



2022-2023 Annual Report



Reflections: Board Chair, Sonja Grbevski and Executive Director, Nerin Kaur

With great excitement, the Board of Directors appointed Nerin Kaur as the Executive Director of ConnexOntario, effective November 28, 2022. The Co-Leads, the Leadership Team, and the staff joined together to steer the ship as the Board of Directors searched for a successful candidate during this transition.

The Leadership Team worked towards achieving their strategic priorities and continued strengthening internal and external relationships. Each person took on a vital role and played a valuable part at ConnexOntario to ensure our organizational success.

Thank you to everyone for their dedication and support during this transition. Our support staff, the staff who answer the phones and the people we serve tell the story of our joint efforts and impact. We are grateful to our funders, Ontario Health, for their ongoing support of our work. In addition, we would also like to thank Kids Help Phone for their investment in wellness support for our heroes.

I will continue to support the Board and the organization for one more year. ConnexOntario has recently transitioned from the Ministry of Health oversight to Ontario Health. Maintaining continuity of the position of Chair over the transition period was deemed necessary by both the ConnexOntario executive team and the Board of Directors.

In closing, we would like to say farewell to Marcia Scarrow, Karen Fleming, Marion Wright, Danielle Wilson, and Aseefa Sarang, whose valuable input and oversight as members of the Board will be dearly missed.

Sonja

As I transition into this new role, I aim to successfully guide ConnexOntario toward positive growth and continue to support the mission and values of this organization. We will reflect on how to prepare ConnexOntario to assist further the mental health, addiction, and problem gambling sector. We hope to reflect on potential digital and sector initiatives that can set the course for improved service outcomes and allow Ontarians to access services when and where they need them. We aim to set the path for a better future.

The pandemic has highlighted areas of improvement and paved a new way for collaboration and new possibilities. Our work in the upcoming years will focus on leveraging the lessons learned and focus on partnerships to enhance our navigation service, data services, and infrastructure. We will continue to invest in our team and network partners to deliver quality service to Ontarians.

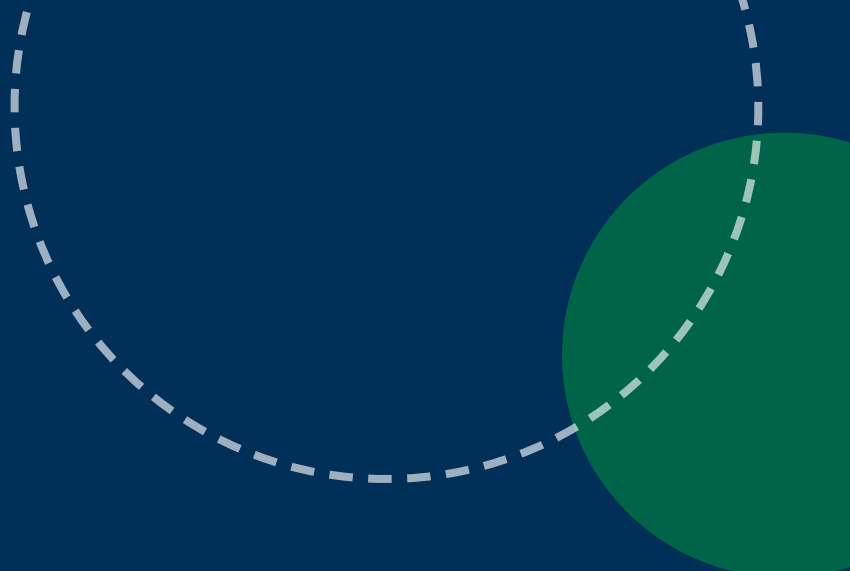
Nerin



“ The greatest discovery of all time is that a person can change his future by merely changing his attitude.

