely. People are much more uncomfortable, and much more ill-equipped, to deal with mental health issues. I think in addition to fear, it's also the narratives that many of us have been taught as we grow up in a society where these issues are openly

discussed. We are taught that it's okay to go to a doctor (and in fact, encouraged all the time that this is a positive step for our health), but we don't have that same encouragement (without stigma) attached to seeing someone to support our mental health.

Ann Dale

Ashlee, exactly, how do we change this, and others? Another factor I believe is that our communities and families are now so dispersed, a lot of the factors that are so important, a community, are missing?

Paul, what role do gardens have to play, nature?

Paul Allison

Ann, let me give you a recent example:

One day I was invited to visit a very unique garden while working with a community group in Otsuchi a coastal town that was completely destroyed by the tsunami. A local man whose name is Mr. Sasaki constructed within a quiet part of the garden a white telephone box. This white telephone box served a very special purpose. Mr. Sasaki explained that he created the telephone box in the garden for those survivors to pick up the phone and have a 'direct line' with their loved one lost in the tsunami.

The relatives of who survived the disaster never had the opportunity to say goodbye or express their feelings to their lost loved ones. They carry a heavy burden of lack of closure and because they never had the chance to say goodbye. The telephone box provides comfort to hundreds of visitors who have utilized the metaphor to converse with their love ones. This creative idea has proved to be a very powerful symbol and an effective therapeutic tool for the survivors of Otsuchi.

Ashlee Cunsolo Willox

Paul, that is an absolutely beautiful story and imagery. I particularly like that the healing is directly incorporated into landscape design, into the environment, and is explicitly making the connection between healing and connecting with 'outside'.

Jodi Mucha

Paul!! I saw your [slideshare](#) on this:) it was awesome. I think more connection and inclusion within our communities is highly important. Especially, when you think of the increasing number of immigrant and newcomers and the aging population. People are more and more connected via technology and less and less connected in person. How do we better engage on our streets? In our neighbourhoods as a start.

Ashlee Cunsolo Willox

I think we need to find as many opportunities as possible to talk mental health, and to have these types of dialogues in our home, communities, schools, and work places. Peggy has been writing about messiness -- we need to work towards (or continue to work towards) fostering environments and dialogues where we learn the skills to become comfortable with this messiness. And, where we can find ways to support ourselves and others through these processes and moments.

Yuill Herbert

But messiness can be scary, threatening and dangerous. Not always but sometimes. Perhaps, reminiscent of pre-societal times when everything was not so controlled, behaviour, speech, etc. This can be challenging.

Peggy Taillon

Yes true, we need to find ways of being comfortable in the messy rather than pretend we are all okay. The stiff upper lip mentality is a mask. If people were honest when we greeted each other when asked how are you doing? The answers would make people uncomfortable...

Rather than, "I am okay".

Imagine if we said, "Well I am really stressed, worried about my finances, my spouse may lose their job, my son is being bullied at school..."

Yuill Herbert

Indeed it would make for richer communications and a much stronger community, somehow our society has ended up emphasizing and propagating expediency, superficiality. Is it a cultural thing (i.e. the British stiff upper lip) or something that is driven by technology, or perhaps enhanced by technology?

Ann Dale

Peggy, you made me remember after my beloved only son died, I was in an elevator about a year later at school, and someone asked if I had any children. What to do, what to do. I knew if I said something, it would make everyone uncomfortable. I refused to deny him, so I replied, "yes, but he died", and we rode down in silence. Grief, however, will eat you alive if you don't let it out, I wonder how much unresolved grief, loneliness and isolation are a systemic social factor associated with this stigma?

Peggy Taillon

Yes Ann, saying it out loud acknowledges that it happened, the loss lives with you. It may be easier for the other person in the elevator, but not for you. I really do feel like part of the challenge is allowing people to be themselves, present themselves as they are. We live in a world that want to cover up truths deemed too ugly we are obsessed with vanishing creams and tins to hide wrinkles. Truth is it's the wrinkles, the lines, and the marks that make us interesting.

