



Annual Report

2021 – 2022

Executive Summary

Community Connect YYC (CCYYC) is a collaborative of 16 community agencies that focuses on transforming the norms of access to affordable counselling. Led by Kindred, the initiative provides access to affordable counselling to residents of Calgary and the surrounding area. The online platform allows clients to book affordable counselling appointments anytime and remove barriers such as wait times, costs, and stigma. CCYYC addresses growing mental health challenges by seamlessly connecting clients with services that meet their needs.

CCYYC focuses on client centered care design and delivery, collaboration and sector transformation. All partners are committed to providing high quality services with the goal to collaborate with one another to meet the client's unique needs and serve the community together. Through this model, the initiative aims to achieve following outcomes: improve client experience; improve service delivery; improve mental health outcomes; and improve sector coordination.

The initiative was launched in August 2020 with 6 services and now in its third year offers over 30 services. Since launch, over **7300** appointments were attended, showing how critical and effective this resource is for the individuals with mental health needs. Services are offered virtually and in-person providing flexibility. With 24/7 access to booking appointments, on average, 31% of the bookings made happen after-hours (6pm-8am),

Collaboration has helped to break down silos between service providers and serve the client in a holistic manner. The service agencies value their partnership with the initiative as it sheds light on sector trends, service demands, gaps and care delivery.

CCYYC is a vital part of the mental health system and will continue to partner with service providers to push boundaries to improve client experience and strengthen positive mental health outcomes.



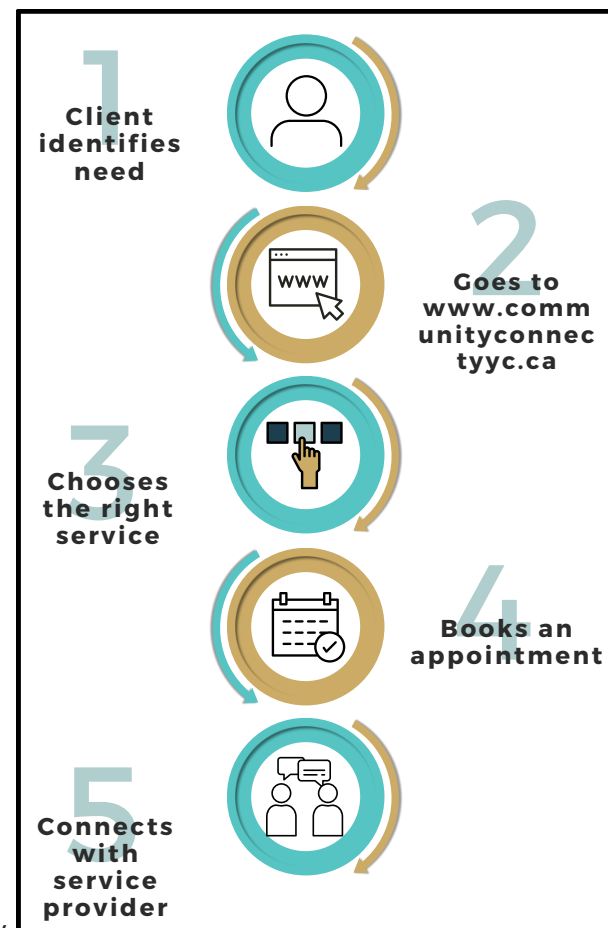
Background

Community Connect YYC (CCYYC) is a collaborative of agencies whose purpose is to transform the norms of access to affordable counselling. Through the use of a web-based platform it provides access to affordable counselling to residents living in Calgary and the surrounding area. The initiative, led by Kindred, was launched in August 2020. It was part of our response to the pandemic and the growing mental health needs that required timely access to affordable counselling. Now in its third year, the network has 16 community organizations providing over 30 services, all committed to eliminating barriers and lengthy wait times that prevent Calgarians from connecting with affordable counselling.

Mental health supports were in high demand prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the pandemic further escalated this need. More and more individuals struggled with isolation, loneliness, and anxiety, and needed someone to talk to about their challenges. Navigation, wait times, stigma and costs were some of the other barriers experienced in accessing counselling. CCYYC reduces these barriers by offering a simplified online solution that enables all types of clients (children, youth, adults, individuals and families) to book an appointment with a service of their choice, at the time that is right for them. The accessibility of the platform allows clients to book more than one service at a time, depending on their needs.

Beyond supporting Calgarians through improved access, the network has facilitated collaboration between community partners for our greater purpose. Keeping the client in the centre of care delivery, partners bring to the table a wide pool of services, complementary to one another, and deliver high quality



services to improve both the client and provider experience. CCYYC has transformed the overall infrastructure of mental health supports through its innovative and collaborative nature.





