

Rural eMentoring BC

Rural eMentoring BC (ReMBC): The first 10 years

How far we’ve come: A look at how ReMBC has changed since its beginnings in 2016



In fall 2016, ReMBC piloted its online mentoring program with one class of students at JL Crowe Secondary School. Since then, the program has taken on new initiatives, including REAP’s high school strategy and Selkirk College’s Rural Pre-Health eMentoring program, and has served over 1000 rural students.

After the funding period for their successful Aboriginal eMentoring program ended, Drs Sandra Jarvis-Selinger and Katherine Wisener, from the University of British Columbia, searched for a way to sustain the program and utilize all the resources and knowledge that came out of it. They found an ally in Dr. Blair Stanley, a rural doctor and Associate Director of the Rural Education Action Plan (REAP). With Dr. Stanley’s help they were able to secure 5-year, one-time funding to transform the program into Rural eMentoring BC, an online mentoring program for BC’s rural youth.

[\(continued on page 2\)](#)

ReMBC commits to Truth and Reconciliation

In the fall of 2023, ReMBC received a \$250,000 grant from the University of British Columbia’s Indigenous Initiatives Fund.

Following on the success of Aboriginal eMentoring BC, ReMBC principal investigators Drs Sandra Jarvis-Selinger and Katherine Wisener hoped that the new ReMBC program would continue to provide e-mentoring opportunities to Indigenous students. As more Indigenous health professionals are needed, especially in rural communities, this goal was shared by the Rural Education Action Plan. So, the ReMBC team got to work! [\(continued on page 4\)](#)

Bridging gaps: How ReMBC is sharing its knowledge

“ReMBC exists in the space between high school and post-secondary education” says ReMBC principal investigator Dr. Sandra Jarvis-Selinger about the program’s high school offerings. The same can be said about all of ReMBC’s initiatives, which aim to bridge the transitions between educational stages.

ReMBC’s research portfolio aims to show the power of mentoring for supporting these transitional stages. To accomplish this, the research team has sought out cutting-edge research opportunities and shared their findings in a variety of settings. [\(continued on page 4\)](#)

Participants give feedback and ReMBC responds

“I believe the changes done this year were good and I am excited to try them out!” – a multi-year mentor

No program can be sustainable without input from its users. Since the beginning, ReMBC has asked its participants for feedback and has critically evaluated the impact of its offerings. As a result, all of its offerings have undergone significant changes each year!

“Most participants learn something new and get something out of our programs. But, we have to be flexible in order to adapt to changes in student needs and attitudes, which is why we ask for feedback and make changes each year.” says program manager Juliet Oshiro. [\(continued on page 4\)](#)

Home grown: how ReMBC is supporting rural students throughout their educational journeys

It is well known that rural students return home to practice, but that they are underrepresented in, and underserved by, post-secondary institutions.

