

Planet Youth in Canada

Exploring the Icelandic Prevention Model

Planet Youth is a guidance program designed to support communities to implement the Icelandic Prevention Model (IPM), a community-driven initiative designed to reduce adolescent substance use. It takes a system-wide approach to youth wellness, shifting the focus from individual interventions to the larger environmental context.^{1,2}

The IPM uses population-based data to create strategic, locally relevant interventions that target key domains like school, families, and leisure time. By harnessing these protective factors and increasing local engagement, communities work together in new ways to address upstream challenges and create lasting change.^{1,3}

Canada is currently seeing a surge in the adoption of the IPM across provinces, with sites in various stages of development in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia.⁴



Support for the Model

The IPM has been effectively reducing youth substance use rates in Iceland for over 20 years. Studies have demonstrated that it has led to a 46% reduction in youth alcohol intoxication rates,⁵ and lifetime cannabis use has dropped from 16% to 5% of youth.³ This is in contrast to the rest of Europe, where rates of substance use have remained relatively consistent.⁵

When replicated in Spain, similar reductions in smoking, cannabis use, and intoxication were observed. Specifically, time spent with parents during weekends was most significantly correlated with reductions in youth substance use.⁶

Although the IPM has flexibility in how it is adapted locally, what defines the model is its five guiding principles, described in the next column.⁵ The model also outlines ten core steps to guide implementation, from coalition building, funding, and data collection, to goal-setting, policy alignment, and environmental enrichment.⁷

[Click here to learn more about the Icelandic Prevention Model⁸](#) and read on to the next few pages to learn about its current implementation in Lanark County, Ontario.

Five Guiding Principles⁵

01

Apply a primary prevention approach that builds on the social environment as a foundation for change.

02

Emphasize community action and work with schools as the natural neighbourhood hub where youth can maximize their health, learning, and life success.

03

Engage and empower community members to learn how to use local data to make practical decisions about how the interventions take shape.

04

Integrate researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and community members into one collaborative team with the ability to tackle complex, real-world problems from different perspectives.

05

Match the scope of the solution to the scope of the problem, with an eye for lasting, long-term change based on available community resources.

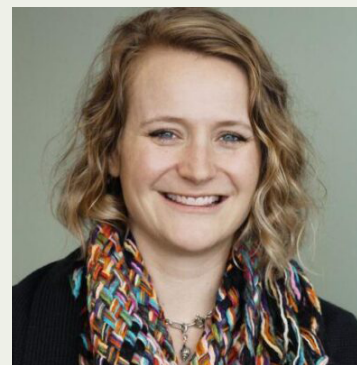
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Planet Youth Lanark County

A Conversation with Dr. Tanya Halsall

Tanya Halsall is a Scientist at the University of Ottawa Institute of Mental Health Research at the Royal and an Adjunct Research Professor in the Department of Neuroscience at Carleton University. Her primary research areas are related to child and youth development, evaluation and health promotion. Her specific interests are in participatory approaches and interventions that support system change for child and youth well-being. Originally brought into the planning for Planet Youth Lanark County because of her expertise in youth engagement, Dr. Halsall has since supported the project through the development of an evaluation guide and several publications about the implementation process.

We reached out to Dr. Halsall in November 2024 and she sat down with us for a conversation about her experiences with Planet Youth.



What is the current state of Planet Youth Lanark County?

The first round of school surveys were distributed in March 2022 after a long period of COVID delays and the second survey just wrapped over the summer. The implementation of IPM in Lanark County is focused around two goals: create safe spaces for youth and improve sleep habits. These priority areas were validated through consultations with youth about the challenges they face and the changes they want to see in their communities. The next step in the process is action planning!

What are some structural considerations that are unique to our context?

One insight that has emerged from our work implementing IPM locally is that this model originated in a country that has strong structural supports in place already. Politically and culturally we're quite different from Iceland. They have a large middle class, as opposed to Canada where there's a widening wealth gap. An important component of IPM is parental involvement, and that's much harder to do when parents do not have as many social supports. They're busy working and they have limited access to childcare.

There's also more political polarity in Canada, but making "healthy spaces for kids" is an idea that everyone can get on board with. Planet Youth can be an awareness-raising tool to draw attention upstream and demonstrate the need for provincial investment in prevention initiatives.

What have you learned from your work in youth engagement?

There are not many effective models of youth engagement within upstream prevention. A lot of the conversations in upstream work center on policy, budgets, collaboration, and other high-level systems issues. You have to adapt your approach based on the age, interest and ability of youth, but they can be included upstream. It is important to design strategies that address key issues that are identified by youth. Young people who become involved in decision-making should be informed about the evidence related to upstream prevention and social determinants of health. This supports their understanding of how to address key issues and increases their meaningful involvement in dialogue with other stakeholders.

What excites you about Planet Youth?

My impressions have changed over time, the longer I've worked upstream. What drew me to upstream approaches initially was my background in human kinetics and psychology. So many youth services tend to focus on life skill programming and education, but it's less common to explore other contexts where youth are spending their time. What makes the IPM so cool is that it uses those contextual realities, along with data, to create healthy spaces. Measurable outcomes are still far off but progress is happening!



Research Snapshot

Building Community Engagement to Support Adoption of the IPM

Published in 2022, [this study by Dr. Halsall and colleagues](#) examines the process of engaging communities to adopt the Icelandic Prevention Model (IPM) in Lanark County, Ontario. Interviews were conducted with nine community partners leading the implementation of IPM to identify challenges, successes, and practical strategies for community engagement. The findings provide insights into motivating stakeholders, overcoming resistance, and fostering community collaboration when implementing youth wellness initiatives.

Motivating Influences

- Stakeholders were drawn to the IPM's holistic approach, which targets root causes of substance use and promotes youth empowerment, family cohesion, and broader community well-being.
- Many were motivated by concerns over the local opioid crisis and its impact on youth.

Strategies to Develop Buy-In

- Transparency and open communication without applying pressure to become involved, were essential to gaining community trust.
- Leveraging existing partnerships and aligning the IPM with ongoing local initiatives helped reduce the perceived competition for resources.
- Highlighting the data-driven and participatory nature of the IPM facilitated support among potential collaborators.

Resistance to Adopting the IPM

- Some community members expressed skepticism about applying a model from Iceland in Canada, citing cultural and contextual differences.
- Concerns were raised about previous environmental restructuring strategies, such as curfews in Iceland, which were seen as restrictive and inconsistent with youth empowerment values.
- The open-ended nature of the IPM, which tailors interventions based on local data, left some stakeholders uncertain about the model's immediate strategies and outcomes.

Key Takeaways

Although the findings are specific to Lanark County and may not fully apply to other communities, this research provides actionable strategies that support uptake and system-level implementation of the IPM.

- Building Stakeholder Engagement:** The study emphasizes the importance of understanding local community perspectives, as well as clear communication, open dialogue, and transparency with community members.
- Adapting to Local Contexts:** By tailoring interventions to local needs and leveraging existing community networks, initiatives like the IPM can achieve broader acceptance and sustainability.
- Balancing Prevention and Immediate Needs:** The findings highlight the need to integrate prevention efforts with existing treatment and harm reduction programs, ensuring a comprehensive approach to addressing substance use.

You can reach out to Dr. Tanya Halsall at tanya.halsall@theroyal.ca or access this article directly to learn more:

[Halsall T, Mahmoud K, Pouliot A, Iyer SN. Building engagement to support adoption of community-based substance use prevention initiatives. BMC Public Health. 2022;22\(1\):2213.](#)

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