Ashlee Cunsolo Willox

Ann, I think you have pointed to something important here. This unresolved grief and loneliness. Grief can be a powerful unifier when united together with other grieving, but it can also make us feel incredibly alone and isolated, especially when we encounter others who were not part of that process and may not have an understanding of how to encounter others who are grieving. We are often taught to push these feelings way down deep and 'get on with it' and 'move on' and 'keep going'. What does that do to all of us, individually and as a society, to continue to do that?

Yuill Herbert

I wonder what constitutes mental health and mental 'unhealthy' or mental 'illness'. If I remember correctly, it's the inability to cope in society for a prolonged period. But, our society is filled with dysfunction and does someone's unwillingness to accept this dysfunction then constitute illness? In other words, are those (or some of those) who are considered mentally ill in fact rebels against broader societal 'illnesses'? Against conformity?

Robert Newell

Adding to this discussion of vulnerability, in our introduction to this conversation on our webpage, we have a quote from Dr. Marcia Webb, “[a]s a society, we shy from reminders of our frailty. If persons with mental illnesses are conceptualized as separate – as invisible within, or as intruding upon – mainstream society, then mainstream society may deceive itself and imagine that mental illness does not reflect universal truths about the human condition.”

This alludes to a larger picture, in the way that by addressing mental health more and more at the individual scale, we then fear that we must accept the vulnerability of communities and societies on the larger scale. It seems that, unlike physical health, mental health is one of those things, as Peggy mentioned, we think we can ‘pretend’ our way out of, ignore it to essentially minimizing as a societal threat.

Jodi Mucha

It's like a siloed approach. Our bodies and minds are disconnected. There's little connection between body/mind- go to the physician for pills to feel better. What about how diet impacts mood and mental health? Physical activity? Touch? Love? Etc.

Peggy Taillon

Yes siloed for sure. Medicine craves us into pieces, head, neck, arm...As a former VP at a large teaching hospital I often was invited into the OR by surgeons. They would talk about the procedure, the organ they were focusing on. I would always ask about the person on the table...I suppose they are taught that to protect themselves...distance

themselves. Honesty, if a doctor is treating me, I want them to know and care about me....not disassociate with me.

Robert Newell

Compartmentalization of the mental and physical has been something that has baffled me for quite some time. The Cartesian approach of mind/body dualism has been rejected for years by both psychologists and medical doctors, yet this still seems to work into common practice. The fact that I even separated the professions of 'psychologist' and 'medical doctors' actually speaks to this. I wonder why this is, that we understand that the mind and body are intimately linked, yet we won't let this fully translate into how we approach human and societal well-being.

Rebecca Foon

The New Leaf Foundation in Ontario is an interesting example of bridging this gap to a certain extent by bringing yoga and meditation to youth who are facing barriers due to a number of factors including socio-economic issues, challenges in school, experiences of abuse and neglect, involvement with the criminal justice system and various forms of marginalization and trauma. The Foundation believes in the strength and resiliency of youth and draws on their capacity to heal and thrive....and through meditation and yoga, they offer youth tools for cultivating self-awareness, emotional resiliency, the ability to respond rather than react, etc. They have had amazing breakthroughs, including greatly reducing violence, bullying and aggression in custody facilities and schools in Ontario.

Peggy Taillon

Yes, initiatives like New Leaf reinforce the reality that much of what needs to happen is not necessarily a formal health intervention. People need to feel accepted, they need to feel like who they are is embraced and that we don't need to be carbon copies of each other. That the world is richer when there is more difference present. That the whole essence of ourselves matter.

Yuill Herbert

There is one model of health that focuses on autonomy. It is about the ability of people to be autonomously motivated, they experience volition. In contrast, those that are unhealthy, behave as a function of external rewards and punishment, energized by an approval motive, avoidance of shame, ego, etc. I think this is an interesting concept to apply to mental health.

Jodi Mucha

Reminds me of my thesis focused on the connections between spirituality and sustainability - Christianity's view was Man has control over nature and its almost the same here – man's control over body and mind. However, our sense of 'control' over mind is not an empowering one - rather shut it down and suck it up approach.

Paul Allison

Yes, we are still living with Newton physics and still need to embrace Quantum physics. Epigenetics will prove to be a strong link as we see that the mind effects our bodies and vice a versa.