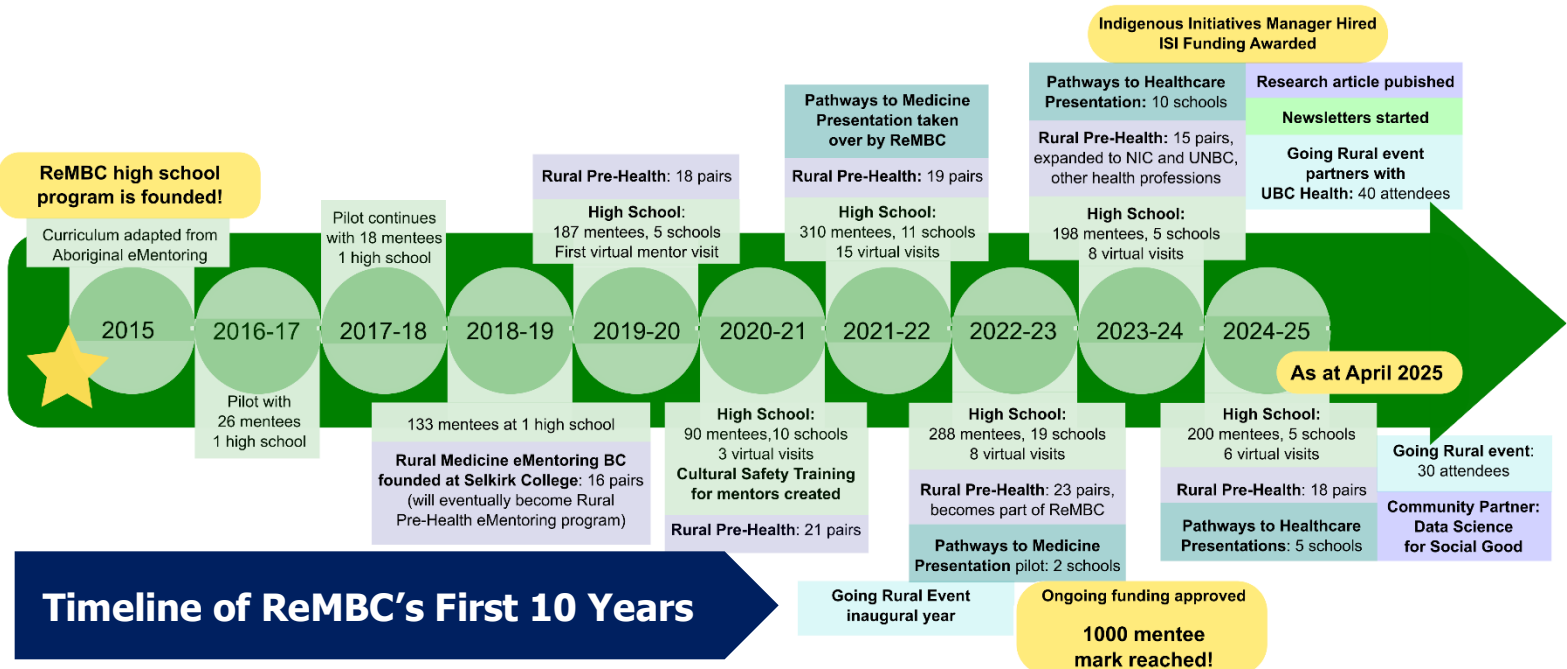
ReMBC was created to help “locally grow” rural healthcare practitioners by supporting rural students throughout their educational journeys. [\(continued on page 3\)](#)



The next 10 years: the team consults with key interests to plan for the future

In the spring of 2024 program staff Parvaneh Rahbar and Juliet Oshiro wondered why some classes were more engaged with their mentors than others, and consulted with the teachers. These conversations, coupled with declining engagement rates across the educational-outreach sector, launched a new strategic focus on consultation and needs assessment.

In early 2025 the team began identifying partners and interests to consult with from across the secondary, post-secondary, and health professions sectors, as well as Indigenous interests in these areas. [\(continued on page 5\)](#)



(How far we've come, continued from page 1)

Like Aboriginal eMentoring, ReMBC matches high school students with mentors who are post-secondary students. Since 2016, the program has reached 31 rural high schools across BC and engaged over 400 volunteer mentors from 16 colleges and universities.

But the growth didn't stop there. In 2018, ReMBC partnered with Selkirk College to pair Rural Pre-Medicine students with medical student mentors. In 2022, ReMBC took over the program and offered it to pre-health students across BC as Rural Pre-Health eMentoring. In total, 122 pre-health students from 6 schools have participated as mentees, and 97 students from 6 schools and 10 different health professions programs have volunteered their time as mentors.

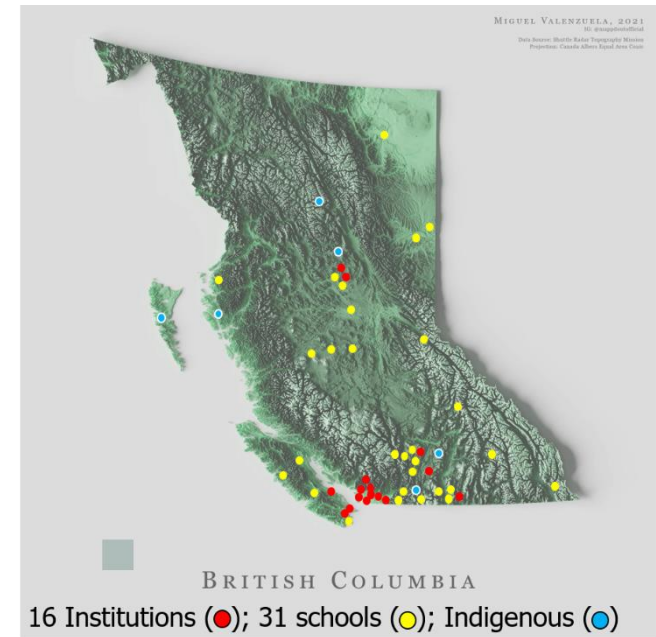
In 2021, ReMBC was tasked with reviving a REAP initiative that supported medical students on rural rotations to present to their local high schools. In partnership with UBC Medicine's FLEX program, students developed and piloted the Pathways to Medicine Presentation, and since then students have presented in 9 communities. In 2023 the program partnered with UBC's Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences to create a pharmacy stream of this initiative, with 8 presentations given since then.

