

Understanding the Experience of Youth Visiting the Emergency Department with Mental Health Crisis

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In situations of acute mental health emergencies, young people in Alberta have been increasingly using Emergency Departments (ED). To explore youth experiences when accessing the ED, the Addictions and Mental Health (AMH) Strategic Clinical Network™ (SCN), in partnership with the Patient and Community Engagement Research (PaCER) program, used a survey to engage large numbers of youth and their parents.

The PaCER model is founded on engaging people with lived experience in planning research – a process known as *co-design*. Before beginning this study, we wanted to ensure that the survey would be relatable to youth, so we engaged youth in co-designing the survey. The goal was to adjust the language, wording, layout and content of the survey, so that participants would feel engaged, respected and comfortable responding to it.

PaCER held an all-day co-design focus group on February 4, 2017 at the Distress Centre in Calgary with 10 youth over the age of 16, to explore the topic of youth experiences visiting the ED with a mental health crisis. Participants reviewed the draft survey and provided input on the design, layout, wording and content. The language and content of the questions needed to reflect a natural dialogue of this age group. It was found that small but significant changes in language turned out to be key in creating interest and participation. For instance, participants recommended changing the term ED to emergency room (ER).

The participants provided a re-design of the survey to make it specific to youth and advised on how to best connect with youth. The co-designed survey was sent to youth separately from their parents/family, using different engagement methods, as youth were more likely to respond if they were connected with directly online using social media or texting. We learned not to use email as many youth no longer respond to emails!

Over 900 surveys were completed and returned. The youth-led co-design process informed the methods of engagement with youth, giving researchers more opportunity to collect ‘lived experience’ data.