Ann Dale

Paul's example shows the importance of facing and honouring loss and place, as Ashlee has pointed out. Yuill asked a critical question, and I hate to move us along, however, our next question? We have talked a lot about artificial separations, between the body and the mind, between the parts rather than the whole, are there particular advances, organizations and literature in this field that you would like to highlight. Should we even make a difference between physical and mental health, is it counter-productive?

Ashlee Cunsolo Willox

I think for me, some of the most exciting things I see emerging is the increasing focus on and understanding of the intertwined relationship between mental health and the environment. I think intuitively, many of us realize this, but to see it hit national media,

academic research, and scientific study is heartening -- not least because it may encourage us to foster stronger relationships with the more-than-human world.

Jodi Mucha

From a community development stand point we are generating more momentum around activities such as Neighbours Day. One day a year that is recognized for people to close off their streets, have a bbq with all the neighbours - connect and have fun, play street hockey - learn how to support each other. It may seem like a small step but is very effective and has been happening internationally for many many years. Quebec has a strong [Neighbours Day movement](#) - its June 7 this year for those of you in QC :)

Peggy Taillon

During mental health reform in the late 90s in Ontario we found some great work from the US and the UK that focused on resilience, recovery and strengths - a whole person approach. The core of the reports that we wrote then worked to bring that philosophy to Ontario and shape the system into one that would embrace the philosophy and shift in practical ways to facilitate recovery. It has taken the better part of 20 years to move the system in that direction (beyond adopting the words to adopting the practical structures and approaches to make it happen).

Ashlee Cunsolo Willox

There's also some great work linking Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding what it means to be well and whole, and how this can support and enhance 'medical' or 'Western' approaches to mental health that have been dominating in our systems for quite some time. This can help to move beyond 'treatment' and 'diagnoses', and reactive versus proactive behaviour.

Yuill Herbert

Ashlee, do you know any more details about this? I remember once hearing that medicine men were people able to enter into the 'sphere' of mental illness and then return to 'normalcy'. It would be interesting to know how other cultures deal with mental illness or if they even have it?

Ashlee Cunsolo Willox

Many Indigenous perspectives will include mental health as a part of overall health -- you need to be healthy in your mind, body, emotions, spirit, and environment. For First Nations people, that may be best illustrated in the Medicine Wheel, which has equal parts in Physical, Mental, Emotional, and Spiritual, and understands that life is a continual journey throughout all of these pieces. In Northern Labrador, my Inuit colleagues tell me that for them, mental health is inextricably linked with the land, and with being on the land. The land is not only the foundation of mental health, but also a great healer and rejuvenator. This understanding that mental health is not only about ourselves, but about our larger environments and how we are embedded within them, is something that I think has been lost in much of 'Western' approaches.

To add to this, and to respond to your question on how other cultures deal with mental health: there's some excellent work happening in the field of global mental health. Vikram Patel is a strong component of training regular people to provide mental health supports in areas where access to mental health services (let alone medical health services) is virtually non-existent. He does an interesting TED talk on it: [Mental Health for All by Involving All](#).

Jodi Mucha

I can't remember where I read this, but look at some of the very brilliant people in the world who may have mental illnesses. They were looked upon as a gift to the community and cherished so they were actually seen in a very positive light. Look at Temple Grandin, someone who made great gains in the area of livestock research and work with animals. Amazing!

Ann Dale

And, I wonder if eccentricity and difference also play a role. There are many creatives who have suffered from mental illness, many take their own lives, a link that has not been explored enough. And, of course, the link with addictions? But this is a sidebar, but maybe a strategy for reducing and ideally eliminating the stigma?

Peggy Taillon

I think that loss of control or perceived control is part of the puzzle of stigma. People want/need to control when much of this is out of our control. It makes people uncomfortable.

Jodi Mucha

Another very integrated approach (which is the basis of our work) is Integral Theory, originated by Ken Wilbur. It address physical/behavioural, psychological/spiritual, Cultural and Systems and Structures. Quite a good model to explore inner/exterior as individuals and cultures/groups/systems.

Ashlee Cunsolo Willox

These approaches can also help us connect 'mental health' within larger contexts of environment, family, history, place, connectedness, etc., as well as linking to the many socio-cultural determinants of health: employment, income, housing, family support, education, geographic location, sense of connectedness, food security, gender, age, cultural identity, etc.