Although the program's focus was strictly rural at this point, Dr. Jarvis-Selinger and Dr. Wisener remained dedicated to the program's Indigenous roots and prioritized Indigenous engagement within ReMBC. In 2022, the program developed a strategic plan to expand its Truth and Reconciliation activities, address the needs of Indigenous participants, and ultimately increase Indigenous engagement. In the fall of 2023, ReMBC was awarded \$250,000 from UBC's Indigenous Initiatives Fund and hired an Indigenous Initiatives Manager, Ms. Angela Nash, to put this plan into action.

As ReMBC grew and built relationships with rural residents, the team identified the need to create a community in which to share opportunities and resources. In 2023, ReMBC began hosting the virtual "Going Rural: Opportunities in Rural Healthcare" event, and has since hosted the event yearly in partnership with UBC Health. Rural students at all stages in their journey join online for an evening of discussion with rural students, professionals, and schools.

With ReMBC reaching hundreds of rural students each year, the team saw an opportunity to evaluate the program's impact and disseminate the knowledge they gained along the way. In 2023 the research team published an article in Rural and Remote Health about the program's impact, and in 2024 was selected to be a community partner in UBC's Data Science for Social Good program, where students used machine learning to analyze mentor-mentee conversations.

After the one-time funding was exhausted, it was clear that ReMBC was worth investing in and the program was funded permanently starting in 2023. It was a busy 10 years for the ReMBC program and the team is excited to see it grow even more!



(Home grown, continued from page 1)

Colleges and universities are often very involved with their local communities, and it is often because of this ease of access that urban students are more likely to attend post-secondary than their rural counterparts. Rural eMentoring BC aims to disrupt this inequality by bringing post-secondary connections to rural students through the initiatives described below.

ReMBC’s high school eMentoring program connects rural high school students with mentors who are post-secondary students to inspire and support them to pursue post-secondary.

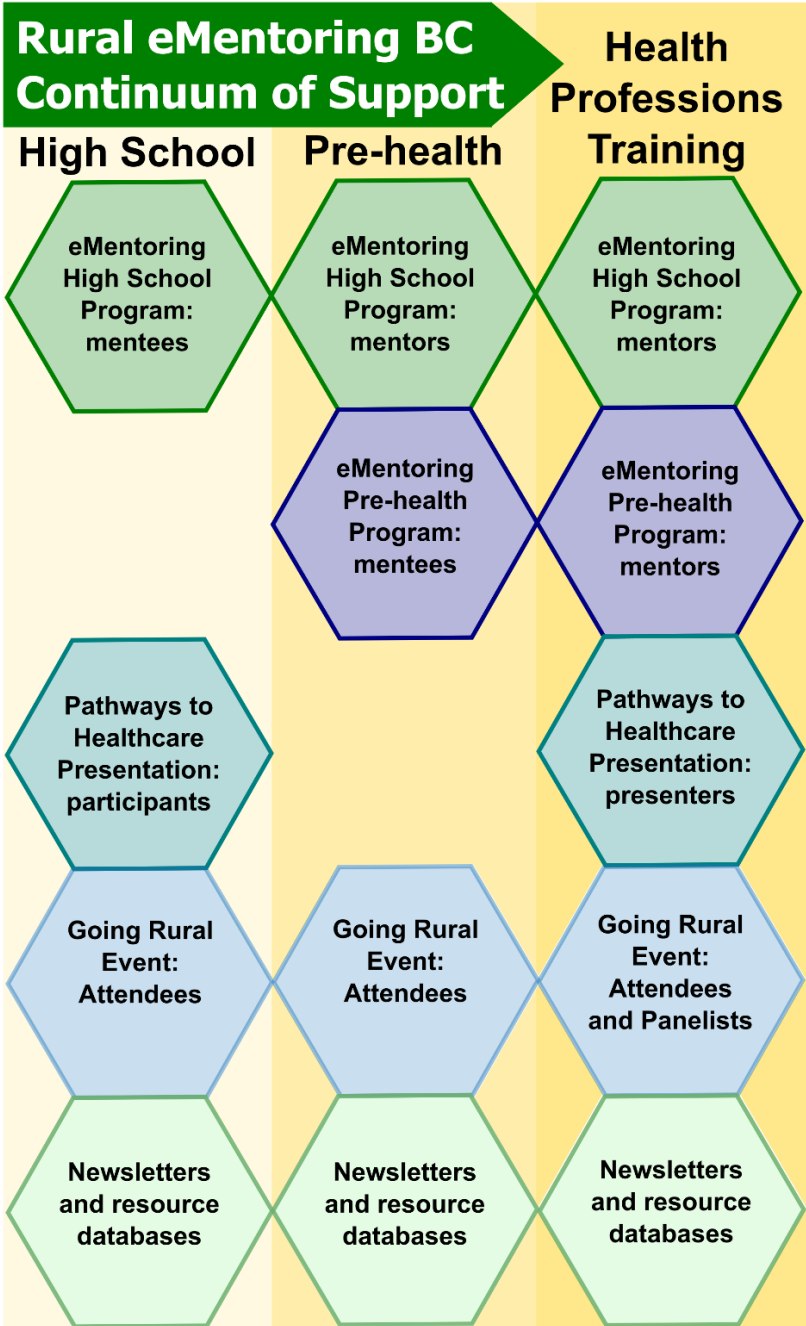
The Pathways to Healthcare presentation brings medical and pharmacy students into rural classrooms to share different pathways to medical and pharmacy careers, and to highlight different career opportunities within each field – all with a rural spin.

