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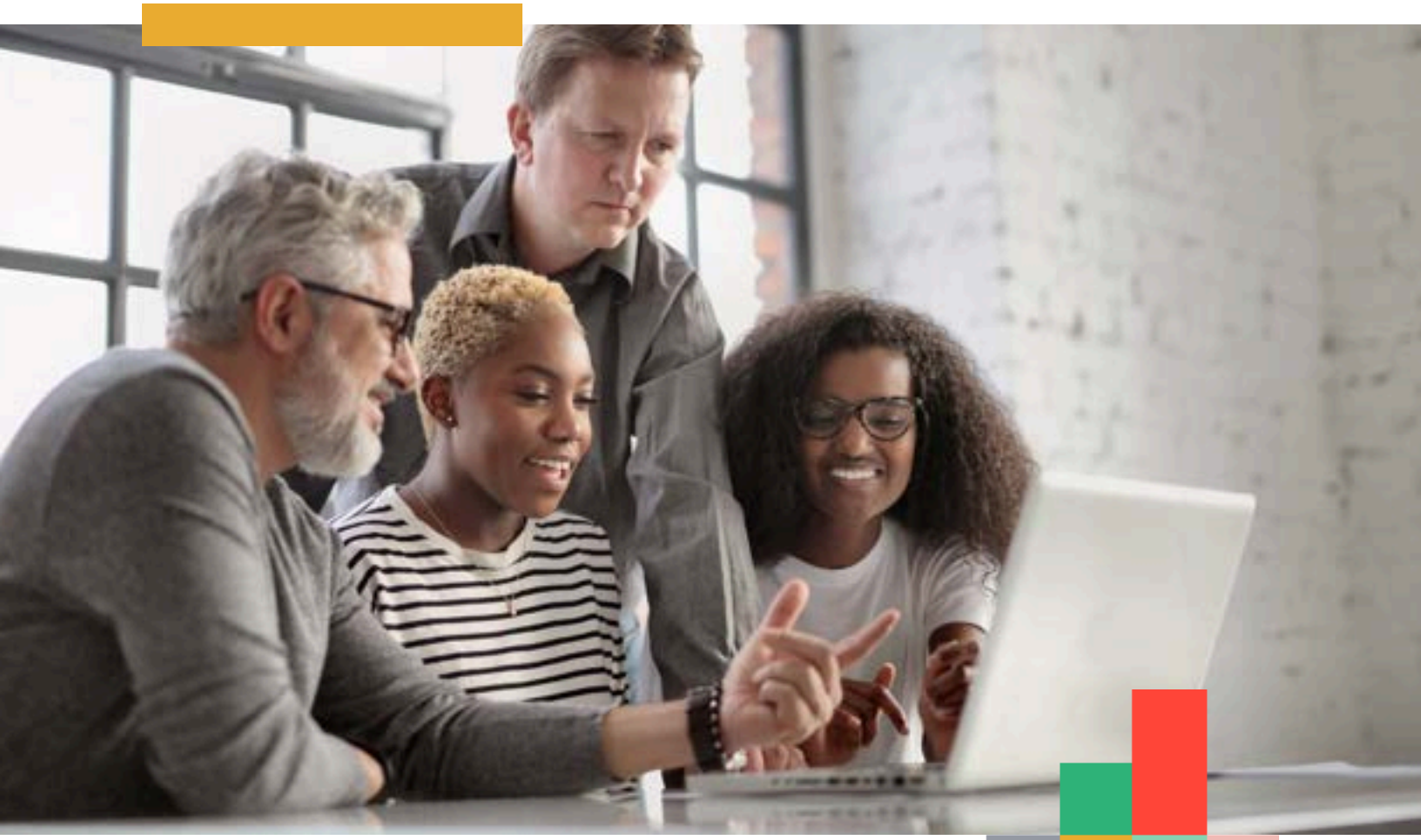
National Mental Health Datathon

KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION SUMMARY REPORT



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INTRODUCTION

Canada's mental health system is composed of disjointed sectors across multiple jurisdictions and locales. Integration and coordination are often lacking in mental health support systems, including clinical care, housing, income assistance, education, and the legal system. Because each has different goals, mandates, and data practices, the landscape is fragmented and hard to support.

This disarray leads to harm to individuals and families seeking care. At every point of contact, they are routinely asked to recount their stories, often without assurance that their previous experiences are understood or shared. The result is too often duplicated, delayed, or misaligned care, placing a significant emotional and administrative burden on those least equipped to manage it. People in crisis and their caregivers must become system navigators and self-advocates while simultaneously managing mental health symptoms, trauma, or intersecting challenges such as housing insecurity or systemic discrimination.

In response to this reality, **Converge Mental Health**, a national coalition working to accelerate innovation, action, and equity in mental health systems, and **Data for Good**, a volunteer network of data professionals across Canada, collaborated to launch the National Mental Health Datathon. The Datathon was conceived as a time-bound, practical initiative to test the value of ethical data sharing and collaborative analysis in the mental health sector. While not positioned to drive system change on its own, the Datathon served as a low-risk, high-learning opportunity, bringing together organizations, volunteer data enthusiasts, and community partners to explore real-world challenges using existing service and research data.

The event also aimed to challenge several persistent misconceptions: that data sharing is too complex, that privacy concerns are insurmountable, and that organizations lack the capacity to engage meaningfully with their data. In reality, there are practical ways to address all of these concerns when clear frameworks, guidance, and technical support are in place.

The Datathon provided a compelling proof of concept, demonstrating that ethical, impactful data collaboration is not only possible but also practical, scalable, and welcomed by those working on the front lines of care. The insights generated were of tangible value to the participating organizations and helped foster data confidence and curiosity among participants across sectors.

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WHY A DATATHON?

At its core, the Datathon was a collaboration, not a competition. In a system where data is often siloed, underused, or feared, the Datathon offered a focused, time-bound way to explore what's possible when organizations invite collaborative insight generation. It was not intended to overhaul the system overnight, but to ask a simple question: ***What if we tried something different, at a manageable scale, and learned as we went?***

As a strategic proof of concept, the Datathon created a rare space where cross-sector partners could safely test the mechanics of data sharing. This included privacy protocols, technical logistics, and trust-building. It also gave organizations a chance to explore their own data with support from volunteers who brought technical skills and fresh perspectives.

Instead of prescribing top-down solutions, the Datathon encouraged co-creation. It demonstrated that data collaboration does not need to begin with perfection. It can start with curiosity, willingness, and the right structure. The most important outcomes were not just the insights produced, but the relationships built, the confidence gained, and the momentum created for what comes next.

Its goal was to leverage data and technology for positive impact in the mental health sector, not to "win," but to learn, explore, and build collective capacity. All participants were expected to protect the data and use it only within the context of the Datathon, guided by strict governance protocols, clear expectations, and a shared ethical commitment to privacy and respect.

The event addressed several persistent sector challenges: siloed information, limited analytical capacity, and hesitancy around data use due to privacy concerns and reputational risk. By bringing together mental health organizations and volunteer data professionals from across Canada, the Datathon created a unique space for partnership, bridging lived experience, service expertise, and technical skill to explore real-world questions using anonymized, cleaned datasets.

The goal was to demonstrate that valuable insights can be generated from existing or limited data when supported by clear governance, technical infrastructure, and cross-sector collaboration. It also showed that simplified datasets can spark curiosity, build trust, and inform local decision-making without requiring major system overhauls.

WHY A DATATHON?

Importantly, the Datathon complements but differs from other efforts to improve data use in the sector, such as the **Information Sharing Framework (ISF)**, developed by George Alvarez, Public Policy Advisor for Converge. While the Datathon used historical, de-identified data to explore service-level and research questions, the ISF is a broader initiative aimed at enabling real-time, person-specific data sharing across systems. The ISF seeks to improve care coordination by ensuring that contextual information follows individuals through the health, social, and justice systems, guided by strong governance and trust frameworks.

In contrast, the Datathon focused on what's possible now, demonstrating how insights can be generated from existing infrastructure and capacity, while also highlighting the need for ongoing investment in tools, staffing, and skills to build lasting capability across the sector.

Together, these efforts represent different but complementary strategies. The Datathon tested a practical, scalable model for data collaboration, while the ISF charts a long-term path toward integrated, person-centered care. Both are grounded in the belief that better outcomes are possible when data is shared with purpose, context, and consent.

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DESIGNING FOR LEARNING & IMPACT

The idea for the National Mental Health Datathon emerged in response to a growing focus on data as a strategic priority in the mental health sector, paired with persistent concerns about whether meaningful collaboration, ethical data sharing, and organizational capacity could truly align in practice. Converge Mental Health Coalition and Data for Good saw an opportunity to challenge those assumptions through a time-bound, real-world experiment designed to demonstrate what's possible when trust, technical support, and shared purpose come together.

At the same time, Data for Good was looking for a meaningful way to mark its 10th anniversary as a volunteer-driven organization with nine chapters across Canada. The organization recognized from experience that Converge, a national cross-sector coalition of mental health innovators, funders, and policymakers, was a strong partner for such an initiative. Not only was mental health a critical issue, but Converge member organizations held valuable datasets that, if shared and analyzed collaboratively, could identify actionable insights. A national Datathon offered a powerful way for all nine Data for Good chapters to contribute their skills and passion, while demonstrating the value of data sharing in the mental health sector.

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Datathon Design & Data Use Framework

In the months leading up to the Datathon, a group of 25 Data for Good volunteers called Data Ambassadors formed teams and engaged with participating mental health organizations to explore their data and co-develop challenge questions. These questions, when combined with national datasets such as the **Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC)** dataset and/or the **HelpSeeker Social Trends Explorer** (based on the 2021 StatsCan census), aimed to inform program design and service delivery, while also contributing to broader knowledge-building within Canada's mental health sector.

