5TH ANNUAL
MENTAL HEALTH IN THE DIGITAL AGE CONFERENCE

Presented by the Mental Health in the Digital Age Lab

NOVEMBER 24, 2025 | 6:30-9 PM (EST)

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

Time	Session
6:30-7:10 PM	**Welcome and Keynote Address** *Hon. Senator Katherine Hay*
7:15-7:35 PM	**Concurrent Session A** (15 min. presentation + 5 min. Q & A) **Session A-1:** Problematic Technology Use: How to Recognize Unhealthy Use in Children and Youth and Promote Digital Wellness **Session A-2:** Levelling Up! Addressing Loneliness Among Seniors Through Online Gaming Platforms **Session A-3:** The Role of Digital Citizenship Education in Promoting Positive Student Well-Being **Session A-4:** Social Media's Influence on Migration Preparation, Cultural Adjustment, and Mental Well-Being of International Students **Session A-5:** TikTok, Body Image, and Eating Disorder Risk in Adolescents: Gender Differences and Learning Outcomes **Session A-6:** Navigating a New Country: Mental Health Experiences of International Students in Post-Secondary Institutions
7:40-8:00 PM	**Concurrent Session B** (15 min. presentation + 5 min. Q & A) **Session B-1:** Promoting Digital Literacy Among Adolescents to Alleviate Anxiety Linked to Social Media **Session B-2:** Short-Form Video Consumption: Mental Health & Behavioural Impacts in Young Adults **Session B-3:** Navigating the Digital Frontlines: Race-Based Traumatic Stress, Online Resilience, and the Imperative for Systemic and Algorithmic Reform **Session B-4:** Balancing Innovation and Well-Being: Enabling Teacher Flourishing in an Era of Educational Technology **Session B-5:** Reframing Digital Wellness: Understanding Grade 1-2 Teachers' Challenges in Reducing Classroom Technology for Students' Mental Health
8:05-8:25 PM	**Concurrent Session C** (15 min. presentation + 5 min. Q & A) **Session C-1:** Evaluating the Integration of Artificial Intelligence in Youth Mental Health Care **Session C-2:** Math Influencers: How Social Media Shapes Mathematical Attitudes **Session C-3:** Between Screens and Belonging: Digital Loneliness Amongst Mature Immigrant Learners **Session C-4:** Understanding Adolescent Sexting **Session C-5:** The Impact of Play on Children and Adolescents' Well-Being
8:30-8:50 PM	**Concurrent Session D** (15 min. presentation + 5 min. Q & A) **Session D-1:** The Impacts of Technology Use on Adolescent Mental Health and Sleep Hygiene **Session D-2:** AI Tutors and Student Mental Health in Alternative and Equity-Oriented Education **Session D-3:** Mindfulness and Social Media: Finding Balance for Digital Wellness **Session D-4:** Media Multitasking and Mental Health: The Hidden Strain on Student Focus and Stress **Session D-5:** Breaking Cultural Barriers: How Technology Helps Combat Mental Health Stigma
8:50-9:00 PM	**Closing Remarks** *Dr. Jennifer Laffier, Director of the Mental Health in the Digital Age Lab*

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

HON. SENATOR KATHERINE HAY

The 5th Annual Mental Health in the Digital Age Conference is a *free* event for all!

As passionate supporters of Kids Help Phone, attendees are welcome to make a contribution to Kids Help Phone in honour of our event.

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MENTAL HEALTH IN THE DIGITAL AGE LAB

OntarioTech UNIVERSITY

ABOUT HON. SENATOR KATHERINE HAY

Katherine Hay is a not-for-profit executive with more than 40 years of experience in the health care and financial services sectors.

Since taking on her role as President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Kids Help Phone in 2017, she has transformed the organization into Canada's only national, 24/7, multilingual e-mental health service for young people.

Prior to this, Ms. Hay worked as President and CEO of the Women's College Hospital Foundation and held leadership roles at the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Credit Valley Hospital Foundation, the University of Guelph and the University of Toronto. She also worked for several years in the financial sector before being appointed as President of the Canadian Foundation by the Consul General of Canada in São Paulo, Brazil, where she helped raise funds for children affected by HIV/AIDS.

HON. SENATOR
KATHERINE HAY

Ms. Hay has dedicated much of her life to public service and her recent career to advancing health care services for women, children, and youth. She is a member of the UNICEF International Expert Advisory Group for Adolescent and Youth Digital Mental Health as well as the eMental Health International Collaborative Expert Advisory Council. She serves on the board of directors of Mental Health Research Canada and co-chairs the National Alliance for Children and Youth CEO Roundtable. She has previously served on the boards or councils of several other organizations, including the Mental Health Commission of Canada, Children First Canada's Council of Champions, the Ontario Premier's Council on Mental Health and Addictions, The Darling Home for Kids, and Kensington Health (Hospice).