The Going Rural: Opportunities in Rural Healthcare yearly virtual event, now hosted in partnership with UBC Health, connects rural intending students with information and resources about career and educational opportunities in rural healthcare. The event features two interprofessional panels of student presenters, where panelists discuss rural healthcare careers and their experiences in their respective health professions programs. The program also hosts an exhibitor hall where health professions programs have virtual booths that students can visit to learn more about educational opportunities available to rural students.

The rural pre-health eMentoring program connects rural intending undergraduates or recent grads with a mentor who is in the health professions program of their choice. This program also offers interprofessional mentoring, where mentees can be matched to a team of mentors from different programs of their choosing.

Newsletters and resource databases: all program participants receive monthly or bi-monthly newsletters that feature learning opportunities, like events and workshops, resources, like academic, career and mental health supports, and job, volunteer, and scholarship postings. The ReMBC team is constantly on the lookout for opportunities and resources to share with the high school, pre-health, and health professions students who participate.

Professional development: College and university student volunteers are the heart of ReMBC’s offerings. To make the time they dedicate to the program worthwhile, the program offers professional development opportunities, including training in communication, relationship development, privilege and power (with a rural spin), and Indigenous cultural safety, that they can take with them to their future career. Many of the volunteers are from urban backgrounds, so the program provides them an opportunity to gain insight into the rural experience; this is especially impactful for students who deliver the Pathways to Healthcare presentation at a rural school, as it gives them the chance to get to know their placement communities.



“I gained knowledge about the medical world. This exceeded my expectations!”
- High school mentee, 2022-2023

“I am always thrilled to be matched with a mentee who has lots of questions about life after post-secondary! I get to learn a lot from the experience while helping them get some clarity on what they want to do as they grow into adulthood. It’s a very rewarding experience!”
- Mentor for high school program, 2023-2024

“My mentor had some great advice, took time to research some stuff and ask people they know on their experiences. I’m going to take all resources and apply them to the rest of my academic career.”
- Rural pre-health mentee, 2023-2024

“As I continue to consider a career in rural family medicine, this experience was invaluable. It allowed me to connect with the people and places where I might one day work”
- Presenter, Pathways to Medicine presentation, 2023-2024

(Truth and Reconciliation, continued from page 1)

The team developed a strategic plan for this work, which included securing ongoing funding for an Indigenous Initiatives Manager who would oversee its implementation, as well as start-up funds to build new initiatives. In fall 2023 the Joint Standing Committee on Rural Issues approved a budget expansion to hire Ms. Angela Nash, and ReMBC successfully applied for a \$250,000 grant through UBC’s Indigenous Initiatives Fund. Guided by UBC’s Indigenous Strategic Plan and Ms. Nash, ReMBC developed five goals:

Decolonize and Indigenize unit operations and practices: ReMBC aims to train its staff to operate the program in a way that honours the land and the Indigenous people who once resided there, incorporates Two-Eyed Seeing and the 4-Rs, and reduces the usage of colonial systems and ways of knowing. Ms. Nash is also reviewing all public facing materials to ensure they are culturally safe and reflect Indigenous values.