Dennis Foon

Interesting that Narrative Therapy, a way of using people's own life stories as a way to affect personal change, evolved out of Michael White's work with Aboriginal peoples in Australia.

Ann Dale

It seems to me that integrated health systems, connected to place, and reconnecting the senses? There is also a connection, as Yuill points, out to autonomy or what I call agency, that is, the will or intent and social capital connections. I guess with stigma people are then shunned, and exclusion is such a powerful negative demotivator.

And, what are some small steps about what I am talking about. I know of a surgeon who now has her patients, when possible, walk into the operating room, to meet the surgical

team. As a recent recipient of this, I cannot begin to describe how this small step, rather being wheeled in on a gurney, empowers and lessens your fear, the building of agency, of partnership, or as Jodi talked about earlier, relationship.

Peggy Taillon

Traditional approaches and certainly those of First Nations are great models. The sense of community, whole person, connection to the earth is so intuitive. Our systems be it health social or mental health are wired in ways that can never adequately respond to what the human condition needs. It starts right from how government is organized and siloed and how those structures ripple down to service providers and into our communities. Totally counterintuitive.

Robert Newell

This idea of 'sense of community' is a very important concept. Research on place will often include social bonding as part of the sense of place concept. In this manner, the quality and quantity of social relationships and the social network becomes a part of the place itself. This brings up considerations about community design, I'm also thinking back to Ashlee's discussion on mental health and the environment (thinking built environment). So, really, mental health becomes part of the field of urban planners, and the language around mental wellbeing needs to be integrated into urban planning. Is this feasible considering our siloed approaches, or are there examples of cities using the mental health language in their urban plans?

Jodi Mucha

There is more emphasis lately on health and the built environment in terms of mental health and sense of place and space from an 'interior' point of view. As well, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) is exploring the development of programs focused on mentally healthy communities. In addition the [Community Action Initiative](#) provides funds for innovative activities and projects that support overall mental health and wellbeing from a more integrated approach. There are more and more resources and initiatives out there that seem to be making the connections from a 'whole' of community approach.

Yuill Herbert

Health is increasingly becoming a variable considered in urban planning. It's painful though at how obvious the connections are but how disconnected planning is. Right now the most significant focus is on walkability to target diabetes, heart disease and others. The main indicator I have seen for mental health is access to green space and in the same way some planners are thinking about food deserts, there are also green space deserts in areas dominated by an impermeable layer of concrete, asphalt, and buildings. BC Healthy Communities is heavily involved in this world and we are working with a couple of municipalities to explore the integration of health into planning, for example with Squamish. LEED does address mental health in a way by crediting buildings that ensure all occupants are accessible to views and openable windows.

Ashlee Cunsolo Willox

I think that community planning, architecture, and design are integral to mental health, and that mental health language should be incorporated. There is research emerging all over looking at the links between green areas and violence levels (the more green an area is, the less violence), and a lot of designers are really starting to incorporate this into their work.

Yuill Herbert

Although, I argue modern building materials are mutually exclusive of an environment that supports mental health. Most materials are designed for expediency and therefore reflect the harshness of mechanised mathematics and none of the softness that came with constructing buildings by hand of indigenous materials. The result is the dominance of right angles (which are never found in nature), impermeable materials, not to mention destructive chemicals. A great book on this is called Places of the Soul by Christopher Day, a British architect.

Jodi Mucha

Yuill, I agree, look at the OUR EcoVillage up Island at Shawnigan Lake or many of the other ecovillage models where many of the buildings are rammed earth or cob, very healing spaces conducive to peacefulness/mindfulness.

Ann Dale

Paul, what about healing gardens and do you have any references for us? I believe the Canadian Mental Health Addictions Centre out of Toronto is also an integrative approach. Once again, one of its champions is Micheal Wilson, whose son died. The more of us who speak out and share our stories, perhaps then, the conversation will change? Ashlee, how does connection to place factor in?

Rebecca Foon

Yes Paul, I would love to hear more on this. Charles Landry in his book the Creative City, discusses innovative homeopathic gardens developing in hospitals in Europe where the herbal medicines are used as remedies, and patients can enjoy and walk the gardens during the day. I would love to know more about what kind of initiatives are happening in Canada around healing gardens.