~ Oprah Winfrey

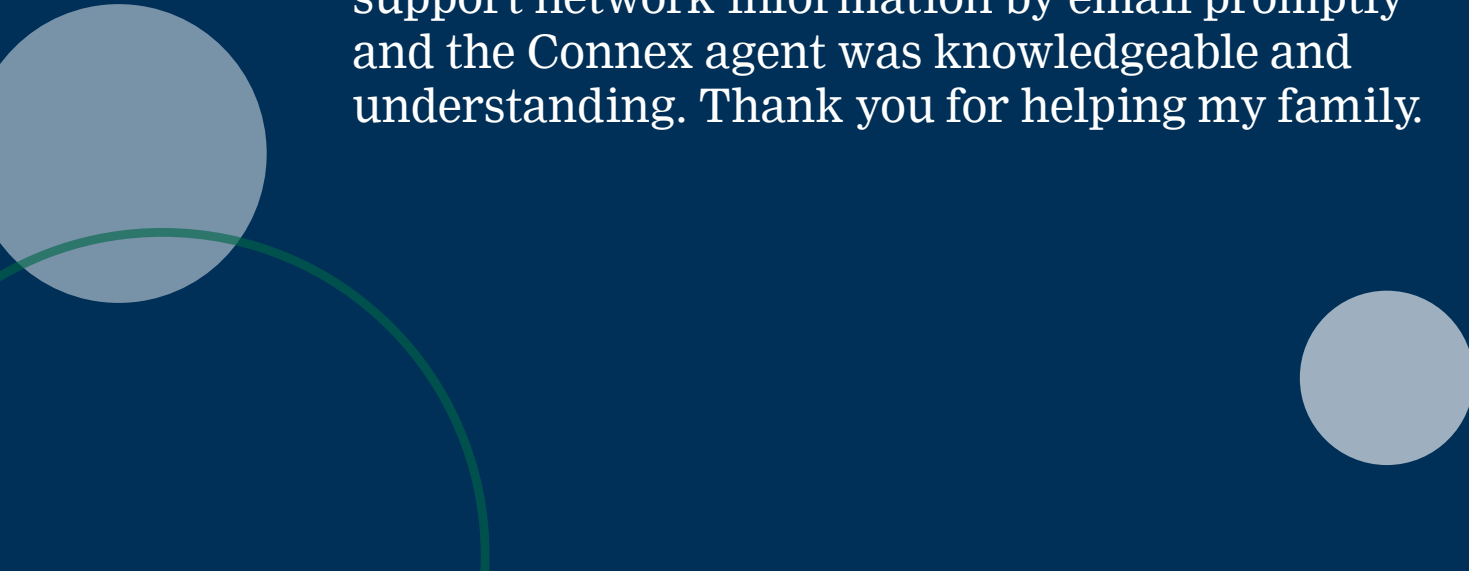




“ Clear and quick and useful information about relevant services. The staff are always very pleasant and professional whenever I call looking for resources for my patients.

“ I contacted Connex by email on a Saturday morning with a request for information and received a comprehensive response within an hour. I was so surprised! Thank you!

“ I am grateful for the professional and caring manner provided by the agent. My call was picked up quickly, the agent listened carefully and provided me with the information and supports I did not know existed. I received the support network information by email promptly and the Connex agent was knowledgeable and understanding. Thank you for helping my family.



System Navigation and Information Services

Aligning with objectives identified in ConnexOntario’s 2021-2025 Strategic Plan, several initiatives were implemented that improve options for accessing ConnexOntario’s navigation services. We have increased our ability to facilitate more immediate referrals to designated programs, improving access for individuals.

Working with an Ontario Health Team, we can now offer warm transfers or direct referrals to designated services in certain regions of the province. Offering a warm transfer to a caller* and facilitating that transfer saves the caller from needing to make a second call to initiate service. An e-referral can be sent directly to the service provider on the caller’s behalf, saving them from making a further call to the service. We hope to extend these options to other Ontario Health teams.

We would also like to announce a new update to our telephony technology! We can now translate webchats and text messages (SMS) in over 130 languages in real-time.. Within a few days of the Talkative™ implementation, staff were able to interact seamlessly and immediately with a contact who initiated a web chat in Cantonese!

This technology also offers an option through the ConnexOntario website that allows individuals to call in directly from the website – no landline or cell phone required – increasing the range of options that individuals have to reach ConnexOntario.

We aim to continue collaborating and elevating awareness of ConnexOntario’s services through building relationships with various groups, including several Ontario Health Teams, Good2Talk, iGaming, and the Alcohol and Gaming Commission (AGCO).