Provide support to Indigenous students transitioning to university: Through monthly newsletters and information on our website, ReMBC aims to connect Indigenous students to support, services, and opportunities that help remove structural and systemic barriers to pursuing and attending post-secondary education.

Provide education on Truth and Reconciliation and advance the rights of Indigenous people: All participants receive information on Truth and Reconciliation through an in-house curriculum unit, and the program will promote events, opportunities and resources on Truth and Reconciliation.

Decolonize and Indigenize curriculum and mentor training: The program is working to ensure its curriculum and mentor training are representative and safe for Indigenous participants. Curriculum goals include increasing Indigenous representation, adding Truth and Reconciliation content, and reviewing the curriculum as a whole, including verbiage and structure, through the lens of Two-Eyed Seeing and the 4-Rs. Mentor training goals include updating the program’s Indigenous cultural safety training, as well as adding additional resources and Indigenous content.

Gather and implement input from Indigenous interests: ReMBC hopes to hear from rural Indigenous interests about how they see the program addressing the structural and systemic barriers to accessing post-secondary education. The program will also work to understand and incorporate Indigenous views on mentoring, and hear ideas for how rural Indigenous youth would like to utilize a connection to a post-secondary student as a way to reach their career and educational goals.

The program staff hopes that by addressing these areas, the program will be able to engage more Indigenous participants, and that Indigenous participants will be better served by the program’s offerings.

(Feedback, continued from page 1)

The high school program surveys participants after each curriculum unit and after completing the program to ensure that program goals are being met and to identify participants’ challenges within the program. This has informed the program’s curriculum content, with the team exploring new ways to highlight the value of post-secondary education and living rurally. After a review in 2022, the team identified participant challenges with reading, writing and technology. They have since tinkered with the program’s user interface and added a portal of resources that help participants develop these skills. Staff say these changes have decreased requests for support and promoted more casual back and forth between mentors and mentees.

Moreover, to keep the program’s content up to date and incorporate the latest advances in teaching and learning, ReMBC hosts teacher candidates from UBC Faculty of Education each year. Their contributions since 2022 include integrating more opportunities for participants to choose how they learn and demonstrate what they have learned, and refreshing the program’s goal setting, mental health, and career pathway units.

The rural pre-health program also surveys its participants. The evaluation team found that participants got more out of the program the more they engaged with it, so they looked for ways to increase engagement. They worked with a medical student to create training on commitment and professionalism, develop a worksheet where pairs agree on ways of working, and to add resources to support mentors with mentee engagement. Since the program was originally developed for medical students, after the expansion to all health professions the team enlisted a student to expand the program’s resources to include more healthcare fields, which will debut in the 2025 school year.

“My mentor had some great advice and took time to research some stuff and ask people they know on their experiences. I’m going to take all resources and apply them to the rest of my academic career.”
- Mentee from rural pre-health program,
2023-2024

In 2023 the program underwent a comprehensive review through MentorCanada’s Quality Mentoring System. The staff was proud to see that the program measured up, with only a few areas identified for improvement. Areas since improved include providing ongoing training and regular check-ins for mentors, implementing mid-program check-ins for mentees, and connecting participants with community supports, resources and opportunities – including providing items on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Indigeneity. Staff say that these practices have decreased requests for program support, while also increasing staff awareness of participant concerns, enabling the staff to quickly address problems and ensuring participants feel heard.

The ReMBC staff reflects that most of the changes they have had to make are superficial; participants have overwhelmingly valued the information that the program provides and, most importantly, valued the time they spent with their mentors.

(Knowledge translation, *continued from page 1*)
In the first stage of this research, conducted from 2016-2021, the team examined the program’s short-term impact on participants’ interest in healthcare careers, post-secondary, and practicing rurally, as well as their self-efficacy in finding and utilizing resources to support their goals. They found that interest in all outcome areas and participant self-efficacy were high throughout the program, with increased interest in healthcare careers. Mentees found the advice and information from their mentors valuable and useful for planning their educational journeys.