Paul Allison

Humans have evolved in Nature. Our relationship with plants or perhaps more correct plants relationships with humans is deeply ingrained. The hospital restorative gardens I have worked with have allowed visitors, patients and staff deal with loneliness, depression (grief) and boredom that eats away at our minds. The American and Canadian Horticultural Therapy Associations are important resources.

Paul Allison

Healing is a matter of time it is also a matter of opportunity (Hippocrates).

Gardens and gardening can provide that opportunity

If you want to be happy for a week -
Kill your pig

If you want to be happy for a year-
Marry

But if you want to be happy for a lifetime-

Plant a garden

Confucious

Ashlee Cunsolo Willox

Paul, I completely agree. For me, personally, gardening is an essential part of my mental health. We moved last summer, and for the first time in years I didn't have a garden, and I noticed a huge difference to my mental wellness. I think that our response to gardening is also our response to increasing urbanization, and to the need to bring some beauty and naturalness to the concrete and technology that often surrounds us. It's a way for us to bring a tiny piece of the much larger environment from whence we came, and keep it near us. When I work up in the Arctic and SubArctic, and am completely surrounded by the most incredible land and nature and environment one can imagine...well, that is where I feel most mentally well, and it's a heck of a (metaphorical) garden.

Ann Dale

Paul, are there any hospitals using healing gardens?

Paul Allison

I am careful about using the word healing. I like to use restorative and comforting which of course leads to healing. For it be therapeutic you need the therapist who works as part of a treatment planning process with other medical professionals to use horticulture to treat a known medical diagnosis.

I designed a garden at the Royal Jubilee Hospital here in Victoria.

Ann Dale

Any pictures?

Paul Allison

If you want to photos of a restorative hospital garden, check out my [LinkedIn profile](#) see below.

I also include parks and green spaces in my work. Recently I gave a presentation entitled 'Healthy Parks - Healthy People' to Parks Administrators from 15 countries. With cuts in funding to Parks worldwide I think it is especially important to link public parks with public health and the economic spin off with this relationship.

This presentation is also on my LinkedIn profile.

Yuill Herbert

Here is a great [example of a farm](#) for that purpose.

Peggy Taillon

In Kenya, in rural villages, or attest the ones I am familiar with, there are no mental health labels, no jargon. People are people and if someone is living with a mental health condition it is usually does not have a formal label. People in the village understand that a person may have some condition and that they need some extra support. Everyone just sort of looks out for the person and will help the family when need be.

Jodi Mucha

There are also programs that allow llama's into hospitals as this animal is particularly healing. My ex-landlord had a llama farm and each week they loaded the llama into the van and took it (its name was Willis) to the seniors centre for a few hours.

This a [program](#) in the US that does this.

Yuill Herbert

What do you think are the key differences between Kenya and the western world? Is it our institutions? Our climate? Or characteristics of our culture?

Peggy Taillon

A great question, given where Kenya is on its journey up the development ladder and the challenges before them part of the approach is that they have to find way to make what they have work. They have to support each other because shared prosperity is the only way to combat rationing. They are also wired to consider the greater good. (Canada used to be like that as well...)

Women are key to how a village functions and they are wired to share, to think of the whole and to support each other through their individual and collective struggles.

Maybe, as societies become more complex they become more separated.

Peggy Taillon

The personal refection that can come from spending time in nature is so powerful. It reminds me of the connection to art and personal healing and reflection. In a Hospice I have been working with you see people who have never picked up a paint brush create some stunning pieces of art in their last weeks of life. A gift for those they are leaving behind and a way to express where they are in their journey.

Ann Dale

Interesting article on [how to foster social contagion](#).

This is an interesting [video](#) by a New York planner on the importance of public space, wonder if there is a connection between the amount of green space and mental health.

Also, attached is a paper we did on [Community Vitality and Health](#).

Peggy Taillon

Yes community = belonging. You even see this in rural communities to some extent, they will make what they have to offer work and do what's needed probably because they know each other, they are connected.

Robert Newell

Very true, and further contradicting mind/body compartmentalization is this [presentation by Dr. John Cacioppo](#), (University of Chicago), discussing his research on the influence of the social context on human health.

