



## **Canada's APEC Digital Hub: Leading the Way on an Innovative Mental Health Super Cluster**

Canadians are taking a leadership position in an innovative, science-based campaign with the potential to transform global understanding and treatment of mental wellness through an unprecedented digital collaboration leveraging the knowledge and research efforts of countries around the world.

### **Canada on the global front lines of an innovative digital campaign for mental wellness**

The APEC Digital Hub, hosted at the University of British Columbia and with co-partners Mood Disorders Society of Canada and University of Alberta, is working to become the centre of an international super cluster and digital platform for Canadian and international scientists, innovators, businesses, health institutes and governments to share knowledge, research, data, public policies and best practices.

While the Hub will serve as a digital centre for information and learning about mental health, its transformative and unique value will be as a place where key stakeholders will go regularly to work and collaborate. Specifically, among other attributes, the Hub will:

- for the first time ever, allow experts, innovators, universities, and the private sector to create, improve, fund, and propagate mental health research and studies on a global digital platform, greatly advancing our knowledge of mental health;
- create a global showcase of mental health start-ups and private sector solutions that will massively advance the ability of companies to promote and export new capabilities, and;
- create valuable and progressive ways to leverage digital collaboration tools such as ideation and prediction analysis through an international lens focused on mental health.

With the right support, the APEC Digital Hub will put the entirety of Canada's mental healthcare community on the global front lines of an innovative domestic and international campaign for mental wellness. We believe the immediate and long-term socio-economic benefits associated with this project cannot be underestimated.

And as a strong partner at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, Canada is well-positioned to lead in the fight against mental illness globally as well as helping Canadians benefit from the innovative collaboration essential to the APEC Digital Hub.

The federal government has broken new ground in its recognition of the human and economic costs of mental illness and in its commitment to a wide-ranging strategy to address the problem and prioritize research and treatment. The Hub provides a unique opportunity for Canadian leadership in this area.



## **Recommendation: \$5 million over five years to accelerate digitization of the mental health super cluster; true partnership with government critical**

We recommend that the federal government provide \$5 million over five years to accelerate the current digitization of the APEC Digital Hub for mental health innovation.

We are hoping to build a true partnership with the federal government to advance this project, which we believe would help solidify Canada's leadership role globally through its support for an important, precedent-breaking project with immense potential benefits for Canadians and the 2.8 billion people across 21 APEC economies.

Besides advancing the federal government's agenda on mental health and its role as a cooperative international partner, federal funding for the Digital Hub would help actualize the innovative potential of Canadian and international collaboration to address such issues as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Indigenous health, youth health, medical therapy, primary care and public safety among other.

We believe the project is also exactly what the federal government is aiming for in its efforts to foster innovation and the technological ingenuity that will enable Canadians to excel in the digital world in ways that better connect knowledge clusters, foster economic growth, maximize the global reach of Canada's professionals and entrepreneurs, leverage science and enable the jobs of the future.

In that context and in the true spirit of imaginative, innovative thinking, we are hoping that the federal government will give serious consideration to examining the criteria attached to some of its innovation-related funding programs to ensure that worthwhile projects that tie in directly to the government's innovation agenda are not rejected because of arbitrary or too-rigid conditions for approval. We realize that the criteria for many programs are still evolving, but we do hope the government will take steps in the unfolding of these funding tranches to ensure the widest possible application of criteria at a time when truly innovative professionals, entrepreneurs and others may be testing the boundaries of current models, strategies and creative fusion in the development of new academic and commercial endeavours.

The Digital Hub is a prime example of significantly enhancing collaborative networks while breaking down silos. As the host country, Canada will work with its APEC partners to create measurable value in collaboration with the public and private sectors and produce tangible economic benefits in science and innovation. For example, healthcare dollars will be impacted in a positive way – money will be saved by addressing mental illness and increasing the availability of healthcare resources. In addition, Canada will be able to be more engaged with APEC economies through international collaborative research.



Nearly 100 domestic and global partners have already signed on and are keen to begin exchanges that will lead to enhanced Digital Hub engagement and mental health supports for Canadians and people throughout APEC countries.

### **The world is watching**

All 21 APEC economies are closely watching developments and domestic government pronouncements in support of this Canadian-led, ground-breaking initiative. Of the global economies involved, possible early advances in expanded engagement and government-to-government alignment can be expected with the U.S., China and the Philippines.