In recognition of her leadership and contributions, Ms. Hay was named one of WXN's Top 100 Most Powerful Women, one of Canada's Top 25 Women of Influence and one of Canada's Top 10 Women Leaders in Digital Health. She has also been honoured with RBC's Canadian Women Entrepreneur Award and the University of Waterloo's Alumni Achievement Award. Most recently, she was awarded the King Charles III Coronation Medal.

Ms. Hay holds a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Waterloo and an Institute of Corporate Directors Designation from the University of Toronto.

MENTAL HEALTH IN THE DIGITAL AGE LAB

CONCURRENT SESSION A

BREAKOUT ROOM 1

Problematic Technology Use: How to Recognize Unhealthy Use in Children and Youth and Promote Digital Wellness

Presented by: Andrea Harris

This presentation explores the issue of problematic technology use (PTU). We will examine what PTU is, contributing factors, how to recognize PTU in children and youth, and finally, methods for promoting digital wellness to reduce unhealthy technology use. Parents and educators can apply these strategies to support the well-being of children and youth as they navigate the digital world.

BREAKOUT ROOM 2

Levelling Up! Addressing Loneliness Among Seniors Through Online Gaming Platforms

Presented by: Deb Allan and Tara Bruckmann

This session will explore the benefits and the challenges of seniors' online gaming and the effects it can have on loneliness. Online gaming can be an effective way to reduce loneliness in an aging demographic. In order to reduce vulnerabilities and increase comfort in the online world, we need to support seniors in developing fundamental digital literacy skills. Evidence-based recommendations and strategies for promoting digital literacy in seniors will be discussed, including ways to increase mental and physical activity, build comfort in online gaming spaces, and enhance well-being.

BREAKOUT ROOM 3

The Role of Digital Citizenship Education in Promoting Positive Student Well-Being

Presented by: Mackenzie Hoy

In today's digital age, children and youth spend a significant amount of time online, which influences their mental well-being both positively and negatively. Digital citizenship education can help equip students with the necessary skills to navigate online spaces responsibly, promoting safe interactions and positive mental health. This session explores how digital citizenship education promotes positive mental health in adolescents. Attendees will learn evidence-based strategies for teaching responsible online behaviour. A tip guide for educators will be provided with practical tools to help integrate digital citizenship into classroom practice and support students' well-being.

BREAKOUT ROOM 4

Social Media's Influence on Migration Preparation, Cultural Adjustment, and Mental Well-Being of International Students

Presented by: Emmylou Montecino

This presentation highlights the role of social media in supporting mental well-being and cultural adjustment for international students. Social media can be a valuable tool for migration preparation, as it helps students gather information, learn about the host country, connect with peers through online communities, and access essential resources. However, these platforms can also pose risks, including exposure to misinformation and digital overload. By understanding the benefits and risks, institutions can enhance their student well-being initiatives and facilitate a smoother transition for international students to their new institutions and host countries.

BREAKOUT ROOM 5

TikTok, Body Image, and Eating Disorder Risk in Adolescents: Gender Differences and Learning Outcomes

Presented by: Mariam Hssassa, Madina Pakzad, Jo Rae Marino, & Gena Smith

This presentation will review TikTok's body-image-related content's adverse effects on adolescents' self-esteem, eating disorder risk, mental health, and, subsequently, how this can impact their learning and academic achievement. Strategies and recommendations will be explored for educators, parents, and adolescents to support this age group in cultivating healthy digital habits, fostering positive body image, and promoting academic success by understanding how these experiences intersect.

BREAKOUT ROOM 6

Navigating a New Country: Mental Health Experiences of International Students in Post-Secondary Institutions

Presented by: Lennique Bannister

International students face unique challenges that can affect their mental health, including social isolation, academic stress, and cultural adjustment difficulties. Research suggests that emotional support, psychological resilience, and inclusive mental health services can enhance well-being and mitigate distress. This presentation synthesizes current literature and explores strategies post-secondary institutions can use to better meet the mental health needs of international students. The findings highlight evidence-based approaches for promoting inclusion and mental wellness for students, educators, and policymakers.

CONCURRENT SESSION B

BREAKOUT ROOM 1

Promoting Digital Literacy Among Adolescents to Alleviate Anxiety Linked to Social Media

Presented by: Alexis Colautti

Social media plays an important role in the lives and development of adolescents, where it can support social interaction and identity development, but it can also negatively impact self-esteem and put youth at risk of cyberbullying. However, critical thinking and digital literacy skills can support youth to safely and thoughtfully navigate their digital worlds. This presentation will examine the connection between online social media use and how a lack of digital literacy affects the anxiety and mental health of youth aged 12 to 18. Together, we will explore why digital literacy is important and basic skills that we can teach young people, such as being aware of algorithms, echo chambers, and confirmation bias on social media.