CCYYC Model

With its creative and integrated approach to improving access to affordable counselling CCYYC has established itself as a integral part of the mental health care system. The initiative has two main elements of focus:

-  **Client Centered**
-  **Collaboration and Sector Transformation**

The initiative aims to achieve the following outcomes:

-  Improve client experience
-  Improve service delivery
-  Improve mental health outcomes
-  Improve sector coordination



Area 1: Client Centered

CCYYC effectively uses a digital health approach to improve access to affordable counselling for all types of clients within Calgary and surrounding areas, with some services being available province wide. Over 30 services are available for clients to choose from ranging from rapid access, single session options to long-term therapy. Clients have the opportunity to easily navigate the website at their own pace and comfort with the option to choose services that address their personal goals and needs; all this without the fear of judgement and stigma. Clients are able to browse and book a wide variety of services all in one-location, making it a barrier free process. Clients are empowered with choice and autonomy.



Improving client experience



Improving health outcomes

84%

of clients said that the online booking process helped them match with an appropriate service*

91%

of clients said that they were able to access the service when they needed it*

87%

of clients feel somewhat or much better after the session*

94%

of clients said that they have positive service experience*

86%

of clients feel that they have a much better idea of what their next steps are*

*Client Feedback Survey

Accessing counselling services can be an intimidating process, especially for those who have not spoken to a counsellor before. Stigma, appointment fees, language barriers and availability of culturally relevant services are all barriers that can prevent someone from getting the care they need. CCYYC removes these barriers by making the process online, easy, confidential and secure.

"I appreciate how simple the online booking was to navigate, and being able to see a counselor on the same day was a huge bonus. Overall I had a positive experience."

-CCYYC Client

"This was the easiest way I have EVER received services of this nature. This website is AMAZING!!"

-CCYYC Client

CCYYC is committed to supporting the diverse population in our community. Historically there have been many barriers for members of marginalized communities and those with language specific needs. Our partners are committed to providing high quality care, where clients' needs are consistently prioritized to meet their outcomes and helping as many clients as possible. Anyone needing help is supported, without judgement, regardless of their age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, culture, ethnicity, economic or social status.

"My experience with the ALEX gave me hope where precious little hope existed."

-CCYYC Client

"Although all the reasons above made my experience excellent, it was the counselor I spoke with who made the difference. I felt understood, and accepted."

-CCYYC Client

This year's expansion had a particular focus on bringing on additional services tailored to equity seeking groups including immigrants, those living with a disability, and the BIPOC community. There are different service options in more than 11 languages. During the first year of CCYYC only 3 services offered language options compared to 9 services in year two. Services for immigrant population also increased to 8 compared to 2 services from year one.



"A young Immigrant couple struggled to find a way to save their marriage and could not access the services they needed due to different barriers. Through CCYYC, the couple was connected with carya's Language Specific Counselling in just a few days. They were able to feel heard, understood, and respected, and their marriage was saved."

-carya

"CCYYC has expanded our reach and given clients access to counseling services that support their sexual health and relationship support needs."

-Centre for Sexuality

"RAAM has been very helpful. I have been on a wait list with AHS for close to 3 months. RAAM got me in in a week."

-CCYYC Client

All services available on CCYYC are affordable, meaning some services are absolutely free and some have a sliding scale model, but no client is ever turned away due to their financial circumstances. Depending on the service, sessions are available all days of the week with virtual and in-person option allowing clients the flexibility to book according to their preference and reducing financial and access pressures that may prevent them for seeking care. Across all services, on average clients are able to see a service provider within **7** days. In fact, some services are available on the same day.

"I really appreciate how accessible this service was. Both from a booking and cost perspective."

-CCYYC Client

"The rapid access counselling sessions have been so important to me in healing from trauma. I have noticed that I am better able to cope and I am so grateful that I have access to a counsellor in a short amount of time with affordable payment options."

-CCYYC Client

Since the platform is available online, people are able to access booking appointments 24/7. Monthly, on average, **31%** of the bookings made happened after-hours (6pm-8am), which would not be possible in the traditional way of accessing services.

"Partnering with CCYYC has improved client access to information and services while maintaining confidentiality and limiting barriers such as transportation etc."

-Lionheart Foundation

"C4S has had the opportunity to work with clients, who if not for CCYYC, would not have known about our services."

-Centre for Sexuality



Since August 2020 to September 2022, CCYYC has addressed the growing needs by adding more sessions and increasing system supply and consequently observed more clients accessing the services. Since last year, the number of services offered doubled and a **14%** increase was seen in the number attended appointments .

Description	Year 1 (2020-2021)	Year 2 (2021-2022)	Total	% Increase
Attended Appointments	3422	3900	7322	14%

Appointments are available throughout the day, including evening and weekends, allowing the client to find supports that meet their schedule. In fact, **12%** of the sessions attended happen between 5-10pm, highlighting the accessibility and flexibility of the model.