### **Sampling of Canadian partners**

- Mental Health Commission of Canada
- Canadian Depression Research & Intervention Network (CDRIN) is a national mental health research and intervention network established in the 2012 federal budget and funded through a Health Canada Contribution Agreement commencing in January 2013.
- University of British Columbia
- University of Alberta
- University Health Network in Toronto
- Royal Ottawa Mental Health Research Institute
- Douglas Hospital/McGill in Montreal and Dalhousie University in Halifax
- First Peoples, First Persons Indigenous Research Hub, a national, Indigenous Peoples' Research hub located at the University of Saskatchewan composed of Indigenous researchers and NGOs from across Canada.

### **Sampling of international partners**

- Peking University
- Janssen Asia-Pacific
- Malaysia Ministry of Health
- Indonesia Ministry of Health
- Japan National Institute of Mental Health
- Philippines National Centre for Mental Health
- University of the Philippines – Manila
- Mexico National Institute of Psychiatry
- Peru Ministry of Health and National Institute of Mental Health

Select provinces and cities are keenly interested and would certainly consider following suit on potential federal engagement. There are also serious discussions regarding funding from within corporate Canada under way but a serious signal from the government of Canada is critical.



## How will it work?

Based on design thinking principles and revolving around research done with the potential user community, we have produced numerous user scenarios to clarify how the Hub will work globally in practice. A sample of two of them are below:

### Private sector example

Mr. Smith is a Canadian-based HR executive for Acme Corp. His organization, through Mr. Smith's leadership, has been successful in instituting a progressive program around workplace mental health that has seen short and long-term disability claims drop for the last five years. Through his work with the Mental Health Commission of Canada, Mr. Smith was introduced to the APEC Mental Health Digital Hub.

Mr. Smith has been exposed to numerous informational websites over the years but was interested to see what the Digital Hub had to offer. His first impression was being impressed by the amount of activity taking place in real time; it seemed more like an online lab than a typical portal. In the *Project Platform* area, Mr. Smith is "following" a number of projects and research papers as they are being produced. This proximity to best practices, studies, and progressive approaches to mental health will allow him and his team to incorporate and adjust their company's program much more efficiently, saving time and money while bringing better results for his colleagues and company goals.

In the *Solution Showcase* area, Mr. Smith was impressed by the interesting array of solutions that companies of all sizes had available. Acme has been looking for over a year to find an Anonymous Group Chat solution that catered to the business workplace and was surprised when he found ABC Inc from Singapore and is currently testing ABC's product. Mr. Smith also started a "Demand" dialogue in *Solutions Showcase* to see if Hub viewers were aware of another solution that Acme was looking for but had not yet seen it in the Solutions section.

### Practitioners

Dr. Jones is a primary care doctor in Alice Springs, Australia, a remote town of 25,000 located in the Northern Territory. Like much of the Northern Territory, the town has a large proportion of Aboriginals with many more aboriginals visiting Alice Springs to use the services there. Dr. Jones estimates that 50% of his patients are aboriginal.

Like all primary care doctors, Dr. Jones deals with many aspects of mental health as it relates to his patients. Given his location and patient demographics, finding support for mental health issues is difficult. He began researching resources and quickly found the APEC Mental Health Digital Hub.



Dr. Jones has found a number of things that he likes. First, he has set up a weekly email function in his profile area of the Hub that pushes new information to him on areas of interest, ensuring he is current but allowing him not to have to visit the Hub every day. Dr. Jones is also directly involved in two studies that are focused on improving aspects of indigenous mental health taking place in the *Project Platform* part of the Hub. Next month, with his supervision, the local schools will be using a new software targeted at helping Aboriginal teens cope with particular challenges that they have. Dr. Jones found the software in the Beta Testing area of the *Solution Showcase*.

Dr. Jones finds that his involvement with the Hub gives him leverage and access to tools and support that are hard to find anywhere else.

### **How quickly will results emerge as a result of federal support for the Digital Hub?**

There will be immediate outcomes as collaborations, research and digitization are already underway. When it comes to patient care, we can expect significant outcomes to be felt quickly in Canada, which is the lead country, and within four to five years in other APEC economies.

In closing, let me say that we believe this is an exciting project that ties in directly with many of the federal government's goals. In particular, we believe that, with appropriate funding support, the APEC Digital Hub could contribute in a very significant way to the early advancement of the federal government's landmark campaign on mental wellness. The project also represents a transformational move forward in scientific collaboration and the digital empowerment of health care providers, governments, businesses and others through an innovative digital network with the potential to produce great benefits, both in Canada and globally.

We appreciate the chance to set out the details of the APEC Digital Hub and very much hope we will be able to collaborate with the federal government in the further development of this uniquely Canadian innovation on the world stage. We would of course be more than happy to appear before the Finance Committee to provide additional information on the project.