He discusses how as a social species, we are biologically programmed for interpersonal connection. One of the forms of connection is 'collective connection', i.e., community, referring to our social identity, which relates to our sense of belonging and sense of community. The presentation draws a strong link between our biology, mental state, and need for social connection, and positions loneliness as an important societal issue, rather than just an 'unfortunate inconvenience'.

Ann Dale

Rebecca and Dennis, do you know of any arts-based programs?

Dennis Foon

It wasn't therapy per se, but a Theatre in Education programme I co-created some years ago, Feeling Yes, Feeling No, was a child sexual abuse prevention program that used community development as its cornerstone. Workshops with parents, teachers, and the team around the school (police, social workers, nurses) all coordinated to be able to respond appropriately to any disclosures and provide proper support. Once that was implemented, we would do the workshop for children. FYFN is now a series of films distributed by the NFB. Just one way art, in this case, theatre, can be a mental health tool in the community.

Ann Dale

And, a very successful model, I wonder if reframing the issue as health - our minds our bodies and beginning early in schools. Just as we should also include nutritional literacy, learning how to read labels in elementary schools?

Dennis Foon

It's so true, Ann. How can we get a true sense of our mental state when we're so toxified by our external and internal environment? As so many have stated here, the Western approach is symptom based, stemming from the mind/body separation. A simple example is sugar. Kids that are "sugared up" get hyper. And when they crash, they get moody. So now, there's a psychiatric category in the DSM for Childhood Bipolar disorder and a drug therapy for children to alleviate the condition. Big Pharma rules!

Rebecca Foon

Music and art therapy is becoming more popular - to help maintain, and restore mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health. It seems that more and more institutions of higher education are offering certificate programs.

Ashlee Cunsolo Willox

Ann, I think incorporating mental wellness literacy is a really interesting idea. I have been working with the five Inuit communities of Nunatsiavut, Labrador on some mental health assessments related to climate change, and through this research we have been working with people to identify what they need for mental health or wellness, how they would define it, and some strategies to enhance it. Interestingly, a number of youth from the region brought up the idea about having 'mental health first aid' training in the schools, in the same way they have physical health first aid training. They wanted to have this included in broader strategies for talking mental health and wellbeing in general, and for finding ways to destigmatize the issues while simultaneously providing people with skills that might contribute to their own empowerment.

Ann Dale

Do you have any references for us on your work, Ashlee?

Ashlee Cunsolo Willox

That aspect is not yet published, as we're still analyzing the data. But, here are two

articles that connect how changes in the land and environment are affecting mental health and wellbeing from an Inuit context, and how mental health is conceptualized in that context.

- [Climate change and mental health](#): an exploratory case study from Rigolet, Nunatsiavut, Canada
- [“From this place and of this place:”](#) Climate change, sense of place, and health in Nunatsiavut, Canada

There are also a number of digital stories created by Inuit in Labrador about their experiences with the land and mental health. Here are two that might be of interest: [Melva's Story](#) and [Marilyn's Story](#).

Jodi Mucha

The [Arts Health Network](#) does some great work.

Rebecca Foon

On a totally different note, maybe even a bit controversial, I was recently reading about how the use of smart phones can also offer access to hundreds of virtual resources. I have read about an app called the CBTReferee, which allows users to log their thoughts as they occur in order to monitor negative thinking. Once thoughts are logged, users are able to evaluate what is untrue, unrealistic or unfair about each thought process and can help people who might be experiencing depression. Of course you need to be able to afford a smart phone to have access to this tool!!

Another one is called BellyBio Interactive Breathing asks users to place their smartphones on their stomach as it guides them through a deep breathing exercise useful in fighting anxiety and stress. This free app monitors breathing patterns while simultaneously generating meditative music and light in synch with the deep abdominal breathing movements. There are many different apps out there for meditation.

There are also numerous scientific studies that make the correlation between physical (including nutrition) and mental health and the benefits of alternative treatments such as naturopathy, homeopathy, acupuncture, etc. or a combination can provide interesting holistic treatment.

A study published in 2012 in Scientific Review of Mental Health Practices examined

over 250 published studies on meditation, investigating 45 years of research on a diverse range of meditation techniques and how they influenced both mental and physical health. Results from the [study](#) make a case for the value of meditation in cultivating positive psychological health.