BREAKOUT ROOM 2

Short-Form Video Consumption: Mental Health & Behavioural Impacts in Young Adults

Presented by: Agnieszka Prymicz

Research shows that short-form video platforms, such as TikTok, are addictive due to highly personalized algorithmic content recommendations (Al-Leimon et al., 2025; Qin et al., 2022). Short-form video consumption has been linked to increased social anxiety, as these platforms substitute for in-person interactions, particularly among users with limited social support (Peng et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2019). Additionally, excessive use contributes to sleep disruption (Jiang & Yoo, 2024; Zhu et al., 2023). In this presentation, attendees will explore how short-form video consumption affects young adults' mental health, particularly its links to anxiety and sleep disturbances. By examining mindfulness training as a potential intervention, this session aims to promote healthier digital habits.

BREAKOUT ROOM 3

Navigating the Digital Frontlines: Race-Based Traumatic Stress, Online Resilience, and the Imperative for Systemic and Algorithmic Reform

Presented by: Amrit Kaur Dhaliwal

Existing research confirms that Race-Based Traumatic Stress (RBTS), caused by systemic racism and direct or vicarious exposure to racial violence, manifests in severe health impacts, including sleep disturbances, depression, and chronic stress (Jackson et al., 2024; Tao & Fisher, 2022; Vine, 2022). The digital age has exacerbated this issue, as constant media exposure and algorithmically reinforced bias act as continuous stressors (Fields et al., 2025). While digital media may heighten symptoms of trauma, social media technologies also have the potential to foster resilience through activism and collective action (AuBuchon et al., 2025). This session will explore the opportunities for digital tools to promote wellness and mitigate the risks of RBTS among tech users.

BREAKOUT ROOM 4

Balancing Innovation and Well-Being: Enabling Teacher Flourishing in an Era of Educational Technology

Presented by: Abbie Chaddah

This research examines the growing tension between technological innovation and teacher well-being. As educators navigate multiple digital platforms for instruction, assessment, and communication, many experience heightened anxiety and burnout. Through a synthesis of existing research, this presentation will explore best practices that help teachers manage digital demands and foster healthier, more sustainable professional practices. A resource will be provided to attendees, along with additional resources and evidence-based strategies, to help educators put research into action and promote flourishing.

BREAKOUT ROOM 5

Reframing Digital Wellness: Understanding Grade 1-2 Teachers' Challenges in Reducing Classroom Technology for Students' Mental Health

Presented by: Clerona Felicien

In an educational era where innovation is often equated with technology integration, early primary teachers face the challenge of balancing digital tools with student mental health and emotional regulation. Research suggests a connection between high digital exposure in young learners and attention difficulties and anxiety, emphasizing the importance of screen-free time and hands-on learning experiences (Nagata et al., 2024). Despite all this research, curriculum expectations continue to prioritize technology use, leaving educators with little support or guidance on how to achieve digital balance (Abedi et al., 2023). This session will discuss findings about teacher barriers, mental health outcomes and digital wellness practices, highlighting recurring themes and identifying recommendations for classroom and policy interventions.

CONCURRENT SESSION C

BREAKOUT ROOM 1

Evaluating the Integration of Artificial Intelligence in Youth Mental Health Care

Presented by: Annie Ronsky

This presentation focuses on the intersection of youth mental health care and artificial intelligence (AI). It will explore how AI is being implemented in mental health support for young people, examining both its benefits and potential drawbacks. Additionally, it will analyze the factors that influence these outcomes to better understand AI's overall impact on youth mental health care. A resource will be provided for attendees to transfer their learning to actionable items to support youth as parents, care-providers, educators, or mental health professionals.

BREAKOUT ROOM 2

Math Influencers: How Social Media Shapes Mathematical Attitudes

Presented by: Katie Grant

Math is a subject that has a reputation for being 'boring,' 'difficult,' or a source of anxiety, despite its application to many aspects of everyday life. This presentation will provide evidence for the utilization of social media to improve math attitudes and engagement for both learners and educators. Participants will learn to recognize math negativity and see examples of positive use cases of social media for math learning. Takeaways for educators and parents will be discussed, and a tip sheet will also be shared to help transfer learning from the session into action-based strategies.

BREAKOUT ROOM 3

Between Screens and Belonging: Digital Loneliness Amongst Mature Immigrant Learners

Presented by: Minakshi Singh

This session explores how digital loneliness affects learning and well-being among new immigrant mature students. Drawing on trauma-informed and culturally responsive research, it offers strategies to foster connection, inclusion, and psychological safety in virtual classrooms, reimagining integration as emotional belonging, not just legal status. Attendees will walk away with resources and actionable tools to turn research into action, helping to foster connection, inclusion, and psychological safety in online education.