Combining datasets in this context meant that insights from each organization's data could be layered with anonymized and aggregated data from MHRC or HelpSeeker to identify trends, gaps, and opportunities at both local and systemic levels. Throughout the process, organizations maintained full ownership and control of their data.

The Data Ambassadors from Data for Good acted as an extension of each organization, operating strictly within the terms outlined in the individual data-sharing agreements. Only anonymized data was shared with the broader Datathon cohort, and only with organizational consent.

To safeguard all parties, data sharing agreements were signed between Converge and each participating organization. All data was stored securely in Canada.

Preparation

Engagement with mental health organizations began in earnest by September 2024, with the development of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) to outline shared expectations and goals. Data-sharing agreements were also developed to align on expectations and to assure and protect confidentiality. Nine organizations ultimately came on board, including:

- 211 Canada
- Big Brothers Big Sisters - Calgary
- Canadian Mental Health Association – Alberta + Centre for Suicide Prevention
- Canadian Mental Health Association – Edmonton
- Canadian Mental Health Association – National
- Distress Centre Calgary
- HelpSeeker Technologies
- Kids Help Phone
- Mental Health Research Canada

The Data Ambassadors played a crucial role in preparing for the Datathon, working closely with each partner organization through a phased approach. In the first phase, actioned in January 2025, their focus was on conducting a thorough review of the data provided, assessing accessibility, content, anonymization needs, quality, and any restrictions on use that would inform the data-sharing agreements. They also collaborated with organizations to identify key questions and challenges related to their data. These objectives were gathered and organized to guide participant teams who would later focus on these during the Datathon.

In the second phase, which took place in February 2025, the Data Ambassadors helped consolidate the datasets, working alongside Converge partners to develop broader, national-level questions and challenges that could be explored by combining data across organizations, a stage where unique insights often emerge. Finally, in March 2025's third phase, they compiled comprehensive documentation and resources to support Datathon participants in their analytic and visualization efforts. An Overview of Data and Objectives for each organization is presented in **Appendix 1.**

Data Sharing & Use Agreements

In parallel, during this time, Converge and Data for Good carried out extensive preparations to guarantee the responsible handling and use of data for the Datathon. Converge delegated day-to-day data management responsibilities to Data for Good for the duration of the Datathon

Data Sharing Agreements were established between Converge acting as the Data Holder, and the participating organizations recognized as Data Contributors. These agreements formalized the ownership of the data by the organizations and outlined strict terms and conditions governing how volunteer participants could access and use the data throughout the Datathon. Key clauses in the Data Sharing Agreements covered critical areas, including:

Data Use by the Data Holder: Ensuring the security and confidentiality of all data, and confirming that datasets made available to participants contained no personally identifiable information.

Data Use by Datathon Participants: Participants could only access data after individually signing a Participant Data Use Agreement that required them to safeguard the data against misuse or unauthorized disclosure, use the data solely within the context of the Datathon, keep it confidential and restricted to Canada, and refrain from attempting to identify individuals or contact them. Participants were restricted from analyzing or interpreting data related to Indigenous peoples. This was because there had not been an opportunity to engage with Indigenous groups, also some contributors had previously removed Indigenous data. Social media posts were limited to participation announcements only, with any sharing of data or analysis requiring consent from Converge and contributors. After the Datathon, participants were required to destroy any local copies of the data within seven days.

Security Measures: Data was securely stored in a Canadian repository with physical, administrative, and technical protections in place. Any data breaches would be promptly reported to Converge, which would take action to mitigate harm.

Disclosure and Publication: Making any analysis or reporting public required prior approval from Converge and contributors. Publications had to acknowledge data sources, and opinions expressed were identified as those of the authors, not the data contributors. Contributors accepted that Datathon outputs might combine data from multiple sources.

This comprehensive data governance framework ensured that data sharing during the Datathon was ethical, secure, and respectful of contributor and participant responsibilities, laying a strong foundation for trust and collaboration.

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Infrastructure Planning

As this foundational work progressed, the infrastructure planning also ramped up. Google Workspace tools, communication templates, and instructional guides were developed. After exploring a commercial hackathon platform option, Oracle and Nextcloud were selected as the data repositories and file system. These had a high degree of functionality and flexibility and had been used for previous Datathons.

With a large number of participants from nine chapters across Canada, it was important to automate as much as possible. A three-step process was developed to move participants from registration to secure data access and then to sign up on the Discord platform (used for communication and collaboration).

A server outage of the initial Nextcloud provider was a reminder of the importance of infrastructure resilience. For a couple of days, teams lost access to their workspace, and this reinforced the value of having backup systems and contingency plans.

Nextcloud was migrated to Oracle Cloud Infrastructure (OCI) to leverage a more stable and easily configurable platform. The environment was deployed with robust backup and disaster recovery strategies in place, ensuring availability and minimal disruption in the event of a failure. This setup provided a reliable foundation for the remainder of the Datathon.

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And GO!

The Datathon officially launched on April 5, 2025 with a livestream kickoff event held in Calgary. At the same time, local chapters hosted in-person events in Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Regina, Waterloo, Ottawa, Montreal, and Halifax (Toronto and Montreal were virtual-only). All of the chapters joined the Calgary livestream remotely. This hybrid approach successfully combined live gatherings with a national virtual launch, uniting the community across the country.

The kickoff agenda included opening remarks from Converge and Data for Good, followed by presentations from participating mental health organizations who provided context and described the objectives they hoped to address through the Datathon. Attendees then took a virtual cross-country tour of Data for Good chapters, reviewed technical instructions for data access, and explored available reference materials. The session was followed by an opportunity for team formation and initial collaboration to begin generating insights. By the end of the team formation process, nearly 600 participants had registered across 100 teams, engaging both online and through in-person chapter events.

Over the next three weeks, Datathon participants– Data Ambassadors, technology advisors, data scientists, and Data for Good and Converge representatives– collaborated in teams to dig into the datasets and explore the objectives shared by each organization. The objectives were a starting point for the teams, and the approach was flexible. This allowed teams to follow their interests and pursue some of the stated objectives or to come up with their ideas for analysis.

Towards the end of the 3 weeks, teams were asked to complete a Team Presentation Form outlining key aspects of what they had worked on and to prepare a short 5-minute video presentation. The videos were used at the wrap-up event and also became part of the documentation from the teams to be passed on to the organizations.

Post-Event Activities

The Datathon wrapped up on April 26, 2025 with another national livestream hybrid event. Participants gathered for a closing event that included opening remarks and a high-level review of key themes that emerged from the Datathon. The agenda also featured video presentations from a cross-section of participating teams- about 20 of the 60 total number of teams- selected to reflect all contributing organizations and Data for Good chapters. The event included reflections from data partners, a cross-country spotlight on local Data for Good chapters, and closing remarks from Converge and Data for Good. Some chapters also hosted additional presentations to showcase local team contributions.

At the end of the Datathon, teams were asked to complete a comprehensive Team Documentation Form. This form included detailed information and links to the data files, analyses and insights that were generated by the teams. All of this valuable information was later incorporated into a Documentation Repository that was made available to each of the organizations. About 75 teams provided information related to their efforts at the Datathon. Team summaries with selected information are shown in **Appendix 2.**

As outlined in the Data Sharing Agreements, each organization retained control over whether to share presentations or findings publicly. Following the event, participants could complete a Post-Datathon Interaction Form to indicate interest in continued engagement- such as offering a demonstration or volunteering- and to request permission to share their findings publicly. Converge facilitated communication by contacting participating organizations to gauge their interest in ongoing collaboration. If interested, organizations were encouraged to reach out to participants directly. Where public sharing was permitted, Converge relayed that approval to the relevant participants.

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DATA EXPLORATION HIGHLIGHTS

Each overview below summarizes the data scope, analytic approaches, and key questions explored by Datathon teams. Thematic highlights identified key trends, challenges, and opportunities uncovered through collaborative analysis with each organization. Organizations were asked to share their reflections on teamwork and findings.

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211 Canada

Teams working with the 211 Canada dataset focused on identifying service demand trends, unmet needs, and regional disparities in access to mental health and social supports. Some analyzed spikes in service requests linked to events like wildfires, seasonal patterns, or system pressures. Others explored demographic variations and the intersection of mental health needs with social determinants like housing or income. A few teams combined 211 data with other sources, such as census data or local crisis line reports, to understand overlapping gaps and inform better resource planning. Several used Power BI and visualization tools to make these insights more accessible and actionable.

Emerging Themes:

- **Regional & Seasonal Trends:** Spikes linked to wildfires, inflation, and seasonal events helped explain fluctuations in call volumes and service use.
- **Demographic & Economic Disparities:** Access gaps were analyzed across age, income, gender identity, and region, often using census overlays to pinpoint inequities.
- **Unmet Needs & Service Gaps:** Some teams' work using machine learning and trend analysis helped flag where needs went unmet due to capacity, cost, or referral breakdowns.
- **Referral Systems & User Experience:** Several teams analyzed referral journeys and call handling patterns, recommending centralized systems and Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools to streamline navigation.
- **Data Quality & Benchmarking:** Many teams noted missing or inconsistent data fields. Nonetheless, cross-provincial benchmarking exposed shared issues and operational insights.
- **Visualization & Dashboards:** Interactive tools using Power BI, Databricks, and mapping platforms were common, making it easier to explore mental health needs by location and group.