*A caller may contact SNIS by toll-free telephone, SMS texting, web chat, or email.



Phone
64,172
↑ 24%



Webchat
16,748
↑ 11%



Texting
5,254
↑ 179%



Email
2,994
↑ 21%

Our Impact:

Last year, 89,168 people contacted ConnexOntario to find mental health, addiction, and problem gambling services in Ontario, overall 26% more than the previous year. Along with our navigators, our data management team worked hard to keep current on program changes, virtual supports, and program closures during the COVID-19 pandemic.



**Mental Health, Substance Use,
and Problem Gambling
calls received.**

Data and Support Services

Through 2022-2023, ConnexOntario has undertaken a series of transformative initiatives to enhance our organizational communication strategies and expand our service offerings to cater to diverse demographics.

One such initiative involved the rebranding of our department – the “Data, Product, and Project Management and IT” division has been renamed to the more intuitive “Data and Systems Support.” This strategic adjustment is aligned with our commitment to ensuring clarity within our operational framework.

Our dedication to enriching the ConnexOntario database has resulted in considerable progress. The health data management team has dedicated their efforts towards integrating programs featuring specialized ethnocultural services, fulfilling our mandate to cater to a broader demographic spectrum. Likewise, our ongoing commitment to serving the needs of Children and Youth is reflected in our expansion of related service offerings.

In line with our commitment to modernity and enhanced user experience, we have initiated a comprehensive overhaul of both the ConnexOntario.ca website and our eServices platform. These transformational redesigns show our dedication to providing an intuitive, user-centric digital interface.

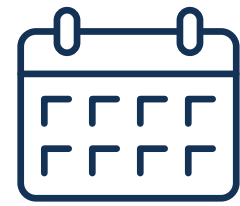
These initiatives emphasize ConnexOntario’s commitment to effective communication, inclusivity, and the continual elevation of our services. We remain focused in our pursuit of excellence and innovation, addressing the evolving needs of our diverse stakeholder base.



534
Organizations
on the
Database



1,782
Sites Operated
by those
Organizations



6,109
Programs
Offered



1,103
Programs Specialized for
Children & Youth

mindyourmind

mindyourmind was pleased to return to in-person Design Labs this past year. The team conducted three youth cohorts as part of the Canada Service Corps Initiative (CSC), which took place in Montréal, QC, Yellowknife, NT, and Oakville, ON. Through these Design Labs, a variety of innovative, engaging, and creative mental wellness resources were developed, each customized and relevant to their own unique communities.



mindyourmind



Updated Interactive Tools:

This past year **mindyourmind** updated two of its oldest interactive digital tools, for improved design, usability, and content. Both tools, Galaxy and Alice: Getting Unstuck (each now available in English and French), are mobile-friendly and help young people to develop a safety plan for when they are in times of need. A full colour printout is also available for download.



Infographics

The printout section on **mindyourmind.ca** serves as a resource hub, offering engaging and informative materials that complement our existing tools and pay tribute to archived ones. This section was created to make it easy for youth, parents, and youth-serving professionals to access, download, and print. This year we introduced the following infographics: Cannabis, Squish Em Anxiety Busters, and the Tree of Life.



Working with the United Nations



The United Nations Association of Canada Symposium invited **mindyourmind** to lead an activity with a group of youth ambassadors who have made significant contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals.

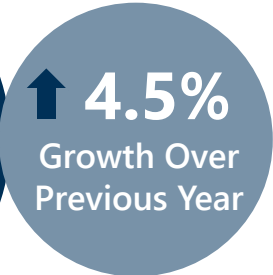
Over Zoom, **mindyourmind** led the youth ambassadors through two activities, including a grounding exercise where participants created their own self care kits. The Self Care Kit handout provided guidance on different types of self care – physical, social, emotional, mental, and spiritual.



Social Media Highlights



225 Followers



Post Engagement Rate Up **↑ 26.7%** Over Previous Fiscal

Corporate Services

Like the Department of Data and Systems Support, our administrative division has been renamed to Corporate Services which incorporates Financial Services, People and Culture, Systems Administration, and Marketing and Communications.

