

FREE to BE in 2023



Canadian
Paediatric
Society



CPS members of a certain age may recall *Free to Be... You and Me*, a hugely popular children's entertainment project which launched stateside in the early 1970s. This moving and funny multimedia campaign brought screen, stage and sports stars together to celebrate gender, difference, and tolerance, through story, song and sketches.

50 years on, we are still working hard to achieve equality, diversity and inclusion in so many aspects of public and private life. And so many of the CPS members we celebrate this year did just that.

2023 YEAR IN REVIEW

Being, belonging, becoming

CPS members are creating environments and care pathways for young people—and parents—on a complex developmental journey. **Drs. Ashley Vandermorris** and **Daniel Metzger**, with the Adolescent Health Committee, wrote a groundbreaking statement on [caring for transgender and gender-diverse youth](#) that describes affirming, stepped approaches and appropriate language for evolving therapies. Youth advocate **Dr. Arati Mokashi** was awarded a CPS [Certificate of Merit](#), in part for her work as founding medical director of the Trans Health Endocrinology Clinic for Children and Youth, the first of its kind in Halifax.

Confidentiality is key when caring for adolescents, yet results of a recent survey by **Drs. Holly Agostino** and **Brett Burstein** and published in [Paediatrics & Child Health](#) show they do not receive it often enough. The multiple—but modifiable—barriers to privacy and confidentiality were directly addressed in a [new Adolescent Health Committee statement](#) by Drs. Agostino and **Alene Toulany**, which describes focused, supportive and non-judgmental approaches for every clinical encounter with teens.

For the 80% of children and youth in Canada who are not able to access timely, appropriate mental health care, change can't come soon enough.

"By ensuring appropriate quantity and quality of confidential care for adolescents, clinicians are ... empowering the adolescent involved to develop agency, autonomy, trust, and responsibility for their own health care decision-making and management".

Drs. Holly Agostino and **Alene Toulany**, from their statement ["Considerations for privacy and confidentiality in adolescent health care service delivery"](#).

“The most important thing for paediatricians is to know what they don’t know ... [and] to realize how much they have to work at gaining the trust of Indigenous families”.

Dr. Kent Saylor, paediatrician in Kahnawake, Quebec

A CPS [statement](#) developed by the CPS Mental Health Task Force and the Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry advocates for essential systemic changes: more federal funding, team approaches, and better education, training, and remuneration for practitioners. Special thanks are due to **Dr. Natasha Saunders**, who spoke so vividly to the social and mental health effects of firearm injuries before a Senate Committee meeting to amend gun control legislation in October. Also, as the CPS began the process of determining strategic priorities for 2024-27, preliminary research and consultation made it abundantly clear that mental health continues to be a priority for paediatricians in Canada and worldwide.

Dr. Peter Rosenbaum wrote the final [blog](#) in our RetroDoc series celebrating 100 years of the CPS. He reflected on recent advances in neurodisability, where conditions such as CP, ASD, and ADHD tend to be defined more by descriptions of impairment than by origin, cause, or symptoms. Increasingly, however, individualized approaches to care for all three conditions focus on activity (“doing stuff”) and participation (engaging with families, friends, and community) rather than performing to standard. This more holistic lens was also fully reflected in a new Developmental Paediatrics Section practice point on [cerebral palsy](#), written by **Drs. Scott McLeod, Anne Kawamura** and **Amber Makino**.

Being the change(s) we want to see

The first Indigenous paediatrician in Canada, **Dr. Kent Saylor**, Mohawk from Kahnawake, Quebec and former chair of the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Health Committee, was recognized with a Healthy Generations bursary named in his honour. **Taylor Stoesz**,

a McGill medical student and member of the Manitoba Métis Federation, was its first-ever recipient in 2023. Dr. Saylor also led development of a new online module, [Providing culturally safe care for Indigenous children and youth](#), with a planning committee of paediatricians, family physicians and other professionals working in Indigenous health. The module, available on [Pedagogy](#), evolved from an in-person teaching curriculum for paediatric residents developed by the CPS and the National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health ([NCCIH](#)) in 2020.