The data analysis aligned with internal observations and deepened understanding of peak periods of interaction by hour, day, and season. 211 indicated that these insights support resource planning for crisis and community team services and clarified assumptions about interaction patterns. Findings on queue times, average call volumes per responder, and call abandonment rates highlighted operational gaps and opportunities to strengthen service quality. Cross-provincial analysis further enabled benchmarking across jurisdictions and exposed shared challenges in data quality and referral tracking.

"These findings offer actionable insights for our organization to improve service quality, optimize staffing, and strengthen data collection and reporting."- 211 Canada

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Big Brothers Big Sisters Calgary

Several teams explored how mentorship impacts youth outcomes at Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) Calgary. Some focused on statistical relationships between adverse childhood experiences (ACE) scores, match length, and developmental relationship outcomes. Others examined volunteer re-enrollment and retention, identifying where and why volunteers disengage. A few teams mapped demographic and regional service gaps, using open data to highlight needs related to racial diversity, trauma-informed care, and youth mental health access. On the technical side, teams cleaned and standardized multiple datasets and built dashboards to support ongoing insights. Overall, the projects aimed to improve matching strategies, enhance volunteer support, and strengthen youth programming.

Emerging Themes:

- **Mentorship Outcomes & ACE Scores:** Statistical tests explored the relationship between adverse childhood experiences and match quality or duration.
- **Volunteer Retention & Re-Engagement:** Teams analyzed patterns in re-enrollment, identifying stages where volunteers drop off and what signals second-time involvement.
- **Regional & Demographic Service Gaps:** Mapping and analysis highlighted where needs are highest especially around mental health access, racial diversity, and trauma-responsive care.
- **Program Design Context Matters:** Some team findings pointed to the need for clearer program documentation, as data interpretation depends on understanding how and why it was collected.
- **Data Infrastructure Improvements:** Multiple datasets were cleaned, schemas aligned, and dashboards built in tools like Databricks and Power BI to support long-term insights.

BBBS Calgary highlighted that data alone doesn't tell the full story. Understanding volunteer re-enrollment rates or mental health indicators requires context about program design and data collection practices. They noted that providing smaller, cleaner datasets along with clear explanations of data and program workings would improve future analyses.

"Differences in how data was interpreted by teams highlighted the need to provide detailed explanations on datasets and how programs work." – BBBS Calgary

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CMHA Alberta & Centre for Suicide Prevention

Teams working with Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Alberta and Centre for Suicide Prevention's suicide prevention data focused on analyzing workshop delivery, satisfaction, and impact. They conducted rigorous statistical testing to compare outcomes across in-person and virtual sessions, identifying delivery modes linked to higher participant satisfaction. Sentiment analysis and text mining were applied to open-ended survey responses to understand emotional tone and recurring feedback. Some teams investigated how workshop engagement might relate to suicide-related distress calls in Alberta, using regression analysis to find possible links. There were also efforts to contextualize findings using broader suicide statistics from Alberta and participant improvement across workshop types, particularly the ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) program.

Emerging Themes:

- **Workshop Satisfaction & Format Comparison:** Workshop Satisfaction & Format Comparison: Statistical testing was used to compare satisfaction scores between in-person and virtual sessions, identifying which delivery modes were linked to better participant experiences.
- **Sentiment Analysis of Feedback:** Text mining and sentiment analysis were applied to open-ended survey responses to surface recurring themes, emotional tone, and satisfaction drivers.
- **Crisis Line Connections:** A few teams explored correlations between workshop satisfaction levels and suicide-related calls to Alberta's crisis lines, using regression analysis.
- **Participant Improvement Tracking:** Teams measured participant learning outcomes and changes in skill scores across different workshop types, especially the ASIST program.
- **Contextualizing with Public Health Data:** Suicide rate trends, census indicators, and mental health data from Alberta were used to frame insights and explore broader impact.

CMHA Alberta and Centre for Suicide Prevention valued the depth and breadth of analysis, noting that the technical expertise applied across four years of data revealed insights that had not been surfaced before. These findings are informing ongoing program development and helping to situate workshop outcomes within broader suicide prevention efforts in the province.

"They had a significant amount of technical expertise in combing and synthesizing data across 4 years of data to reveal new insights." – CMHA Alberta & Centre for Suicide Prevention

CMHA Edmonton Crisis Line

Teams explored Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Edmonton's crisis line data to identify patterns in call types, risk levels, and service usage over time. Analyses included forecasting call volume trends, identifying predictors of referral likelihood, and surfacing operational challenges. Some teams integrated external data (such as opioid-related EMS calls, weather, and employment statistics) to explore relationships between broader societal conditions and call activity. Others produced dashboards and tools to support intake, triage, and referral processes.

Emerging Themes:

- **Exploratory & Descriptive Analysis:** All teams conducted some form of exploratory data analysis (EDA), using visualizations and statistical summaries to surface trends in call volume, call topics, and issue types. Several teams focused specifically on how call characteristics like duration and risk level shifted over time or varied by concern type.
- **Predictive Modelling & Trend Forecasting:** A few teams built predictive models to estimate future call volumes or to assess how well referrals could be predicted based on past interactions. These efforts aimed to optimize service delivery by anticipating demand and streamlining referrals.
- **External Data Integration:** At least one team meaningfully integrated external data sources, including weather data, employment statistics, and opioid-related EMS call data. This allowed teams to explore correlations between environmental/societal factors and crisis call trends.
- **Operational Recommendations:** There was also a focus on generating practical insights for service improvement, including call trend dashboards, agency mapping, and ideas for improving intake or referral flows.

CMHA Edmonton valued the fresh perspective and depth of analysis, noting it helped clarify where internal data efforts could yield greater impact. Key insights are informing their CRM integration with Distress Centre Calgary, helping to strengthen alignment and storytelling across local and national crisis systems.

"We have so little time to do this type of deep analysis... having an outside perspective look at the data was immensely helpful in knowing where to prioritize efforts for the most impact."- CMHA Edmonton

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CMHA National

Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) National provided a rich, publicly accessible dataset based on a recurring national survey issued every two years. The dataset included indicators across population groups and geographic regions, allowing teams to explore mental health trends, system engagement, and potential drivers of change. Participants experimented with visualizations, simulations, and statistical models to surface patterns that could inform future survey design and reporting.

Emerging Themes:

- **Cross-Provincial Analysis & Disparities:** All teams conducted some level of cross-provincial comparison, identifying disparities in mental health outcomes, access to care, and social determinants such as poverty, substance use, and housing. These insights help illuminate systemic issues affecting different regions.
- **Enhanced Indicators & Landscape Mapping:** One team focused on enhancing existing indicators in CMHA's aggregated data, creating a more detailed landscape of mental health metrics to support future reporting and policy work.
- **Predictive Modeling & Simulation Tools:** A team developed a blueprint for a digital twin simulation, an interactive tool allowing policymakers to model and test how resource allocation and social factors impact mental health outcomes.
- **Use of Multi-Source & Open Data:** Teams integrated external datasets including Statistics Canada, Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), 211 Canada, and opioid harm statistics to validate findings, model broader impacts, and link mental health outcomes with healthcare usage and social factors.

CMHA National appreciated the fresh analytical perspectives, particularly how participants engaged with the dataset in new and creative ways. Several team approaches sparked ideas for the next iteration of CMHA's reporting. A rural mental health mini-report is now being considered, informed by methods demonstrated through the Datathon.

"The way the participants were able to play with the dataset and find trends among the indicators was not something I've done. Their analysis gave me ideas for how to approach our next report."
- CMHA National

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Distress Centre Calgary

Teams analyzed over a decade of crisis and Connect Teen call data from Distress Centre Calgary to uncover mental health trends, caller demographics, and evolving risk concerns. Despite differences in how data was recorded over the years, teams worked to harmonize the datasets and surface consistent insights. Several projects incorporated socioeconomic and public health data to better understand what external factors influence crisis line usage. Dashboards and visualizations were created to support the Centre's intake, triage, and decision-making processes.

Emerging Themes:

- **Time Series & Trend Analysis:** Teams identified patterns across years in call frequency, call length, and caller concerns. Some compared pre- and post-pandemic data, while others analyzed urgency levels and risk indicators over time.
- **Demographic & Risk Profiling:** Many teams looked at age, gender, and concern type such as suicide ideation or interpersonal issues, to map who was calling and what their needs were. Adjustments were made to align pre- and post-2020 categorizations.
- **External Data Integration:** Several groups brought in socioeconomic data (e.g., unemployment rates, low-income stats, tax filings) and health indicators to explore how broader conditions correlate with crisis line activity.
- **Data Harmonization & Operational Insights:** Given shifts in how data was collected over the years, teams invested time in harmonizing categories. This made their dashboards and recommendations more usable for Distress Centre staff, with suggestions to refine intake processes or flag service gaps.

In their post-event reflections, Distress Centre Calgary valued the depth and diversity of analytic methods applied, noting how these reinforced known patterns while revealing new insights on caller demographics and service gaps. The analysis of queue times and call volume per responder pinpointed operational pressures, guiding improvements in staffing and service delivery. Integrating external socio-economic data enriched their understanding of factors driving distress calls. Crucially, the project demonstrated how longitudinal data can be effectively harmonized for meaningful trend analysis despite changing recording methods. These insights are already informing resource planning, data quality initiatives, and strategic decision-making.

"These insights are crucial for our organization, as they help us identify and address gaps related to our data capabilities and service patterns." – Distress Centre Calgary

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HelpSeeker Technologies - Social Trends Explorer

HelpSeeker Technologies provided access to their Social Trends Explorer visualization tool that presents community and neighborhood statistics using data from the 2021 Census by Statistics Canada. Use of the tool in combination with other data sources enabled teams to investigate broad social determinants affecting mental health outcomes and service access. Participants employed advanced data cleaning, integration, and visualization techniques, utilizing tools such as SQL, Tableau, and census data to reveal patterns and disparities.