BREAKOUT ROOM 4

Understanding Adolescent Sexting

Presented by: Claire Fitzpatrick

Sexting among youth remains relatively modest, but rising rates highlight growing concern. Research links sexting to impulsivity and substance use, while self-esteem and self-control act as protective factors; sexual and gender minority youth face heightened risks of coercion and image-based abuse. However, little is known about resilience, consent literacy, and the role of family communication in shaping healthy online behaviours. This presentation synthesizes existing research to create harm reduction–based recommendations and resources that promote digital ethics, consent awareness, and safer online engagement for parents, educators, and teens.

BREAKOUT ROOM 5

The Impact of Play on Children and Adolescents' Well-Being

Presented by: Lindsay Ancio, Megan Neely, & Michelle Jilesen

Play is a vital foundation for the cognitive, social, and emotional well-being of children and adolescents, supporting skills such as creativity, problem-solving, communication, and resilience (The Kindergarten Program, 2016; LEGO Foundation, 2018). Research illustrates that play-based learning enhances motivation, independence, and imagination, while also improving classroom behaviours and social interactions (Johnston et al., 2023; Callahan, 2023). Play can promote engagement and skill development, yet more research is needed to understand the long-term impacts of digital play on well-being and growth. This session will explore ways to foster environments that balance structured and self-directed play, from kindergarten to secondary school, to support educators and parents in helping students thrive across all components of the PERMA model of wellness.

CONCURRENT SESSION D

BREAKOUT ROOM 1

The Impacts of Technology Use on Adolescent Mental Health and Sleep Hygiene

Presented by: Savannah Soliman, Venusha Arulvelrajah, Saranqi Naveendrathas & Najmah Madahey

Current literature highlights that poor sleep quality can predict higher levels of depression, anxiety, and emotional dysregulation, while consistent sleep hygiene practices mediate these factors, improving subjective well-being and resilience (Kuhn et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2023). However, research indicates that 76% of adolescents use their smartphones before bed to message, browse the internet, and play games, while one-third report waking up to their smartphones at night (Johansson et al., 2016). This can cause disruptions to sleep patterns and, subsequently, adversely affect mental health and well-being. This session will provide practical tips for parents and adolescents to establish digital boundaries, enhance sleep quality, and recognize the signs of digital fatigue or stress.

BREAKOUT ROOM 2

AI Tutors and Student Mental Health in Alternative and Equity-Oriented Education

Presented by: Hala Hassan

Through immediate and adaptive feedback, AI tutors can enhance organization, self-efficacy, and engagement (Holstein et al., 2020). However, research cautions against the overreliance on AI systems (Baker & Hawn, 2022; Williamson, 2017). This presentation explores the effects of AI tutoring on the emotional well-being, motivation, and cognitive mastery of students in alternative and equity-focused educational environments. It examines how algorithmic design mediates relationships, autonomy, and psychological safety, treating AI as a pedagogical and moral agent (Selwyn, 2016). Attendees will learn about practical, ethically-grounded recommendations and guidelines for implementation in the classroom.

BREAKOUT ROOM 3

Mindfulness and Social Media: Finding Balance for Digital Wellness

Presented by: Tanice Donaldson

This session explores how mindful awareness can help participants build healthier relationships with social media. It highlights the negative effects of overuse, like stress, distraction, and social comparison, while introducing evidence-based mindfulness strategies to promote intentional and balanced use. Participants will explore practical tools and strategies to reduce screen time and improve focus, mood, and overall well-being. This session tasks participants with reflecting and creating personalized habits that support both digital and mental wellness using the provided resources.

BREAKOUT ROOM 4

Media Multitasking and Mental Health: The Hidden Strain on Student Focus and Stress

Presented by: Rasha Mneimne

This presentation will investigate the impacts of multitasking on student mental health and academic performance. Research has demonstrated that many students are constantly switching between devices and digital tasks. However, this can reduce their ability to focus and make it more challenging for them to perform at their best in school. Too much multitasking can make students feel more distracted and stressed. In this presentation, participants will learn simple strategies for educators and care providers to help students build better focus and healthier tech habits.

BREAKOUT ROOM 5

Breaking Cultural Barriers: How Technology Helps Combat Mental Health Stigma

Presented by: Daniella Tenkorang

Research states that stigma surrounding mental health continues to negatively impact young people under 25, affecting their education, employment, healthcare, and social lives (Molloy et al., 2020). Although there is still a lack of understanding of the long-term impacts of online interventions and how they can be adapted across cultures, research has shown that social media-based interventions are valuable tools for improving mental health literacy, reducing stigma, and supporting early help (Halsall et al., 2019). This presentation explores how social media can help reduce mental health stigma across different cultural contexts in today's technology-driven society. Insights from an analysis of global studies, including effective digital strategies for reducing stigma, will be shared to highlight how technology can foster culturally inclusive and supportive mental health discussions.