Delegates from across North America and around the world gathered last March in Tulsa, Oklahoma for the 10th [International Meeting on Indigenous Child Health](#) (IMICH). Co-hosted by the CPS and the American Academy of Paediatrics, IMICH has evolved from being a conference of physicians to a forum for Indigenous-led community programs and strategies, where communities learn from one another. Most speakers in 2023 identified as Indigenous, a milestone in itself. Winnipeg is hosting the [next meeting in 2025](#).

The CPS antiracism initiative gained momentum through 2023 as three working groups—on policy implementation (chaired by **Drs. Minoli Amit** and **Shazeen Suleman**), medical education (**Drs. Mark Awuku** and **Ming-Ka Chan**), and advocacy (**Drs. Muna Chowdhury** and **Tehseen Ladha**) found ways to integrate antiracism into every aspect of CPS work. They reported progress to CPS leaders in November, introducing tools and resources to help assess and correct organizational bias and inequities. These are being evaluated and refined with an eye to testing and implementation in 2024.



The International Meeting on Indigenous Child Health (IMICH) “is an opportunity for conversations about being in relationships and being the change we want to see.... As we learn together, we create new understanding anchored in the very essence and richness of diversity”.

Canadian Senator Margo Greenwood, former academic lead of the National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health

“Antiracism is about unlearning years of behaviours and attitudes. It’s about embedding new insights and ways of being into the [CPS] organization for the long-term”.

Dr. Kassia Johnson, physician lead of the CPS Antiracism Initiative and co-chair of the Antiracism Steering Committee



High profile advisories from the United States in 2023 reinforced growing concerns around the adverse effects of unlimited, unregulated social media use on child and youth mental health. The **Digital Health Task Force** responded in November with specific [calls to action](#) for social media developers and governments. They spoke up for protecting safety and privacy through better design and data-sharing, and stronger standards for data collection, codes of conduct, and information control. Parental control helps too, [and updated guidance](#) for balancing screen use at home was released just in time for return to school.

Education and outreach

National Grand Rounds (NGR) resounded as outstanding educational offerings broke new ground—and past attendance records—in 2023. **Dr. Jean Clinton** presented [Beyond ACEs to Early Relational Health](#) (ERH) with American paediatrician Dr. David Willis, an ‘open access’ NGR framing a new [Early Years Task Force statement](#). Ripple effects included a mini-video on [Incorporating ERH into clinic visits](#) from **Dr. Richa Agnihotri**, president of the Community Paediatrics Section, [another NGR](#) from Dr. Blair Hammond introducing the Keystones of Development curriculum, and a [blog](#) for the Nurture Connection network by **Dr. Robin Williams**, statement author and EYTF chair.

The risks of insufficient prenatal care and how best to prevent vertical transmission of infections were the focus of [a new statement](#) from the Infectious Diseases and Immunization Committee last fall. **Drs. Ari Binun, Sergio Fanella and Laura Sauvé** provide detailed, stepwise guidance for testing and treating women in pregnancy, and mothers and babies post-birth. Early and effective preventive interventions are available for newborns at risk for HIV, HBV, syphilis, or gonorrhea. That congenital syphilis (CS) warrants particular attention was confirmed by a

2-year Canadian Paediatric Surveillance Program ([CPSP](#)) study completed in 2023, led by **Drs. Jared Bullard** (University of Manitoba) and **Carsten Krueger** (University of Calgary).