Emerging Themes:

- **Social Determinants of Mental Health:** Teams examined how factors like employment, education, and geographic region relate to mental health indicators. This provided insight into who is reaching out for help and under what circumstances.
- **Comparative Regional Insights:** One team focused specifically on analyzing 211 and polling data by region, offering a comparative view of service needs and usage across different parts of the country.
- **Data Integration & Visualization:** These projects combined data cleaning and analysis tools like SQL, Tableau, and census data to visualize and better understand cross-cutting social issues.

Combining the Social Trends Explorer tool with additional datasets enabled teams to uncover patterns in social determinants and community-level factors influencing mental health and access to services. Analyses highlighted regional disparities and population needs, while advanced visualization techniques transformed complex data into actionable insights to support planning and decision-making.

Kids Help Phone

Kids Help Phone provided detailed data on young people requesting support via text message through the Crisis Text Line. This data in combination with other sources provided visibility into mental health service usage including seasonal, demographic, and regional variations in youth help-seeking behaviours. Teams applied forecasting models, demographic analysis, and environmental context exploration to uncover patterns influencing demand and service delivery. Interactive tools and predictive models were developed to support resource planning and campaign design.

Emerging Themes:

- **Seasonal and Demographic Trends:** Teams explored how mental health service usage changes over time. They analyzed seasonal fluctuations, age group patterns, and regional differences in Kids Help Phone conversations. One team also added an urban-rural classification to better understand community-level trends.
- **Environmental Crisis Impacts:** Teams investigated the link between extreme weather events like wildfires and increases in help-seeking. While most cities didn't show significant changes, a few saw spikes in calls after major nearby fires, suggesting localized mental health effects from environmental disasters.
- **Predictive Modeling and Planning Tools:** Teams developed forecasting models to predict issue types and call volumes. These insights were packaged into an interactive tool that could support mental health campaign planning and resource allocation.

The exercise demonstrated the value of integrating multiple data sources to generate actionable insights, supporting both operational decision-making and strategic planning for youth mental health services.

"It was really interesting to see the relationship between our dataset and social influences (i.e., less clinical data- more societal.") - Kids Help Phone

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Mental Health Research Canada

TTeams working with the MHRC National Polling dataset examined a range of mental health challenges and service gaps using public opinion and self-reported data. Leveraging the MHRC Workplace Poll, teams analyzed how toxic work environments, job roles, and managerial support influence employee well-being, applying survey analysis and predictive models to identify patterns of stress and burnout. Several teams also developed AI-powered tools to support insights and decision-making.

Emerging Themes:

- **AI Tools & Chatbots:** Several teams created AI-powered chatbots and dashboards to help users explore mental health data easily, using NLP, semantic search, and interactive platforms.
- **Youth & Equity:** Some teams focused on youth mental health and identity. This included looking at anxiety risks in 2SLGBTQ+ youth and comparing diagnosed vs. undiagnosed groups.
- **Regional & Demographic Trends:** Others broke down trends by age, gender, location, and income to show how mental health needs differ across Canada.
- **Diagnosis & Service Gaps:** A few teams looked at gaps like when people don't seek help even if they need it, or what happens after someone gets referred to support.
- **Making Data Accessible:** Some focused on making data easier to use through dashboards, smart filters, or natural language tools that let people "chat" with the data.

"The gambling and social isolation analysis we viewed was shared with our entire team as ideas for thought starters for potential future work, but we'd have to recreate it with our data and analysis methodologies."- Mental Health Research Canada

RECURRING THEMES ACROSS DATASETS

While each dataset reveals unique perspectives, many important patterns and issues emerged repeatedly across multiple organizations. This section synthesizes those broader, cross-sectoral themes, offering a high-level view of systemic challenges and shared opportunities in Canada's mental health landscape. By identifying these overarching themes, we can better understand how different parts of the sector interconnect and where coordinated efforts may yield the greatest impact.

Gaps in Access and Regional Disparities
Many datasets, including 211 Canada, CMHA National, and HelpSeeker, revealed geographic variation in service availability and unmet mental health needs. Rural, remote, and low-income communities often experience reduced access to supports, reinforcing systemic inequities.

Social Determinants of Mental Health
The influence of housing, income, education, employment, and other social factors on mental health outcomes appeared across datasets such as 211 Canada, HelpSeeker, Kids Help Phone, and MHRC. These determinants directly affect help-seeking behavior and service gaps.

Impact of Environmental and External Events
Spikes in mental health service demand linked to environmental crises (e.g., wildfires) and socio-economic stressors were evident in 211 Canada and Kids Help Phone data, underscoring the need to integrate crisis response into mental health planning.

Youth Mental Health and Developmental Challenges
Youth-focused insights emerged from Big Brothers Big Sisters Calgary, Kids Help Phone, and MHRC datasets. Themes included the role of adverse childhood experiences, screen time, social media, and demographic disparities influencing youth mental health.

RECURRING THEMES ACROSS DATASETS

Peer and Community Supports
Informal supports such as peer mentoring, volunteer engagement, and community programs were highlighted notably in Big Brothers Big Sisters and MHRC data as critical complements to formal services, supporting early intervention and resilience.

Workplace Mental Health and Organizational Culture
Workplace-related data (MHRC Workplace Poll) emphasized managerial support, organizational culture, and role clarity as key factors shaping employee mental wellness, stress, and help-seeking behavior.

Data Integration, Visualization, and Accessibility
Multiple teams across datasets showcased the power of linking administrative data with open sources (e.g., census, crisis lines) and applying modern visualization tools and AI-powered dashboards to make insights accessible and actionable for decision-makers and community partners.

Service Delivery Models and Participant Experience
Insights from CMHA Alberta and Distress Centre Calgary highlighted the importance of delivery mode (in-person vs virtual), participant satisfaction, and ongoing outcome tracking to optimize program effectiveness and client experience.

TRANSLATING DATA INTO ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS

The data exploration presented promising directions and early insights grounded in real-world evidence. While time-limited and exploratory in nature, the Datathon demonstrated the potential of cross-sector collaboration to inform multiple levels of impact, from structural system change to community-based service design to individual access and experience. Organized thematically, the following sections outline key areas of learning, helping to identify where future efforts could be targeted to strengthen Canada's mental health system.

System-Level Insights

Informing structural change, policy design, and sector-wide coordination

Cross-Provincial Disparities
Teams mapped mental health access and outcomes across regions, identifying significant gaps in care and highlighting where policy and investment should be prioritized.

Integrated Systems Thinking
Projects combined internal and external data, such as the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), Canadian Revenue Agency (CRA), and Statistics Canada, to reveal bottlenecks and overlaps across health, social, and economic systems.

Predictive Modeling and Scenario Testing
Several submissions used simulation and modeling techniques to test resource allocation and policy impacts. One team, for instance, found that stronger harm reduction policies were more predictive of improved outcomes than overall spending on mental health services, while another showed that strengthening social connectedness could reduce unmet service needs by nearly 30 percent. These approaches offer powerful tools for scenario testing, especially for organizations engaged in federal policy advocacy or systems planning.

Workforce and Service Infrastructure Gaps
Datasets related to volunteer retention, workplace well-being, and training effectiveness point to urgent needs to better support the mental health workforce.

Data Governance and Interoperability
Some organizations also reflected on the limitations of current sector-wide data standards and expressed a desire for more intentional collaboration. While national alignment on data collection remains a long-term goal, the Datathon revealed that even informal spaces to share what is being collected and why can support progress. For smaller nonprofits without dedicated analytics teams, shared insights and common approaches can lighten the workload. They help organizations learn from others, use tested ways to measure impact, and make their data more understandable and useful to funders, policymakers, and partners.

CONVERGE

Population & Community-Level Insights

Enabling responsive, equity-centred, and locally relevant service design

Geographic and Demographic Disparities
Projects consistently identified disparities in service access by region, race, income, and age. These insights offer a foundation for more targeted and inclusive programming.

Social Determinants of Mental Health
Analyses revealed clear correlations between mental health outcomes and housing, income, education, employment, and environmental conditions.

Trauma-Informed and Culturally Safe Approaches
Findings underscored the importance of designing services that reflect the lived experience of youth, Indigenous, and racialized populations.

Mapping the Service Landscape
Integrated analysis helped reveal what services exist, where gaps remain, and how coordination across community providers could be improved.

Social Media and Gambling Trends
Several teams explored the intersection between mental health, social media usage, and gambling behaviour. For at least one organization, these were areas of active interest, and the external analysis provides new angles for internal teams to explore.

CONVERGE

Individual-Level Insights

Improving access, navigation, and outcomes for people seeking support

Service Use Trends and Risk Profiles
Analysis of crisis line data showed shifting trends in help-seeking behavior, concern types, and urgency levels. These patterns offer actionable insights for improving frontline response.

Referral and Navigation Optimization
Teams built tools to improve referral pathways, increase match accuracy, and anticipate demand, all critical for helping individuals get the right support at the right time.

Feedback and Learning Outcomes
Evaluation of workshop and program feedback helped identify which delivery formats best support engagement, learning, and retention for participants.

Empowering Self-Advocacy
User-facing dashboards and data exploration tools created during the Datathon improve access to mental health information, enabling more informed and confident decision-making by individuals and families.

Workplace Mental Health and Support Systems
Analysis of organizational datasets related to employee isolation and managerial support revealed themes relevant to workforce well-being. These insights were especially useful to organizations aiming to strengthen internal policies and improve staff engagement.

