

# *Taking Flight*

SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH ASSIST

Strategic Directions  
2017-2020



SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH-ASSIST  
ÉQUIPE D'APPUI POUR LA SANTÉ  
MENTALE DANS LES ÉCOLES

# School Mental Health ASSIST

## Strategic Directions, 2017-2020

School Mental Health ASSIST (SMH ASSIST) is pleased to share *Taking Flight*, an overview of our Strategic Directions for 2017-2020. In this second phase of provincial implementation support within Ontario schools, we are setting a new course that builds on the foundations set from 2012 to 2017. This strategic plan aims to bring leadership, resources, and evidence-based support to the school and classroom level more quickly through several expanded areas of focus.

During the first phase of implementation support, SMH ASSIST focused on establishing foundations for effective school mental health practices alongside several key stakeholder groups. System and school leaders, particularly Mental Health Leaders and Superintendents with responsibility for mental health, co-designed and co-created the SMH ASSIST approach. Five key strategic priorities emerged through this collaborative development phase:

1. Establish organizational conditions
2. Build capacity
3. Introduce evidence-based mental health promotion and prevention programming
4. Support specific populations
5. Contribute to system coordination across sectors

In addition, a stakeholder consultation conducted in spring/summer 2017 surfaced a number of SMH ASSIST process features that appear to be fundamental to achieving intended outcomes at the provincial and district level. For example, implementation coaching, peer networking, and consistent communication were identified as being associated with implementation progress and coherence across boards.

School Mental Health ASSIST (SMH ASSIST) is a provincial implementation support team, working alongside the Ministry of Education, to support Ontario's 72 school boards and four school authorities in their efforts to promote student mental health and well-being.

SMH ASSIST is part of the ministry's commitment to the provincial Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy, and is in place to provide leadership, Ontario-specific resources, and implementation support.

SMH ASSIST strives to bring alignment, consistency, quality, engagement, scalability and sustainability (ACQESS) to mental health and wellness practices in Ontario schools.







Our 2017-2020 Strategic Directions build on these foundations. The five priority areas identified in the first phase of work continue to be relevant and important. A sixth area of focus on student engagement and leadership related to mental health has been added as a vehicle for catalyzing momentum towards our collective goals. Our belief is that mobilizing youth voice will help to enhance the pace of student mental health literacy development and help to reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness and addictions.

## Key features of the 2017-2020 strategy include:

- Deepen the focus on evidence-based implementation practices at the province, board, school and classroom level
- Extend the reach of resources through expanded communication and creation of an educator-accessible resource repository
- Expand the provincial repertoire of evidence-based, implementation-sensitive mental health programming through a School Mental Health Innovation and Scale-Up Lab.
- Include a dedicated focus on equity and the unique needs and preferences of specific populations alongside community leaders
- Offer guidance to help with alignment and integration of cross-sectoral supports and services across the tiers of intervention
- Introduce youth leadership and engagement to catalyze efforts in bringing mental health awareness and help-seeking to schools
- Introduce family engagement and literacy to further expand the network of caring adults with mental health knowledge to support student well-being.



The priorities identified in this strategic plan were informed by the data gathered from key stakeholders (e.g., Mental Health Leaders, senior and school administrators, classroom educators). The SMH ASSIST team is extremely grateful for this helpful input. We are hopeful that our Strategic Directions 2017-2020 resonate with Ontario stakeholders and that together we will soon be *Taking Flight* in support of student mental health and well-being in our schools.

It is a privilege to serve school boards within the province of Ontario in support of student mental health and well-being. SMH ASSIST appreciates the opportunity and support from the Ministry of Education in fulfilling this mandate.

## Mission

To support Ontario's 72 school districts and four remote isolate school authorities in their efforts to promote student mental health and well-being, to prevent social emotional difficulties and substance misuse, and to help students requiring more intensive supports and services as part of the wider system of care.



