Our initiative combines the expertise from five faculties at the University of Calgary and senior members from the provincial health authority, which oversees all health care in Alberta, to design and implement a 4 course certificate and 8 course diploma in interprofessional mental health and addictions (IPMH&A) at the post-baccalaureate level. The certificate and diploma are aimed at students from health sciences in an effort to provide better preparation for interprofessional mental health and addictions practice across a variety of settings.

Mental disorders and addictions are increasingly being seen as Canada's number one public health issue. There are currently limited programs in Canada specifically designed to train future health professionals in delivering care to mental health and addictions populations. It is imperative that we increase the quantity, competence, and interprofessional preparation of new professionals using collaborative methods while involving educators, practitioners, and employers in the process.

So far, we have developed two foundational courses and four option courses in IPMH&A. A two course equivalent clinical practicum and additional option courses are in the process of final development. The courses use a blended format of on-line and face to face interactions. The focus is on experiential sessions with a high level of consumer involvement. Students work in interprofessional teams and include consumers in all aspects of course preparation and delivery, with a focus on role understanding and collaboration. Many of the courses are co-instructed by faculty from different disciplines. Evaluations of the first couple of courses has been overwhelmingly positive. Students speak to the real life experience and deeper impact of having interactions with students from other disciplines, as well as consumers.

Educating professionals in interprofessional contexts will increase students’ preparation for the environments they will eventually work within, enabling them to begin to contribute to the field immediately upon licensure. Furthermore, this initiative is an important first step towards the establishment of IP courses open to medicine, nursing, social work, applied psychology, and disabilities and community rehabilitation with an official Interprofessional Health Education (IPHE) designation. University wide implementation of an interprofessional course designation (IPHE) is the first step towards development of a larger IP component in the university’s programs. Equally important, this unique collaboration between Alberta Health Services and the University of Calgary has strengthened the relationship between education and health care providers.