CONVERGE

LESSONS LEARNED ON EVENT EXECUTION

While earlier sections summarize what teams found in the data, this section reflects on how the Datathon was delivered, highlighting key learnings related to data access, team engagement, organizational involvement, and opportunities for strengthening future collaborations.

Pre-Event Planning and Clarity of Roles

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was developed well in advance of the event, with strong detail around early planning. However, as expectations evolved during the lead-up to the Datathon, it became clear that the MoU should have been revisited closer to launch. Clarifying the roles of Converge, Data for Good, and the partner organizations in both the event and post-event phases would have improved alignment.

Value and Limitations of the 3-week Format

Participants appreciated the extended time frame for working with complex datasets, but feedback was mixed. Some felt that three weeks wasn't long enough, especially while balancing other commitments. Others found that interest dropped off partway through. Future Datathons may benefit from a tighter structure or built-in touchpoints to sustain engagement.

Team Formation and Support

In-person and virtual team formation occurred after the kickoff, with roughly 100 teams formed. While this process worked reasonably well for in-person attendees, virtual participants faced challenges. More structured support, such as a separate team formation session for virtual attendees, could have improved access and collaboration.

Scoping and Data Complexity

The volume and diversity of datasets, while ambitious, created a steep learning curve. Some participants found it hard to know where to start. In the future, offering more structured or curated datasets, or narrower challenge questions, could increase accessibility and the quality of insights.

Refining Questions Through Iteration

Even when organizations began with broad or unfocused questions, Datathon teams were often able to help refine them through exploration and feasibility testing. This iterative process became a strength of the model, reinforcing the value of open-ended inquiry in a time-boxed collaboration.

LESSONS LEARNED ON EVENT EXECUTION

Opportunities for Deeper Engagement
Several participants and organizations expressed a desire for more structured check-ins partway through the event. Optional drop-in sessions or mid-event alignment points could have offered space to clarify questions, validate early analyses, and build deeper connections between teams and data owners.

Role of Data Ambassadors
The Data Ambassadors were instrumental in bridging technical and service perspectives. They supported both teams and organizations throughout the event, helping to clarify data context and encourage iterative thinking. Their contributions were highly valued and underscore the importance of this role in future events.

Technical Setup and Tool Feedback
Discord worked well as a communications hub, though some participants, especially those new to the platform, found it confusing. Live Q&A sessions or open office hours could have supplemented the asynchronous chat environment. While Oracle and Nextcloud served their purpose as data repositories, some server issues caused delays and user frustration.

Learning Curve and Documentation Expectations
The steep learning curve for some volunteers, particularly those newer to data analysis or the chosen platforms, slowed early progress. In addition, expectations around documentation and deliverables could have been communicated earlier. While some delays were due to technical issues, future events should prioritize clarity on final output formats well in advance.

Post-Datathon Follow-up
The Post-Datathon Interaction Form helped match interested participants with organizations, but follow-up was left to each organization. Several participants noted a desire for clearer and more timely post-event communications. Creating a shared protocol or timeline for follow-up could enhance continuity and long-term impact.

Collaboration Dynamics
Teamwork was a highlight for many, with volunteers citing the value of learning from others and engaging across disciplines. That said, some teams struggled with dynamics or differing expectations. While organizers offered limited support, more structured facilitation or resources could improve team cohesion next time.

POST-EVENT REFLECTIONS

Alongside data insights, the Datathon produced powerful human insights. Participants, many of whom came from outside the mental health sector, describe the event as eye-opening, emotional, and deeply motivating. Their feedback speaks not only to the impact of the experience, but also to the potential of cross-sector collaboration to build understanding, drive innovation, and deepen empathy. The reflections below highlight some of the key themes from the post-Datathon participant survey.

Broader Awareness of the Mental Health Landscape in Canada

Participants gained a deeper understanding of mental health services, structures, and organizations across the country. Many discovered previously unknown resources, such as 211, and became more aware of the scale and complexity of mental health challenges in Canada.

Insights into Organizational Challenges

The Datathon offered a window into the operational realities of mental health organizations. Participants noted barriers such as limited access to data and technical support, inconsistent data quality, outdated systems, and difficulties collaborating across agencies. These insights increased appreciation for the behind-the-scenes challenges in service delivery.

Power of Data to Highlight Need and Drive Change

Participants—volunteers and organizations—saw how anonymized datasets, when vetted and used thoughtfully, could uncover meaningful insights. Data related to housing, food insecurity, and financial stress revealed clear connections to mental health outcomes. Many noted how data can inform more equitable, person-centered services.

Limitations in Existing Data

A common theme was the lack of detailed or disaggregated data on marginalized populations, including people with disabilities and Indigenous communities. Participants also cited inconsistent formatting, missing data, and other quality issues that made analysis difficult.

Appreciation for Collaboration and Teamwork

Participants valued working alongside others with diverse backgrounds and skillsets. The event fostered new relationships, cross-sector learning, and a sense of shared purpose. Many were inspired by how their technical skills could contribute meaningfully to social impact work.

POST-EVENT REFLECTIONS

Personal Growth and Empathy
Engaging with 'real-world' data helped participants connect with the human stories behind the numbers. The experience increased empathy and deepened awareness of how complex and personal mental health struggles can be. Some noted that it changed how they would engage with their communities going forward.

Desire for Continued Engagement
The Post-Datathon Interaction Survey invited participants to express interest in ongoing involvement. Many shared a desire to continue supporting the organizations beyond the event, suggesting options such as remote data access, extended project timelines, and structured pathways to remain engaged with the datasets and partner agencies.

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TURNING CURIOSITY INTO COLLECTIVE CAPACITY

The Datathon has offered a glimpse into what's possible when people across sectors come together to explore mental health data. It's a proof of concept and a powerful one.

We saw that when relationships are thoughtfully supported, technical experts and mental health organizations can collaborate in ways that are both insightful and impactful. Real-world data, too often underutilized, proved rich with potential to inform decisions, shape services, and spark new ways of thinking.

What stood out most was the value of fresh perspectives. External teams were able to garner insights from internal datasets that hadn't yet been uncovered, revealing how exploratory, cross-disciplinary analysis can open new pathways for evaluation and innovation.

This wasn't just about the data. It was about trust, shared purpose, and the willingness to learn from one another. For many organizations, this experience helped build confidence and capability in using data. For others, it highlighted the importance of infrastructure, language, and ongoing exchange to truly unlock the power of evidence.

As Canada faces rising demand and an urgent need to rethink how mental health services are delivered, this kind of collaboration can't be an exception; ***it must become the norm.***

WHAT COMES NEXT

To translate the energy of the Datathon into lasting change, we must focus on the conditions that enable collaboration to thrive and insights to take root. This means investing not only in tools and technology, but in relationships, governance, and learning environments that make data meaningful and usable.

Key areas for continued action include:

- Creating shared standards and protocols for data use.
- Sustaining cross-sector partnerships between mental health and data professionals.
- Investing in accessible tools and ethical infrastructure that support ongoing insight generation.
- Designing more touchpoints for collaboration, not just at the start and end of projects, but along the way.
- Expanding understanding of need, access, and equity by continuing to analyze data from resource and referral services.
- Building spaces for organizations to learn from each other and develop common narratives that reflect the complexity and urgency of mental health in Canada.

These insights point to the opportunities where Converge Mental Health Coalition can play a supporting role in fostering collaboration, sharing knowledge, and advancing data-driven practice.

CONVERGE'S COMMITMENTS

Converge will play its part through two complementary strategies:

Direct Action: Sustaining the Momentum
We will convene a national Community of Practice to carry forward the relationships and learning seeded by the Datathon. This light-touch network will connect participating organizations, data volunteers, and sector partners to share lessons, highlight emerging practices, and explore models for ongoing collaboration.

Amplification: Championing Sector Priorities
We will also use our national voice to advocate for the structural and cultural shifts needed to unlock more ethical, accessible, and meaningful data collaboration across the mental health sector. Our advocacy will focus on:

- **Shared Standards and Governance** – promoting ethical, practical frameworks for data sharing that centre purpose, consent, and context.
- **Cross-Sector Collaboration** – encouraging funders and decision-makers to support initiatives that bridge service delivery, lived experience, and technical expertise.
- **Actionable Learning Infrastructure** – advancing simple, reusable tools that help organizations not only interpret their data, but use it to inform programming, evaluation, and advocacy.

Converge will continue to act as a connector and advocate, but the work ahead belongs to all of us. By advancing shared standards, strengthening partnerships, and investing in learning together, we can turn insights into impact and create a mental health system that truly reflects and serves the people at its heart.