The research team recognized that online mentoring programs like ReMBC can be used as a tool for recruitment and retention in higher education, especially for underserved groups. In early 2023 the team developed a list of “lessons learned”, which included suggestions like partnering with schools, developing activities for mentor-mentee pairs to work through, building in flexibility and participant choice, and grounding the program structure in Universal Design for Learning and online education principles. The team took advantage of the program’s existence in the spaces between educational stages to disseminate this work to educators and leaders in both the secondary and post-secondary stages.

In 2024 the research team turned its attention to matters of mentoring, specifically: what makes a relationship successful or unsuccessful. The plan was to analyze the messages that mentors and mentees had sent over the years as part of the high school program – data that most mentoring programs do not have access to. This was an exciting and unique opportunity for the program, but also a daunting one – participants had sent over 23,000 messages since the program began! Luckily, ReMBC was selected as community partner for UBC’s Data Science for Social Good program, and in summer 2024 hosted three data science students who analyzed these messages using large language models. The team is hoping to publish its findings in 2026.

With the first ten years coming to a close, the research team hopes to examine the long-term impacts of the program. They hope to reach out to former participants to see where they are now, learn how the program has influenced their journeys, and to hear their stories. They hope that this will provide more evidence for supporting educational transitions through mentorship.

(The next 10 years, *continued from page 1*)

Nothing is off the table when it comes to new directions. The team is interested in hearing from all sectors about what mentoring formats would work best, what type of support the program should provide, and how the program can address some of the systemic barriers that rural students face. Consultations are expected to begin in summer 2025.

Program sustainability

The ReMBC staff say they feel fortunate that the program is permanently funded by the Joint Standing Committee on Rural Issues. Program sustainability ensures that rural students are supported throughout their education, and allows the program to investigate and promote long-term impacts on its participants.

“We are keen to form lasting relationships with our participants to hear about their journeys and how ReMBC can help along the way.” says program manager Juliet Oshiro.

ReMBC encourages engagement by prompting mentees to become mentors, promoting the rural pre-health program to graduating seniors, and helping mentor-mentee pairs stay in touch. The team is also planning on rolling out a new Rural Student Resource Hub that will include content on transitioning to higher education, healthcare careers, moving away from home, and much more – all with a rural spin. A new communications role will also be added in fall 2025 to help engage participants through social media, newsletters, and other communications strategies.

The research and evaluation team also hope that creating a following will enable them to study the program’s long-term impacts. An impact evaluation is tentatively planned for 2026.

Other priorities

“One of the most common things we hear is ‘why haven’t we heard of you before!’” says program manager Juliet. The team hopes to answer this question by increasing advertising and marketing, which will be taken on by the new communications role. To guide this work, ReMBC secured funding to create an interactive map that displays the program’s reach, which will help identify underserved areas to target and demonstrate the program’s breadth to potential partners. The ultimate goal is to expand to new communities and schools.

The ReMBC team is scheduled to meet in June 2025 for a full day summit on strategic priorities and unit operations. In addition, the agenda includes re-evaluating internal reporting, as well as team member roles and responsibilities, discussing registering as a non-profit, and brainstorming how to establish synergies with other mentoring programs.

The team is also eager to hear from you! Reach out to e.mentoring@ubc.ca to add your voice to our community consultation process, or share how the program has impacted you.

ReMBC’s Curriculum Vitae

Knowledge dissemination on program impacts

- Oshiro J, Wisener K, Nash AL, Stanley B, Jarvis-Selinger S. Recruiting the next generation of rural healthcare practitioners: the impact of an online mentoring program on career and educational goals in rural youth. Rural and Remote Health 2023; 23: 8216. <https://doi.org/10.22605/RRH8216>
- British Columbia Rural Health Conference: 2022 (presentation), 2023 (poster)
- Toward Unity for Health Conference: 2022 (poster)
- International Conference on Academic Medicine: 2024 (poster)
- Canadian Pharmacy Education and Research Conference: 2024 (presentation)

Knowledge dissemination on lessons learned

Secondary education:

BC School Counsellors association: 2020, 2022 (presentation)
BC’s Career Education Society: 2020, 2022, 2023 (presentation)
BC Digital Learning Symposium: 2020, 2022, 2024 (presentation)

Post Secondary Education

Centre for Health Education Scholarship’s Celebration of Scholarship: 2024 (presentation)
Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring: 2023 (presentation)
Manuscript posted on ReMBC’s website as a white paper