During the pandemic majority of the appointments were available virtually. Recently, some service providers have started offering in-person sessions in addition to the virtual option. **10%** of the attended appointments have been in-person compared to **90%** that are chosen to be virtual (phone/video).

"The wait time was very reasonable, there was next day availability I just chose a later date that worked with my schedule. The booking process was very simple and easy and eliminated the need to leave a message somewhere and wait for a call back. The session was very helpful and the therapist was great, I found it helpful to sort out some of my thoughts and experiences."

-CCYYC Client



Area 2: Collaboration and Sector Transformation

Collaboration has been the key factor in the growth and success of CCYYC. Mutually beneficial partnerships with a joint focus on serving the clients has been driving the network. To continue serving the diverse needs of Calgarians, this year, CCYYC partnered with 7 new organizations that brought in 16 new services, bringing the total to **16** inventory partners and over **30** services.

Collaboration has helped to break down silos between service providers and serve the client in a holistic manner. Service providers do not view each other as competition but rather make use of the network and the established partnerships to meet the diverse needs of the clients through inter agency referrals.

The service agencies value their partnership with the initiative as it sheds light on sector trends, service demands, gaps and care delivery. **88%** of the partners believe that CCYYC has improved their understanding of service demand and gaps and navigation and access trends. **60%** of partners have seen positive impact on service expansion and service delivery model.



"CCYYC has provided another platform for clients looking for services to access. The website also allows for referral resources for individuals looking for multiple services."

-Lionheart Foundation

"Partnering with CCYYC has prompted our organization to update our intake processes, and recognize community trends, needs, and service provision. It is an effective gateway allowing individuals easy access to affordable counselling. Individuals have reported that connecting with our organization has been helpful in finding alternative resources."

-The Alex

CCYYC has proven to be very effective in sharing data trends between agencies and supporting the agencies in making fundamental changes in their service portfolio and inventory to meet the emerging trends. All partners agree that client accessibility to affordable counselling has improved due to CCYYC. Agencies welcome the opportunity to book additional services for their clients through CCYYC, which, traditionally, may not have been as easy to do.

"We have had several clients indicate that they were not aware of us to begin with, and have been happy to finally have a gap met in the community regarding individuals who have disabilities who cannot afford proper services. We have also recognized a large need in the community regarding trauma-specific counselling which has resulted in us starting to revise our focus to help us address the needs in the community."

-Vecova

With its integrated approach to care, CCYYC infuses affordable counselling not only in the mental health sector but also in other community sectors. Expanding our partnership with **8** new external referral partners has increased awareness of CCYYC across many sectors including housing, primary care, agencies serving those experiencing homelessness, seniors and crisis. These external referral partners leverage the CCYYC platform by booking appointments on behalf of their clients and supporting warm hand off in a timely and effective manner. It eliminates the guess work and navigation that the client often faces when offered a resource from a community agency.

"Provides a place for our organization to go that can provide a variety of resources for a diverse case load."

-Calgary West Central Primary Care Network

"For me to have received assistance so quickly is very much appreciated along with the counselling expertise to help me understand what happened to me and steps I can take to help myself and / or reach out to other services / resources.

Also, appreciate the Distress Centre for it's quick and responsive service and insight into helping me and advising me as to what I needed to do in the moment to reduce the stress / distress I was feeling at the time. Kindred and the Distress Centre helped me to get back on track and to take steps to address what happened to me to reduce isolation so that I don't have another scary incident of depression and upset again."

-CCYYC Client

"CCYYC provides a convenient and efficient option for client's who do not meet our eligibility requirements. CCYYC ensures that options for counselling are consolidated in an easy to navigate website."

-Distress Centre Calgary

CCYYC continues to integrate with different sectors by promoting it as a resource on the organization's website and marketing the initiative at various fairs, events, and through social media. Throughout this year CCYYC contacted close to **40** organizations across many different sectors to create an awareness of CCYYC and share its resources,

What's Next

CCYYC has driven the change in transforming the norms of access to affordable counselling. Through its innovative digital health delivery approach and strong collaboration with partners, the initiative has proven to be essential part of the mental health landscape. To sustain the substantial impact, the initiative plans to strategically expand by partnering with service providers that address current gaps on the platform and connecting with non mental health sector agencies for better promotion and marketing. CCYYC will continue to push boundaries to improve client experience and strengthen positive mental health outcomes.



Our Partners



Acknowledgements

We are deeply grateful to our funders and donors for believing in this innovative initiative and whole heartedly contributing in making Community Connect YYC an essential part of the mental health system. We thank the City of Calgary for the Connect the Dots grant and the Home Program grant, the Calgary Homeless Foundation and other anonymous donors.



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