## Aspirational Vision

Ontario students are flourishing, with a strong sense of identity and belonging at school, prepared with skills for managing academic and social/emotional challenges, surrounded by caring adults and communities equipped to identify, intervene early, and support recovery when students struggle with mental health and/or substance misuse problems.



## Vision 2020

By 2020, Ontario school board staff and stakeholders will understand their role in strengthening student mental health and well-being as part of the wider system of care, and will be implementing and supporting evidence-informed school and classroom practices that are consistent with this role.

Students will describe their school as welcoming and inclusive, will be able to identify caring adults in their school who they would approach if they were experiencing difficulty with their mental health, and will demonstrate an understanding of mental health that includes an appreciation for the role of each individual in supporting self-care, help-seeking, stigma reduction, and recovery.



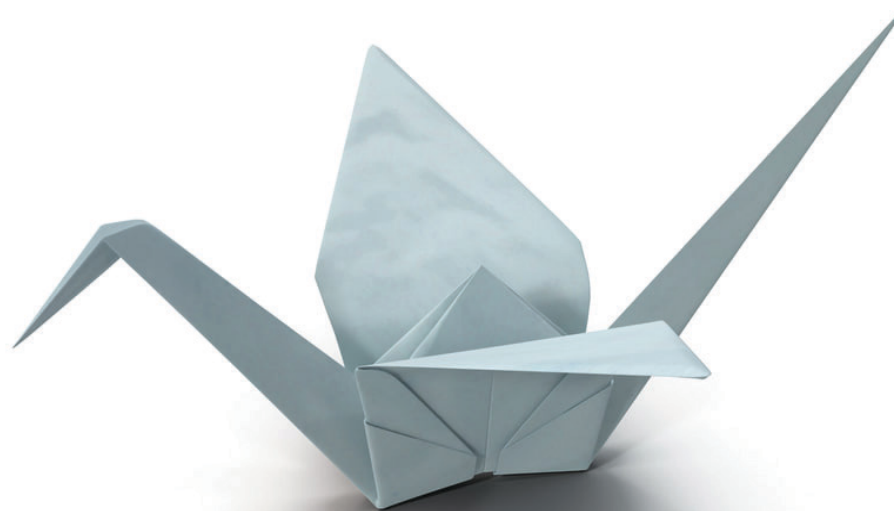
## Values

- Evidence-informed school mental health methods
- Implementation science and coaching approach
- Distributed and cascaded leadership and capacity
- Co-creation and iterative development
- Differentiation and diversity