But, perhaps coming back to what Paul was saying about 'healing' these are all just tools, some only accessible for those who can afford it, and perhaps may not be digging into deeper issues and trauma that might at the root of certain problems.

Ashlee Cunsolo Willox

The [Landscape and Human Health Laboratory](#) out of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign has some really interesting research and resources on design for health and wellness, as well as some accessible reports on their research.

Peggy Taillon

It really circles back to how we design welcoming sustainable communities, doesn't it. Do we want to block out the sun with high rises? Do we want social spaces where people congregate or mazes that people navigate? Puffers or clean air? CVD or walkable communities?

The case has been made for the built environment and physical health. I think a stronger case needs to be made for it and mental wellbeing.

It goes back to what Ann asked about isolation...

Ashlee Cunsolo Willox

I think you are exactly right, Peggy. More emphasis needs to be put on creating mentally health communities, buildings, infrastructure, etc. I think one of the challenges has been that we 'know' (with an emphasis on those scare quotes) what is connected to things such as asthma, heart disease, etc. But, until recently, there hasn't been a lot of 'hard' evidence on what supports mental health through design (and by hard evidence, I mean the type that policy makers and decision makers generally like to use). But, more and more we know what also fosters good mental health. The trick is to get that incorporated in the broader design conversations.

Ann Dale

Do you think all the emphasis on health and wellbeing is contributing to more of a disease model. You have mentioned many innovative models for health, but they are regarded as alternatives, and are preventive. Maybe, if we didn't deny what is important to life, let me be personal, when you lose a child, you are entitled to 4 days bereavement leave in the Federal Government?

Peggy Taillon

Community of course is also about how we connect, the personal connections. We can build the environment but we also have to create the conditions for people to really connect, speak the truth when ask how are you?

That takes reconditioning, and has to start early before society cajoles us into silent polite I'm fine thanks interactions.

Ann, I think that wellbeing is a great way to frame this taking it out of health lingo. If asked how you stay wellbeing, we may consider things like walks, reading, family time etc. If asked what contributes to our health we may answer, eating right, exercise, genetics...I don't know.

I also don't know if people consider their mind and spirit when they respond to questions of health. They may if we use 'wellbeing'.

Ashlee Cunsolo Willox

Yes, language is very important. For me, when I hear 'health' I think more medical or clinical, but when I hear wellness I think of a more holistic approach, in line with what you have outlined, Peggy. That said, I think that the movement from 'mental illness' to 'mental health' has been a small, positive step towards removing mental health from the medicalized 'something-is-seriously-wrong-with-you' domain.

Jodi Mucha

The Ministry of Health in BC uses "health, wellbeing and quality of life".

Robert Newell

The use of the term 'wellbeing' has been quite useful for community indicator systems that aim to take integrated approaches. I'm thinking particularly of Peg, the Winnipeg indicator system, which uses this language to discuss measuring how the community is doing in a manner that comprehensively addresses the connectivity between social, environmental, economic, health, etc. factors.

Peg recently launched their [public website](#) with a very interesting interface that shows community wellbeing as a systems issues We also have a [case study](#) on, for more information on this project.

Peggy Taillon

Another dimension to stigma is the role of media and the portrayal of mental health.

The irony of anti-bullying campaign run ads during police dramas where the villain is portrayed as having a mental health condition.

The irony of a public outcry after a teen suicide that is linked to bullying and the conduct of public figures, not the least of which our parliamentarians.

The contradictions.

Ann Dale

Peggy, bang on. It is seen as 'weakness' to see a counsellor, tough it out kid, and yet you don't hesitate to see your GP for a hang nail:) That is why I quoted Rousseau at the beginning of our conversation, it takes incredible ego strength to ask for help?

Peggy Taillon

Yes, it really does. It takes courage to say, I need help, something is not right and then when you do seek help you are faced with a labyrinth and offered up thing that are more like a bandaid that something that can really make a difference.

Paul Allison

I think it is more like a maze...a labyrinth would be a good thing ;-)

Dennis Foon

This is complicated by the fact that what we perceive as 'normal' has become narrower and narrower. With children, the slightest deviation sends off alarm bells and becomes a trigger for drug therapy. This is not to dismiss extreme mental health conditions where drugs can be invaluable, but Big Pharma has a huge reach and the desire for a quick fix is pretty scary. I'm beginning to wonder if it's all part of a Brave New World movement to go from a society that strives for happiness as a goal as opposed to wanting a fulfilled life, one that includes the full spectrum of experience? To maintain or achieve this happiness, what emotions have to be suppressed or negated?