Another [CPSP one-time survey](#) revealed that cases of severe and life-threatening substance misuse and overdose among children and youth caused by opioids, stimulants and sedatives are increasing. Conducted by **Drs. Matthew Carwana, Nicholas Chadi and Eva Moore**, the survey captured only reported cases but nonetheless exposed a burgeoning crisis and some of the challenges of diagnosing and treating young people with substance use disorders. A new, multi-year CPSP study has been approved in response, and the current team of investigators is already advocating for preventive initiatives, such as naloxone training and kit distribution in high schools, in collaboration with Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is common, occurs in every demographic, and can have adverse emotional, physical, and behavioural effects on children and youth exposed to it. The Child and Youth Maltreatment Section’s [statement on IPV](#) focuses on the critical role of paediatricians and other health care providers (HCPs) in recognizing and responding to children and caregivers who are (or may be) living with IPV. An infographic summarizing HCP priorities and obligations in suspected and disclosed cases is available to print at the statement page.

Hand-in-hand with the CPS [student-to-resident mentorship program](#), the Residents Section produced their fourth annual edition of [Why Choose Paediatrics?](#) in October. In a virtual forum, medical students across Canada are invited to ask questions and learn about the field from a panel of paediatricians and residents at different career stages and working in a range of practice settings.

“In a mediascape increasingly dominated by tech giants, it is no longer effective or appropriate to put the onus on individuals. It is urgent for social media developers to safeguard the well-being of youth, and for governments to hold these companies to basic standards of safety”.

From [Social media and youth: A call to action](#)

"A lot needs to go wrong for a baby to be born with syphilis.... It's pointing at multiple failures along the path".

Dr. Jared Bullard, lead investigator on the CPSP study on congenital syphilis

CPS advocacy and agents for change

With one-fifth of Canada's population speaking a first language other than English or French, important medical information is getting lost in translation. **Dr. Chuck Hui**, chair of the Caring for Kids New to Canada Task Force, wrote a [statement](#) advocating for accessible, quality interpretive services in every health care setting to avoid miscommunication and inappropriate reliance on children and youth as translators. His recommendations were shared with provincial/territorial Ministers and Deputy Ministers of Health in August and reflected in a [National Newcomer Navigational Network](#) (N4) webinar in September.

Following a one-on-one meeting of the CPS executive with then-federal Health Minister Jean-Yves Duclos in June, **Dr. Charlotte Moore Hepburn** and the Drug Therapy Committee made a two-pronged effort to improve access to and safety of paediatric medications. They made a written submission in August to Health Canada's [consultation on improving access to drugs and other health products](#), with recommendations to mitigate the impacts of drug shortages. They also joined six other national and child health organizations providing feedback on Health Canada's [guidance document on submitting paediatric studies](#).

Residents truly rocked in 2023, with new, influential advocacy initiatives making a difference:

- ▶ More than a million children in Canada are estimated to have below grade-level reading skills, and CPS Resident Advocacy
- Grant winners **Drs. Anne-Sophie Gervais** and **Marie Albert**, from the Northern Ontario School of Medicine, are determined to change that. They created book nooks in Thunder Bay, Sioux Lookout and other Northern Ontario communities and collected and donated more than 800 books in English, French and First Nations languages to fill them, in partnership with local Early Words Programs.
- ▶ A Queen's resident, **Dr. Shaira Wignarajah**, also received a Resident Advocacy Grant for her patient-centred project caring for children with ASD. She worked with an applied behavioural analysis therapist to reduce anxiety and improve patient experiences for kids (and caregivers) by creating 'social stories'—videos and pictorials that show what to expect at outpatient (e.g., phlebotomy, audiology, radiology, ECG, and EEG) visits.
 - ▶ Paediatric residents at the Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry are leading a project to ease the process of [transitioning to adult care](#). Results of a recent literature review were shared at LHSC's Child Health Research Day in November. Next steps, including an environmental scan and needs assessment based on HCP input, are already underway.
 - ▶ On October 10, residents participated in a campaign for World Mental Health Day, sending 84 letters to Premiers and federal Ministers of Health and Mental Health and Addictions across the country. Each letter promoted equitable access to quality mental health care services and called for increased funding.



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