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Organization Representatives:

- **211 Canada** – Judy Shum, Diane Dyson + others
- **Big Brothers Big Sisters – Calgary** – Drashti Zaveri
- **CMHA Alberta + Centre for Suicide Prevention** – Jessica Turowski
- **CMHA Edmonton** – Emma Potter
- **CMHA National** – Leyna Lowe
- **Distress Centre Calgary** – Richard Mugford, Mulu Kahsay
- **HelpSeeker Technologies** – Alina Turner
- **Kids Help Phone** – Darren Mastropaolo, Kaylea Walsh, Dhamodharan Krishnamurthy
- **Mental Health Research Canada** – Michael Cooper, Shauna Major, Claire Hlavacek

Data Ambassadors

- **211 Canada** – Dan Gale, Kady Carr
- **Big Brothers Big Sisters Calgary** – Corine Jansonius
- **CMHA Alberta + Centre for Suicide Prevention** – Theresa Smith, Nick Truong, Israel Oludare
- **CMHA Edmonton** – Gabrielle Forget, Fareeza Khurshed, Rick Sandoval, Kailash Bisht, Navodhi Ranatunga, Colby Jamieson, Aastha Patel
- **CMHA National** – Rutvi Patel, Koosha Totonchi, Khush Bhavsar
- **Distress Centre Calgary** – Hossein Shahandeh, David Chan
- **HelpSeeker Technologies** – Amanda Chan, Veronika Shaytarova, Jignesh Dalal, Sandy Ravikumar
- **Kids Help Phone** - Geoff Zakaib
- **Mental Health Research Canada** – Fraser Uitdenbosch, Rowena Dahay
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- **Edmonton** – Navodhi Ranatunga, Kashish Aggarwal, Erin Felesky, Fareeza Khurshed
- **Saskatchewan -** Ryan Tessier, Scott Wells, Rahim Samei, Kate Nimegeers, Brandon Tessier, Kasmeet Singh
- **Toronto** – Rita Tse, David Phillips, Eva Tere, Chandni Somaiya, Sandy Yang
- **Waterloo** – Nadia Novikova, Sasha Fay
- **Ottawa** - Kady Carr, Gabrielle Forget
- **Montreal** – Shruti Sirohi, Joy Robson
- **Maritimes** – Edward Ma, Marina Rao

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APPENDIX 1: ORGANIZATION OVERVIEWS

DATA AND OBJECTIVES

To provide context for the Datathon, each participating organization was supported by Data Ambassadors to develop an overview outlining their key objectives, the data they contributed, and the challenges they sought to address. These summaries highlight the diversity of organizational priorities and datasets, offering readers a clearer understanding of the real-world contexts that shaped the Datathon projects.

211 Canada

Focus: Connecting individuals to essential community and social services, with comprehensive data on service requests and unmet needs across Canada.

211 Canada operates a free, confidential, 24/7 helpline and online resource that helps Canadians navigate mental health, housing, food security, and other social supports. 211 Canada collects a comprehensive range of data, including a national directory of social services, real-time inquiry trends, and caller demographics. 211 datasets capture the types of services requested, geographic demand patterns, and unmet needs, providing valuable insights into the evolving landscape of social support in Canada.

Opportunities for Participants:

- Analyze mental health service demand trends over time, including potential seasonal, weather-related, or event-driven patterns.
- Explore geographic variations, identifying regions with high unmet needs or limited access to mental health services.
- Examine barriers to accessing mental health support, particularly among marginalized communities.
- Investigate links between mental health needs and other social determinants such as housing instability and food insecurity.

Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) Calgary

Focus: Empowering children and youth facing adversity through developmental mentoring relationships that build resilience, social-emotional skills, and community connection.

BBBS Calgary provides early, midstream interventions to support children and youth before they reach crisis points. Data provided captures demographic details, adverse childhood experiences (ACE), mentoring relationship attributes, and outcomes related to Social-Emotional Learning and Developmental Relationships. BBBS is committed to continuously improving their programs through data-driven insights and collaboration.

Opportunities for Participants:

- Compare BBBS client demographics with other mental health organizations serving youth under 24, identifying regional or demographic gaps in service.
- Analyze correlations between Adverse Childhood Experiences scores and factors like match length, mentoring relationship outcomes, and early match closures.
- Explore how mentoring relationships impact Social-Emotional Learning and Developmental Relationships.
- Identify factors that influence client and volunteer success, and volunteer retention / re-engagement.

CMHA Alberta and Centre for Suicide Prevention

Focus: The Canadian Mental Health Association (Alberta) and Centre for Suicide Prevention (CMHA-AB + CSP) **amalgamated** on September 1, 2024 and work to further community mental health and suicide prevention across Alberta.

The dataset provided reviews from all the suicide prevention workshops put on by CMHA-AB + CSP from 2020-2024.

Within the dataset, there are a variety of programs offered by CMHA-AB + CSP (e.g. see **https://www.suicideinfo.ca/workshops/**). These programs are available to healthcare professionals as well as members of the public. The training provides information on providing intervention as well as helping people learn how to help themselves with suicidal ideation.

The records are the end-of-course surveys conducted by the participants. Most responses are Likert-Scales with a few text fields.

Opportunities for Participants:

- Can this data be combined with other data in a way that will showcase the need and help drive more attention and funding?
- Is the training offered having an impact on participants? Note, however, that they do not collect follow-up data.
- Are there any interesting correlations between their participant volumes and satisfaction levels and public wellness information from StatsCan?
- Some free-form text is provided through comment fields on the workshops.

CMHA Edmonton (Crisis Line and 211 Services)

Focus: Providing regional mental health support services through crisis intervention, 211 navigation, education, and community action in Edmonton and Northern Alberta.

CMHA Edmonton operates a regional Crisis Line and 211 service, supporting individuals through mental health crises, disasters, and social challenges. The Crisis Line data includes call information and case information such as categories for the call like suicide, wildfires, etc. Information captured includes the inciting incident, risk assessments, coping and recovery phases, resources, and an action plan. Data from 2017 will be included, providing a long history for analysis before and after COVID-19. 211 data is incorporated in the 211 Canada dataset.

Opportunities for Participants:

- Analyze the impact of major events, including COVID-19, legislation changes (e.g., medical assistance in dying), wildfires, and high-profile suicides, on crisis line call volume and nature.
- Explore trends during disaster recovery phases, when mental health concerns often spike.
- Examine the effects of new initiatives like the 988 national suicide prevention number on service usage.
- Cross-reference Crisis Line and 211 data to understand how crisis intensity influences mental health outcomes and resource needs.
- Identify patterns and insights to inform service planning and community support strategies.

CMHA National

State of Mental Health 2024

Focus: Advancing Mental Health and Substance Use (MHASU) health systems change through research, policy advocacy, and knowledge sharing.

CMHA National supports over 330 communities across Canada, working to strengthen community mental health services and foster social and systems change. For the Datathon, CMHA has shared data from their State of Mental Health in Canada 2024 report, which includes 24 national indicators on policy, population health, service use, social determinants of health, stigma, and discrimination. This dataset includes mostly quantitative and some qualitative data. The quantitative data was sourced from CIHI, Statistics Canada, and Public Health Agency of Canada, and the qualitative policy data was sourced by CMHA from government websites and other sources.

Opportunities for Participants:

- Analyze how well mental health and addictions systems are resourced compared to other healthcare sectors.
- Compare provincial and territorial performance in mental health outcomes and service access.
- Explore disparities in health outcomes, service use, and experiences of discrimination among people with mental illnesses or addictions.
- Investigate trends in population mental health, including improvements or declines, and their correlation with broader social harms.
- The data collected for the policy indicators (bilateral agreement spending for mental health, 2024-2025 PT mental health and addictions health spending, harm reduction policy, mental health Acts, and mental health and addictions strategies) could be combined with other possible datasets.

Distress Centre Calgary (Crisis Line, Connect Teen, 211 Services)

Focus: Providing 24/7 free and confidential crisis support and system navigation services to individuals and families in Calgary and surrounding areas.

Distress Centre Calgary operates Crisis Lines (phone, chat, text, email), youth-focused support (Connect Teen), 211 services, and short-term crisis counselling. They also run innovative programs like Coordinated Entry for housing support and the Community Information Exchange (CIE) to enhance collaboration between social service providers. Data provided is related to Crisis Line and Connect Teen programs. 211 data is incorporated in the 211 Canada dataset.

Opportunities for Participants:

- Analyze Crisis Line, Connect Teen, and 211 data to identify trends in call volumes, frequent callers, and demographic insights.
- Explore the relationship between mental health needs and social/economic factors, and compare service demand across regions and organizations.
- Examine patterns in calls / service requests including correlations with world events, high-profile suicides, or seasonal variations.
- Assess service gaps / unmet needs in periods of high demand, to inform resource planning.
- Identify emerging mental health issues and suggest strategies for service improvements.

HelpSeeker Technologies - Social Trends Explorer (2021 Census)

Focus: Leveraging data to identify and address complex social challenges, with a focus on community well-being and access to services.

HelpSeeker's Social Trends Explorer is a powerful visualization tool that offers insights into community and neighborhood-level social and economic indicators based on the **2021 Statistics Canada Census of Population** data. Datathon participants can use the tool to discover interesting trends and relationships. Once an area of interest is found, census data tables can be downloaded from the StatsCan website for deeper analysis and cross-correlation with data from other organizations.

Opportunities for Participants:

- Examine links between employment, financial stress, and mental health challenges.
- Explore how factors like age, gender, family structure, migration, and race influence mental health as presented in other surveys and reports.
- Analyze housing insecurity and well-being risks across communities.
- Identify regional disparities and trends including differences between urban and rural areas.

Kid's Help Phone

Focus: Since 1989, Kids Help Phone has provided innovative supports for young people, evolving from a telephone counselling service focused on abuse to a multi-channel service addressing the full range of emotional and mental health needs—from everyday concerns to crisis situations—ensuring professional counsellors and volunteer responders are ready to help with any challenge, big or small.

Services:

- Phone: 24/7 support by calling 1-800-668-6868, with professional counsellors available in over 100 languages, including Plains Cree, Severn Ojibwe, Ukrainian, Russian, Pashto, Dari, Mandarin, and Arabic via trained interpreters.
- Texting: 24/7 support via Crisis Text Line by texting CONNECT to 686868, connecting youth with trained volunteer crisis responders.
- Live Chat: Anonymous, confidential real-time counselling in English or French, available daily from 7 p.m. to midnight ET.
- Peer-to-Peer: Online forums for youth across Canada to share experiences, offer support, and connect with peers.
- Resources Around Me: A searchable directory of over 10,000 community resources, including mental health, sexual health, housing, legal, and employment support.