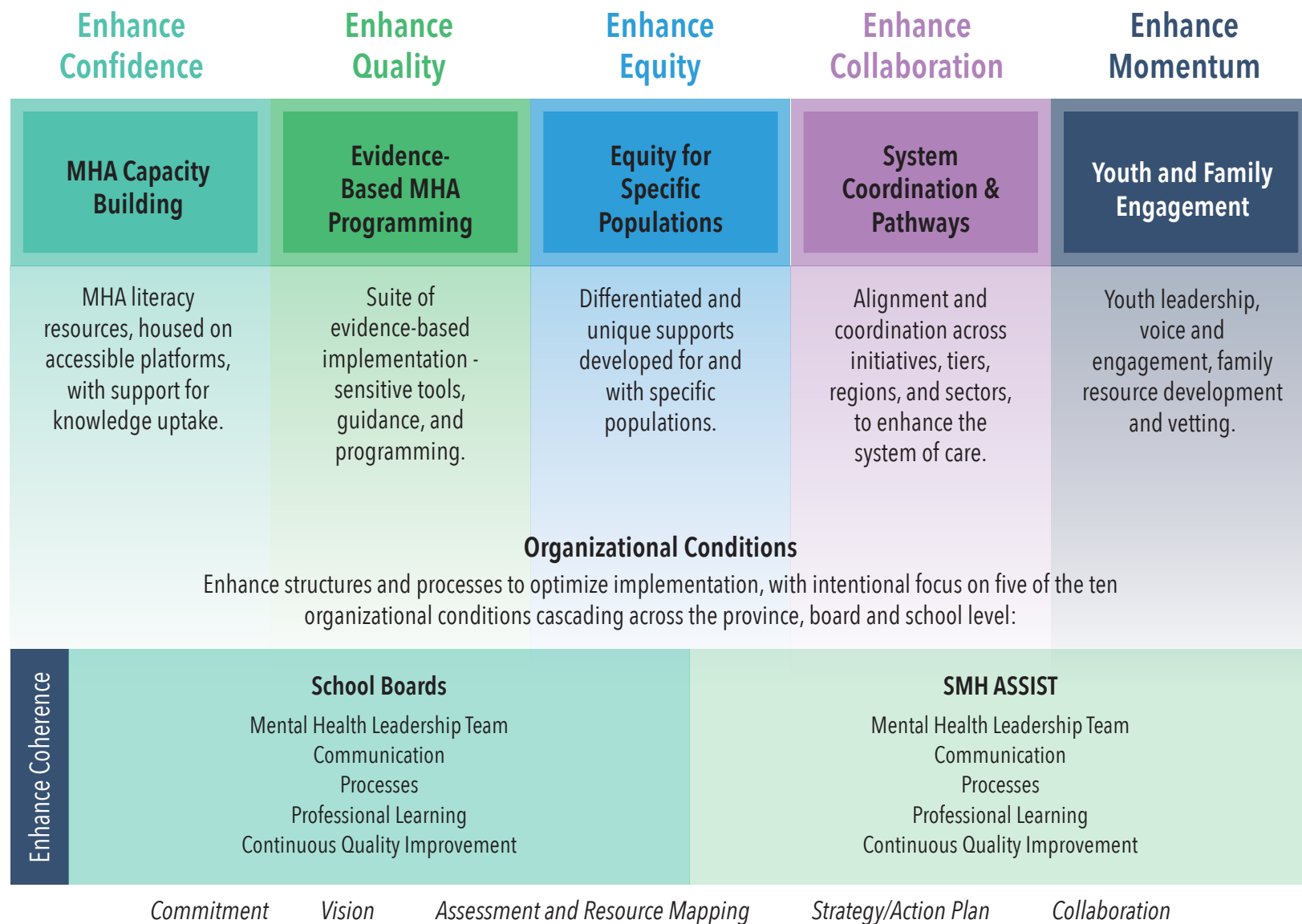


## Goals

1. **Enhance coherence.** Consolidate and sustain organizational conditions across Ontario's 72 school boards so that there is coherence with respect to structures, processes, priorities, and strategies - and staff, students, and families can count on these foundations no matter where they are in the province.
2. **Enhance confidence.** Build mental health understanding, leadership, capacity, and confidence amongst school and system staff so they can implement effective practices that are consistent with their role.
3. **Enhance quality.** Ensure that schools and boards across Ontario have access to evidence-based, locally-relevant, scalable, and sustainable mental health practices.
4. **Enhance equity.** Develop and share tools and guidance designed to help school boards to differentiate supports for and with Indigenous, LGBTQ2S, immigrant/refugee and "early years" populations.
5. **Enhance collaboration.** Create platforms and tools for collaborative planning and implementation that are designed to enhance the system of mental health support in schools and communities.
6. **Enhance momentum,** through student leadership. Enhance the growth of mental health awareness and help-seeking amongst young people by offering vehicles to mobilize and catalyze student voice, engagement, and leadership.