Financial Review 2022-23

| Revenues | Core Fund | mindyourmind | Total 2023 | Total 2022 |
|---|------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Core Programs | 3,751,710 | - | 3,751,710 | 3,751,711 |
| Time-Limited Initiatives/Projects | 117,000 | 678,727 | 795,727 | 850,231 |
| Less: Capital Purchases | - | - | - | - |
| Add: Amortized Provincial Grants | 25,254 | - | 25,254 | 50,457 |
| Adjusted Operating Grants | 3,893,964 | 678,727 | 4,572,691 | 4,652,399 |
| Investment Income | 9,729 | - | 9,729 | 1,859 |
| Other | 62,785 | - | 62,785 | 67,332 |
| Total Revenue | 3,966,478 | 678,727 | 4,645,205 | 4,721,590 |
| Expenses | | | | |
| Core-Funded Expenses | 3,668,697 | - | 3,668,697 | 3,737,126 |
| Time-Limited Initiatives/Project Expenses | 20,067 | 713,284 | 733,351 | 647,081 |
| Total Expenses | 3,688,764 | 713,284 | 4,402,048 | 4,384,207 |
| Excess (Deficiency) of Revenues Over Expenses | 277,714 | (34,557) | 243,157 | 337,383 |
| Fund Balance (Deficit), Beginning | 374,234 | 178,842 | 553,076 | 406,615 |
| Surplus to be Recovered by MOHLTC | (162,292) | - | (162,292) | (190,922) |
| Fund Balances (Deficit), Ending | 489,656 | 144,285 | 633,941 | 553,076 |

2022 - 2023 Board of Directors

Sonja Grbevski, Chair

Harriet Ekperigin, Vice Chair

Priya Paul, Secretary-Treasurer

Marion Wright, Member-at-Large

Karen Fleming

Sylvie Guenther

Helen Karpouzos

Marion Quigley

Aseefa Sarang

Marcia Scarrow

Leighton Schreyer

Danielle Wilson

People and Culture

ConnexOntario believes our staff are valuable. To increase employee engagement post-COVID, we invested in wellness support for our staff to help transition to the new normal. We organized 18 events where employees had the opportunity to engage and build relationships with each other. We are grateful that our staff aligns with our purpose at ConnexOntario and choose to continue to dedicate their energy to our goal. **The average tenure across the organization is 8.55 years.**

Average
8.55
Years

Regarding increasing workplace communication, we continue to provide a safe space where employees can anonymously express their opinions. During this period, we have received forty-two entries in YOUR VOICE. This has helped us to clarify and guide the concerns of our employees.

The wellness initiative and the Social Committee have brought fun and the opportunity to enhance our workplace culture in a friendly and collaborative environment.



Marketing and Communication

We continue to improve our brand awareness across Ontario. ConnexOntario launched a commuter campaign with the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC). Advertisements were placed in targeted areas with the hopes that commuters would see our message and be more encouraged to contact ConnexOntario. This initiative reached 42% of Toronto’s population, with commuters seeing our ads on average 8.5 times weekly. Advertisements were also placed in select Metrolinx GO stations, where 100% of visitors were exposed to our message.

Alongside this, we launched multiple written campaigns throughout the year, including yourcareerguide.ca with over 10,000 monthly visitors and the Mental Health Matters campaign, where our staff contributed articles that were published in newspapers across Southern Ontario. We also ended the year with the brainhealth campaign that brought awareness to frontotemporal dementia. This campaign placed ConnexOntario in front of 55,700 monthly visitors on healthinsight.ca and 875,000 readers of the Toronto Star.



Silence in the Fields: Agriculture and Mental Health

Imagine lying in bed feeling exhausted after a long hard day of physical labour, yet sleep does not come. Your mind is a flurry of “What if?” thoughts that refuse to stop. What if I can’t plant in time? What if there’s no rain? What if the crops don’t grow? What if the harvest fails? How will I feed the cows? What if the market falls? How will I feed my family? What if I lose the farm? What if?...