Data provided for the Datathon:
The dataset is just from texting. The issue tags described in the dataset come from the 211 issue tag codes.

Opportunities for Participants:

- Analyze mental health service topic trends over time, including any patterns/trends/events
- Investigate links between KHP data and datasets from other organizations to uncover new insights.
- Analyze demographic trends over time.
- Analyze any changes in issues discussed post-COVID-19 Pandemic.

Mental Health Research Canada

Focus: Advancing mental health knowledge through national polling and workplace mental health research.

MHRC is dedicated to improving mental health outcomes for Canadians by generating evidence and insights that inform services and policy. For the Datathon, they've shared two key datasets:

National Polling Data – Tracks mental health trends (anxiety, depression, youth mental health, financial strain, social media stress, etc.) across Canada, including geographic and demographic breakdowns.

Workplace Mental Health Data – Focuses on psychological health, burnout, inclusivity, and promising practices in Canadian workplaces.

A significant amount of analysis has been done by MHRC and their partners, with many insights available in the **National Research and Data** section of their website.

Opportunities for Participants:

- Explore under-analyzed areas like social media use, climate change impacts, or employment sectors.
- Integrate MHRC data with datasets from other organizations to uncover new insights.
- Analyze workplace mental health data, which has significant potential for fresh insights.

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Cross-Organization Objectives

Trends in Mental Health Service Demand

- Comparing demand (volumes) between organizations (e.g. BBBS demand compared to 211 mental health-related needs)
- If there are spikes in demand, can we tie them to external events
  - Weather-related
  - Time of year / seasonal
  - Disasters
  - Public policy (e.g. substance decriminalization)
  - etc.
- How do client demographics (region, age, ethnicity, born in Canada, etc.) compare to
  - The general population (Statcan, by FSA, Census Tract, other?)
  - other mental health organizations' clients
- Comparative analysis for mental illness and Substance Use Disorder (SUD) prevalence and self-harm data (based on census, Mental Health and Access to Care Survey (MHACS)) to self-report survey datasets (ex. MHRC polling data).

Impact of External Factors

- Analyze the impact of factors such as:
  - COVID
  - legislation on assisted end-of-life
  - cost of living crisis & housing availability
  - drug toxicity crisis
- How do disasters and crises (e.g., wildfires, climate change) impact calls to the crisis and 211 lines, especially during recovery phases when mental health concerns tend to rise
- What's the impact of Bell Let's Talk?

Barriers and Access to Mental Health Services

- Examine common barriers preventing effective access to mental health services (e.g., financial, geographic, availability).
- Analyze geographic variations (e.g. urban/suburban/small town) in service availability and identify regional gaps in mental health support.
- Assess the referral pathways across organizations to determine patterns, effectiveness, and service gaps
- How does service access vary for people close to the retirement age of 65 compared to when they reach the age of 65?

Predictive Questions

Demand Forecast

- Can historical call/text/chat data from crisis and 211 services accurately predict future spikes in service demand?
- What external factors (e.g., climate events, economic conditions, public health crises) improve the predictive accuracy of models?
- Can seasonality or cyclical trends be reliably forecasted?

Early Warning Systems for Mental Health Crises

- Can early indicators from 211, crisis lines, or BBBS data predict communities or regions at elevated risk of mental health crises?
- Which predictive indicators are most sensitive and actionable for early interventions?

Recommendation Systems

- Could you build a recommender system that can help support staff identify what the best service is for a particular client? (e.g., service matches, mentorship programs, counselling approaches)
- What are key metrics that could be used to measure success of a recommender system?
- Predict clients at risk of underutilizing available services, providing targeted outreach suggestions?
- How can the insights gained be effectively used to improve services?

Other Cross-Organization Considerations

Data Collection

- Are there any noticeable gaps in the data an organization collects?
- What suggestions can be made for improving data collection processes (e.g. useful surveys or other tools?)

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APPENDIX 2: TEAM SUMMARIES

At the end of the Datathon, teams completed a Team Documentation Form with links to their data, analyses, and insights. About 75 submissions were compiled into a shared Documentation Repository that was made available to the organizations. Brief team summaries are provided below, organized by intitial data focus.

Team Name	Chapter Location	Summary	Initial Data Focus	Secondary Data Sources
GenZ and a Half	Edmonton	Analyzed how people are referred through the 211 system using mapping and NLP tools, aiming to improve fairness, access, and coordination in mental health referrals.	211 Canada	N/A
YYC 211 Initial Focus	Calgary	Looked at local trends in crisis calls across Calgary to uncover spikes and patterns using Power BI and Python.	211 Canada	N/A
CivicSignal	Toronto	Used machine learning to predict service gaps based on caller behavior and demographics, aiming to improve how unmet needs are flagged.	211 Canada	N/A
211-Squad	Calgary	Dug into the national 211 dataset to find reporting issues and emerging trends in mental health service delivery.	211 Canada	211 Canada
Unfaded Ninjas of Untapped Energy	Calgary	Combined 211 and Distress Centre data to highlight patterns in unmet mental health needs and fulfillment rates.	211 Canada	Distress Centre Calgary - Connect Teen & Crisis Line, Distress Centre Calgary - Interaction Data

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Team Name	Chapter Location	Summary	Initial Data Focus	Secondary Data Sources
Cloud Home	Toronto	Analyzed how weather impacts mental health service calls using 211 data and climate records to spark ideas for new services.	211 Canada	N/A
YYC 211 Initial Focus	Calgary	Looked at local trends in crisis calls across Calgary to uncover spikes and patterns using Power BI and Python.	211 Canada	211 Canada
Chickadata	Calgary	Analyzed the journey from first call to follow-up across services to identify barriers and improve user experience.	211 Canada	N/A
Équipe Données Sensibles	Montreal	Looked at how demographics affect mental health service access using Canadian polling data and 211 info.	211 Canada	Statistics Canada (2021 census, etc.)
CivicIQ	Toronto	Used 211 data to identify where and why unmet mental health needs are highest, building a clean data model and visual tools for deeper insights.	211 Canada	Statistics Canada (2021 census, etc.)
Team AwesomeSauce	Maritimes	Visualized patterns in mental health call demand by demographic and season, exploring how weather and world events impact service use.	211 Canada	Edmonton Crisis Line, Distress Centre Calgary - Connect Teen & Crisis Line, Big Brothers Big Sisters - Calgary

Team Name	Chapter Location	Summary	Initial Data Focus	Secondary Data Sources
Data Gigs	Toronto	Mapped free and accessible services using 211 data to help Canadians find nearby support tailored to their language and needs.	211 Canada	N/A
data4mh	Toronto	Created a forecasting system to predict regional unmet mental health needs using 211 data, economic indicators, and machine learning.	211 Canada	Statistics Canada (2021 census, etc.)
Data 211	Vancouver	Analyzed 211 data to find trends in call patterns, unmet needs, and service access across cities and seasons.	211 Canada	Statistics Canada (2021 census, etc.)
Overfitters	Vancouver	Explored mental health service demand in British Columbia by season, city, and weather conditions using 211 data.	211 Canada	N/A
211 Insight Lab	Ottawa	Cross-analyzed 211 calls and Google search trends to reveal gaps between public interest and actual help-seeking behavior.	211 Canada	N/A
DataBugs	Saskatchewan	Visualized trends in mental health-related calls and how they connect to seasonality, cost of living, and co-occurring needs.	211 Canada	Statistics Canada (2021 census, etc.)

CONVERGE

Team Name	Chapter Location	Summary	Initial Data Focus	Secondary Data Sources
The-Ledger	Toronto	Used 211 data and census maps to show how unmet housing needs vary across regions, with a focus on agency capacity and waitlists.	211 Canada	Statistics Canada (2021 census, etc.)
Van2OneOne	Vancouver	Used Databricks and Power BI to explore how factors like inflation, time of day, and identity groups shape mental health service use in 211 data.	211 Canada	Statistics Canada (2021 census, etc.)
EfficiencyOne	Maritimes	Mapped mental health call demand in lower-income areas and built a tool for interactive exploration of regional patterns.	211 Canada	Statistics Canada (2021 census, etc.)
Data Hortons	Toronto	Explored seasonal and regional trends in 211 mental health calls and their connection to social and economic factors.	211 Canada	Statistics Canada (2021 census, etc.)
Nyxeon	Calgary	Mapped 211 mental health needs, referral patterns, and service gaps, highlighting how social factors and geography intersect.	211 Canada	Statistics Canada (2021 census, etc.)
Dataminded	Ottawa	Explored barriers to accessing mental health services in Ontario, with a focus on language use, contact preferences, and inclusion.	211 Canada	N/A

Team Name	Chapter Location	Summary	Initial Data Focus	Secondary Data Sources
Nexus211	Toronto	Analyzed concurrent needs in 211 call data and explored links between mental health service demand and unemployment.	211 Canada	N/A
211-distress-centre-datathon	Calgary	Explored unmet needs and service gaps across regions using EDA and KMeans clustering, spotlighting major access issues like caller refusal and agency resource depletion.	211 Canada	211 Canada, Distress Centre Calgary - Interaction Data
Team Greight	Calgary	Investigated co-occurring needs with MH support in 211 data and critiqued the 211 interface for accessibility gaps.	211 Canada	N/A
Dodeca Schema	Calgary	Explored unmet needs, regional disparities, and predictive modeling in 211 MH service demand.	211 Canada	Statistics Canada (2021 census, etc.)
ItTakesThree	Saskatchewan	Mapped demand, service use, and service outages by integrating 211 and HelpSeeker data.	211 Canada	HelpSeeker - Social Trends Explorer
Data Psyducks	Waterloo	Analyzed regional unmet MH needs, common reasons for gaps, and weather-seasonal trends in 211 call volumes.	211 Canada	Kids Help Phone, Statistics Canada (2021 census, etc.)