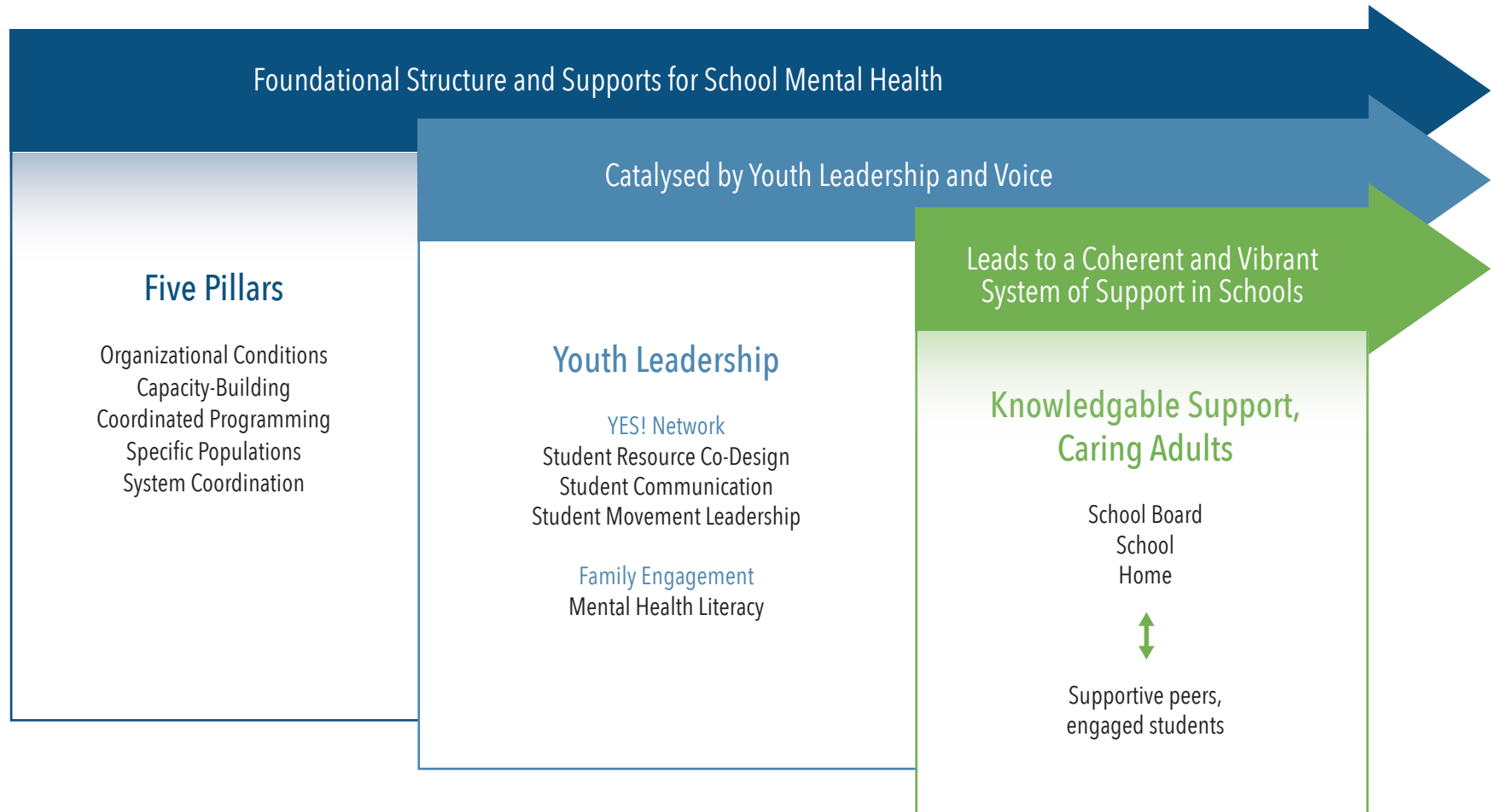


## Strategic Priorities for the 2017-2020 Strategy



## In Summary...

SMH ASSIST is building on foundations alongside mental health leadership teams in school boards across Ontario. With the help of youth leadership and voice, we will soon be *Taking Flight* towards a more coherent and vibrant system of support in school mental health and wellness!



### For more information:

Visit our website at <https://smh-assist.ca>

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