

## Case Study

# Improving Access to Mental Health Services: Ontario's Province-Wide Centralized Intake and eReferral System



## The Background

[Askforhelptoday.ca](https://askforhelptoday.ca), led by the [Ontario Psychological Association \(OPA\)](https://www.opa.on.ca/), aims to enhance access and match individuals with psychologists in Ontario. With over 2,700 skilled psychologists, psychological associates and students in its diverse membership, OPA plays a pivotal role in mental health awareness, service accessibility, and maintaining high practice standards.

In response to Ontario's escalating mental health crisis, OPA and Strata Health partnered in April 2020 to tackle access barriers. The aim was to enable self-referrals to psychologists initially, followed by eReferrals from primary and acute care.

## The Challenge

OPA confronted challenges in improving access and navigation to psychological services amid surging service demands intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. This involved addressing issues related to finding psychologists, navigating websites, matching patients based on their needs and preferences, and breaking down siloes to enable provincial-level service access.



Escalating Service Needs



Absence of a Unified Access Point



Challenges in Patient-Provider Matching



Health System Siloes

## The Solution

The eReferral system was developed by leveraging OPA's extensive network of registered psychologists, an online service request portal, and a staffed central intake service supported by Strata Health proprietary software. The digital solution is uniquely positioned to allow stakeholders such as Ontario Health Teams and primary care clinicians to access specialized mental health services for their patient populations that need it; stay updated as to the status of the referral and enable secure communication between clinicians.

The solutions have also empowered direct collaboration between OPA and the government of Ontario to offer psychological service to frontline health workers.

At the end of the implementation, this partnership will produce a range of impactful solutions strategically designed to enhance Ontario's mental health service landscape, including:

- ✓ A Digital Clinical Pathway for psychologists
- ✓ A Provincial Central Intake and eReferral System
- ✓ A user-friendly Self-Referral Website at [www.askforhelptoday.ca](http://www.askforhelptoday.ca)
- ✓ EMR Integration facilitating GP to psychologist eReferrals through Ocean
- ✓ Acute care referrals
- ✓ Data and reporting capabilities for analyzing service trends and demands.

## The Process

The solution was rolled out in phases to ensure successful deployment and adoption.

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### PHASE 1: SELF-REFERRAL

Developed a comprehensive digital directory of psychologists and enabled self-referrals from [askforhelptoday.ca](http://askforhelptoday.ca) to the central intake, resulting in 2431 referrals within the first year.

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### PHASE 2: MENTAL HEALTH HOSPITALS

Expanded referrals to five mental health hospitals including Waypoint Centre for Mental Health Care, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Ontario Shores, St-Joseph's Hamilton and The Royal to support the publicly funded frontline workers program.

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### PHASE 3: PRIMARY CARE

Collaborated with eServices for primary care integration in 2023.

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### PHASE 4: ACUTE CARE

Expected to extend the system to all acute care settings in the GTA & York Region (RM&R to OPA), accepting publicly funded referrals. Expected to go live in 2024.

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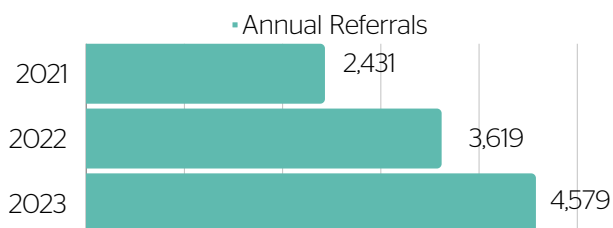
### PHASE 5: NATIONAL EXPANSION

Through partnerships with other provincial psychological associations, the system can be expanded nationally, enabling federal-level programs to reach psychologists across the country.

## The Results

EXPLORE INFOGRAPHIC >

### Key Metrics



# 88%

In October 2023, OPA surpassed 10,000 referrals.

Total referrals increased by 88% from 2021 to 2023.

### Relevant Insights

- Children under 12 saw the greatest need increase in 2022, while seniors saw the greatest increase to date in 2023.
- The age group 19-24 showed a significant 23% increase in service requests, while the 13-18 group demonstrated a relatively negligible increase (8%).
- The continued rise in children youth referrals emphasizes the need for more psychologists and signifies the importance of youth mental health awareness for the Ontario government.



*Askforhelptoday.ca and our partnership with Strata Health continues to support OPA's core mandates to improve access to care and advocate for patient needs. Now more than ever, we are uniquely positioned to not only improve access and minimize wait times for Ontarians, but also to gather crucial referral data and trends. This data will aid in informing the public, Ontario Health, and government partners. We look forward to collaborating with other associations across the country to establish a national program that will improve access to mental health services for all Canadians.*

### Richard Morrison

CEO of the Ontario Psychological Association



### Next Steps

The groundwork has been laid for collaboration, and the upcoming stage is about constructing and broadening to establish a national central intake. For further information and engagement, reach out to Strata Health today.

**For further information and engagement, reach out to Strata Health today!**

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