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Team Name	Chapter Location	Summary	Initial Data Focus	Secondary Data Sources
Waterloo Region 10	Waterloo	Used StatsCan and 211 data to study regional gaps in youth mental health services and how access varies by area.	Big Brothers Big Sisters - Calgary	Kids Help Phone
Keep It Simple	Toronto	Analyzed mentorship program data from Big Brothers Big Sisters to better understand what factors lead to successful youth matches.	Big Brothers Big Sisters - Calgary	211 Canada
B³S Saskatchewan	Saskatchewan	Mapped how volunteer engagement and mentorship success vary across regions using cleaned datasets and interactive dashboards.	Big Brothers Big Sisters - Calgary	Big Brothers Big Sisters - Calgary
Big Data Big Hearts	Calgary	Explored volunteer and client patterns at Big Brothers Big Sisters to identify gaps, improve matches, and visualize service needs.	Big Brothers Big Sisters - Calgary	N/A
Wander	Calgary	Explored BBBS Calgary data to identify racial diversity, trauma-based matches, and volunteer shortages.	Big Brothers Big Sisters - Calgary	N/A
Suicide Prevention VanTeam	Vancouver	Assessed how workshop format and delivery influence participant satisfaction in suicide prevention programs across Alberta.	CMHA AB / Suicide Prevention	Distress Centre Calgary - Connect Teen & Crisis Line

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Hack for Health	Edmonton	Reviewed CMHA-AB workshop feedback and trends alongside suicide-related crisis call patterns.	CMHA AB / Suicide Prevention	Distress Centre Calgary - Interaction Data, Statistics Canada (2021 census, etc.)
Suicide Vancouver Team	Vancouver	Correlated workshop type and satisfaction, with insights from participant feedback and suicide-related data.	CMHA AB / Suicide Prevention	Distress Centre Calgary - Connect Teen & Crisis Line
data whisperer	Toronto	Explored workshop feedback and crisis line data to understand user satisfaction and spot areas for improvement.	CMHA Edmonton Crisis Line	N/A
Destanee's Children	Edmonton	Explored trends in mental health call data and built a referral prediction tool to test ways of streamlining support delivery.	CMHA Edmonton Crisis Line	MHRC National Polling, 211 Canada
Crisis Line Data Detectives	Edmonton	Studied call topics and lengths from crisis line data to uncover how risk levels affect call duration and issue types.	CMHA Edmonton Crisis Line	N/A
Datacraft	Edmonton	Conducted exploratory analysis on CMHA Edmonton Crisis Line data trends and anomalies from 2020–2025.	CMHA Edmonton Crisis Line	N/A

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Edmonton Data Stars	Edmonton	Modeled trends and referral patterns in Edmonton crisis line data, post-pandemic.	CMHA Edmonton Crisis Line	Statistics Canada (2021 census, etc.)
CMHAyltics	Vancouver	Combined CMHA program data and 211 calls to find predictors of high-need callers and recommend early interventions.	CMHA National - State of Mental Health	MHRC National Polling, 211 Canada
SYNAPSE-SQUAD	Toronto	Built a digital twin model to help policymakers test how community factors and smart resource use affect mental health outcomes across provinces.	CMHA National - State of Mental Health	Statistics Canada (2021 census, etc.)
The Magnificent Octopus	Toronto	Explored mental health disparities across provinces and how they relate to housing, substance use, and access to care.	CMHA National - State of Mental Health	CMHA National - State of Mental Health
mindful-metrics	Toronto	Analyzed trends in mental health needs and service access across provinces, using CMHA and 211 data to highlight population-level gaps.	CMHA National - State of Mental Health	211 Canada, Statistics Canada (2021 census, etc.)
Chi Nguyen	Toronto	Reviewed crisis call data to identify shifts in Distress Centre activity, with a focus on call volume and call length trends.	Distress Centre Calgary - Connect Teen & Crisis Line	Statistics Canada (2021 census, etc.)

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Team Name	Chapter Location	Summary	Initial Data Focus	Secondary Data Sources
Calgary Distress Data Lab	Toronto	Mapped patterns in crisis call data to explore how call length and topics relate to mental health trends in Calgary.	Distress Centre Calgary - Connect Teen & Crisis Line	Distress Centre Calgary - Interaction Data
Cowtown Coders	Ottawa	Built a dashboard for the Distress Centre to visualize mental health call trends and flag opportunities to improve intake processes.	Distress Centre Calgary - Connect Teen & Crisis Line	N/A
The Data Avengers	Calgary	Identified 10-year trends in call frequency and concerns from Calgary Distress Centre data.	Distress Centre Calgary - Connect Teen & Crisis Line	Distress Centre Calgary - Interaction Data
Sheldon's Crew	Toronto	Explored gender and age patterns in distress calls, including risk level and mental health concerns.	Distress Centre Calgary - Connect Teen & Crisis Line	Distress Centre Calgary - Interaction Data
Social Trends	Toronto	Looked at social and regional trends in 211 and polling data to better understand who's reaching out for help—and why.	HelpSeeker - Social Trends Explorer	Kids Help Phone
CivicLens	Calgary	Studied links between employment/education status and mental health indicators across provinces.	HelpSeeker - Social Trends Explorer	Statistics Canada (2021 census, etc.)

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Team Name	Chapter Location	Summary	Initial Data Focus	Secondary Data Sources
Peace of Code	Waterloo	Explored 211 and Distress Centre data to understand repeat calls and what they reveal about service delivery gaps.	Kids Help Phone	N/A
Environ-Mental	Ottawa	Looked at the effect of wildfires on Kids Help Phone usage to see if proximity to disaster triggers changes in help-seeking.	Kids Help Phone	N/A
Data4Youth	Edmonton	Explored seasonal trends and demographic shifts in Kids Help Phone conversations, including the pandemic's impact on service demand.	Kids Help Phone	Statistics Canada (2021 census, etc.)
Environ-mental health	Ottawa	Investigated mental health patterns in relation to extreme weather and climate-related disasters.	Kids Help Phone	Statistics Canada (2021 census, etc.)
Tesseract	Calgary	Compared suicide prevention training programs using polling data to find gaps in support for high-risk groups.	MHRC National Polling	CMHA AB / Suicide Prevention
psy-five	Vancouver	Used polling data to understand how mental health needs differ by age, gender, and region across Canada.	MHRC National Polling	MHRC National Polling, MHRC Workplace Poll

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Team Name	Chapter Location	Summary	Initial Data Focus	Secondary Data Sources
MindMatrix	Saskatchewan	Explored the link between anxiety and gambling in diagnosed vs. non-diagnosed individuals, using modeling to surface possible behavioral indicators.	MHRC National Polling	N/A
Supervised Mental Learners	Edmonton	Investigated causes of burnout in Alberta using survey data and machine learning to offer early intervention strategies for employers and workers.	MHRC National Polling	211 Canada
LearningSquad	Calgary	Built a chatbot and predictive model using survey data to flag anxiety risk and improve awareness of post-pandemic mental health drivers.	MHRC National Polling	N/A
Mental Syntax	Toronto	Compared mental health outcomes of 2SLGBTQ+ youth to cisgender peers and built a chatbot to make public research more accessible.	MHRC National Polling	MHRC Workplace Poll, Statistics Canada (2021 census, etc.)
Data healers	Toronto	Combined national surveys and local call data to explore mental health patterns by diagnosis, job status, and demographics.	MHRC National Polling	211 Canada
dataops-mhrc	Toronto	Identified top stressors affecting depression levels, focusing on social, economic, and household factors.	MHRC National Polling	N/A

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Datahealers	Vancouver	Analyzed mental health trends and disparities pre/post-COVID using national datasets.	MHRC National Polling	N/A
datathon-data-champs	Toronto	Explored changes in caller behavior before and after referrals to suggest ways to improve support services.	MHRC Workplace Poll	N/A
The Dream Team	Ottawa	Mapped out how hostile work environments affect mental health across sectors and communities, especially post-pandemic, and explored prevention strategies.	MHRC Workplace Poll	MHRC Workplace Poll
Psy-Five	Vancouver	Used polling data to understand how mental health needs differ by age, gender, and region across Canada.	MHRC Workplace Poll	N/A
Luna Data	Vancouver	Examined how anxiety and depression show up in high-stress industries and the role social media plays in diagnosis gaps.	MHRC Workplace Poll	MHRC National Polling
Insight Squad	Toronto	Combined geospatial and NLP tools to analyze workplace mental health and created a chatbot that surfaces insights from national datasets.	MHRC Workplace Poll	MHRC National Polling, 211 Canada

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Zenalytics	Toronto	Analyzed workplace mental health data to highlight sector-specific needs and proposed more inclusive, cost-effective support systems.	MHRC Workplace Poll	MHRC National Polling
Data Scientist - InfoPlus	Calgary	Built an AI chatbot and analyzed sentiment and topic coherence from workplace MH survey data.	MHRC Workplace Poll	N/A
Mental Metrics	Calgary	Used semantic modeling and a RAG chatbot to improve mental health survey insights and enable city-level filtering and conversational data access.	MHRC Workplace Poll	MHRC National Polling, MHRC Workplace Poll
Erudite	Saskatchewan	Explored how respect, pay, chronic pain, and supervisor support affect employee mental health across Canadian provinces.	MHRC Workplace Poll	N/A
Solo Project	Saskatchewan	Built a machine learning model to predict depression risk from workplace survey data, highlighting key personal and job-related factors.	MHRC Workplace Poll	N/A