Agriculture is working long hours, often in isolation, where you can rarely (if ever) call in sick; you get little to no vacation time, and there is a lack of control over key elements related to the work such as weather conditions, animal disease, market trends and government trade agreements. Add to this the pressure of high debt with no guaranteed income, and often a lack of understanding and appreciation

for the work you do by the general population. These are only some of the stressors involved in working in agriculture.

According to a recent study by researchers at the University of Guelph, farmers experience a higher rate of poor mental health compared to the general population. The chronic stress that farmers experience is one of the main contributing factors to poor mental health – and it’s not only farmers who are affected. Spouses, families, and farm help, including migrant workers, are also at risk of experiencing poor mental health.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines mental health as “our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act.” Knowing when someone is struggling with their

mental health is not always easy, but changes to an individual's behaviour can be an indicator that they are not doing well and may need support. These behaviour changes may include:

- Spending more time reviewing finances and planning for different outcomes
- Social withdrawal – attending fewer or no social/family gatherings
- Feeling like they have no control of their emotions
- Not sleeping
- Not feeling motivated about their work
- Having a hard time making informed decisions in a timely manner
- Less time seeking information/ learning about industry, work.

Barriers to Getting Help

Stigma around mental health, particularly in small rural communities where everyone knows everyone, is not discussed and is considered to be a personal affair. In addition, accessing mental health supports in a rural community is hard. Not only are supports often located in urban areas, but finding professional help that understands the unique stressors and demands of agriculture has historically been a challenge.

Support can be costly, as individuals need to take valuable time away from the farm, travel a fair distance to attend appointments and possibly pay for support. Although virtual appointments may be available, high speed internet is required to connect virtually to internet services, which are not readily available in rural areas. Migrant workers also face different challenges, such as language and cultural barriers and may fear losing their jobs if time off is requested.



Regular Maintenance: Engaging in Self Care

Just as a tractor requires regular maintenance, so do people. The ABC's of self care – Awareness, Balance and Connection – is a great way to start engaging in self care.

Awareness – Pause and take notice of how you are doing today. How are you feeling physically? Emotionally? Mentally?

Balance – Balance your time between Work, Rest and Play. This can be hard as the line between work and home does not always exist and work is sometimes 24/7 depending on the season. However, it's important to try and get adequate sleep and to refuel your body by eating and hydrating regularly. "Play" is equally important. Take the time to engage in a hobby, sport or exercise.

Connection – Make time to connect with family and friends. Sometimes connecting with others can start the upswing back to better mental health, or connect with a professional mental health provider for extra support.

Keep in mind self care is a very personal plan and is not one size fits all. Take the time to figure out what works best for you and start your regular maintenance schedule.

Supporting Others:

The Do More Ag Foundation describes three pillars when it comes to supporting others – TALK MORE, ASK MORE, LISTEN MORE.

- **TALK** about mental health. Talking about both good and bad mental health normalizes it and reduces stigma, plus it's a great way to check-in with people.
- **ASK** someone how they are doing. Ask, specifically, about their mental health – and give time for an answer.
- **LISTEN** to the person. Don't try to fix the problem. Instead, "put their shoes on" and try to understand how they could be feeling this way.

Working in agriculture is hard work. Non-existent lines between home and work, no control over key elements of the job, and working long days sometimes in isolation can take its toll on mental health. If you are struggling with your mental health, remember that sometimes the hardest thing to do is to say "I'm not ok" and to reach out for help.

The above article was authored by Sam Cornelissen, a Health Data Liaison at ConnexOntario. It was developed in collaboration with Postmedia and distributed in 13 markets across Southern Ontario in the spring of 2023. The complete article, including footnotes and a list of mental health resources can be found at <https://7c1e077b.flowpaper.com/HuronCountyMentalHealthJan2023/#page=1>

The information you need
when you need it



Introducing ConnexOntario's Text Line
24/7 • CONFIDENTIAL • COMPLETELY FREE

1-866-531-2600 ConnexOntario.ca Text CONNEX to 247247



mindyourmind.ca myToolKit.ca BeSafeApp.ca youthexperts.ca



ConnexOntario

Discover Mental Health, Addiction and Problem Gambling Services

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