Jodi Mucha

I think you need to have a systems approach way of thinking to begin with though, as I always assumed that everyone respected the environment since that's how I grew up. I was appalled to learn that indeed that was not the case. For us on this panel we GET it. What about those who don't and don't care to? How can we impact the system to get it so we promote and provide an integrated approach? Seems tough when, ie., we are up against the big drug companies, etc.

Peggy Taillon

Yes, a systems approach and the information about options for a journey to recovery that is determined by choice and guided by health professionals. Most people need a combination of things to find balance and their recovery.

Rebecca Foon

In our **community vitality work**, we have identified that mental and physical health is deeply connected to urban planning and community vitality. The way we build our urban landscape, how we develop our commuting habits, where we protect our natural spaces, where we create greenspace and public space, food security, walkability,

diversity, social capital, income, community resilience is all deeply tied to mental and physical health. If anything, this illustrates the need to think about mental and physical health in a holistic, integrative way. Dialogues like this are so important, helping to stimulate critical thinking around mental and physical health, its connection to urban planning, GHG emissions and climate change, stigma, etc. - and identifying the complex issues, the interconnectedness of it all, and perhaps even beginning to break down barriers...

Ann Dale

Jodi, tough questions and questions that need to be answered. Hopefully our dialogue today has gone some ways towards Changing the Conversation, even if just a little.

Thank you so much for your time and contributions to a subject that touches nearly all Canadians. Any last comments before we wrap up?

Jodi Mucha

I think the more we are able to tell the story, the more we are able to demonstrate our collective impact the more effective we will be in our upstream efforts taking a preventative approach and also a compassionate approach for those who are challenged with mental health issues. This is a constant challenge - how to best tell the story and measure the impacts.

Peggy Taillon

Yes, true! Hoops, mazes and barriers....Canada's health system!

I would just offer that perhaps getting back to simple human based interaction, stripped down, real stuff is key. Systematizing often complicates things and moves us further away from responding to things.

Robert Newell

As we start getting toward the end of the dialogue, I would like to share a preview of a video that we will officially release next week that was created to complement this

theme of the Solutions Agenda research. It was created through a partnership project with the BA students in our School of Communication and Culture, and aims to capture the concept of mental health in the community context. The video was designed to be evocative (rather than narrative) and in the end, took a rather artistic approach. This makes me think about the earlier discussion on mental health and art; artistic approaches do show potential for being able to express certain issues when more literal forms of communication fall short.

Here is the [video](#) if you are interested in taking a look.

Paul Allison

A final example to end...

Shinrin-yoku is a term used in Japan that translates into 'bathing in the atmosphere of the forest'. A stressed worker goes to the doctor and receives a green prescription to visit one of the five nationally recognised forests used for mental health purposes. The amazing thing about this is that it is paid by the health care insurance companies!

Thanks everyone, see you all somewhere down the garden path.

Yuill Herbert

Thanks everyone - lots of interesting insights - I now have another 6 browsers open of new links to read about, when I should be out walking in the forest listening to the spring peepers! Thanks a lot :)

Ashlee Cunsolo Willox

Yes, thank you everyone! I was really interested/inspired to see how such a diverse group of people could blend their experiences and understandings of this topic together and have so many points of overlap. Great to have these types of dialogues. And yes, Yuill and Paul, may we all be inspired to get off our computers and head to the woods for some forest bathing.

Peggy Taillon

Thank you Ann, Rob, and Rebecca. Brilliant as always. And thanks to everyone for sharing. Lots to think about.

Ashlee Cunsolo Willox

Thank you, Ann, for hosting us. It was a pleasure meeting with everyone virtually! And thanks to Robert and Rebecca for all your organizational and technological assistance!

Rebecca Foon

Thank you all so much again for participating, this has been a truly inspiring dialogue!

Robert Newell

Thank you, everyone. Very interesting discussion!

Dennis Foon

Thanks so much! Inspiring to read everyone's words. And tons of great ideas to mull over. Be well!