

# Nunavut to bring tele-psychiatry to remote communities

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The students are in the Arctic, but now the teachers can be anywhere.

Nunavut is launching a program today that uses technology developed by Cisco Systems to bring experts from across North America into classrooms in Iqaluit.

Students that have never seen a frog can now link to a university biology lab to see one being dissected.

The interactive, high-definition online video also connects southern students to their northern peers to give them their first close look at Inuit traditions such as kayak-building.

Similar technology has been used elsewhere in Canada.

But Iqaluit school principal Don Peters says this is the first time that online lessons have been integrated into the regular curriculum in the North.

Starting this fall, the program will expand to include the John Arnalukjuak High School in Arviat, Nunavut and the Deh Gah School in Fort Providence, N.W.T.

Mary Simon has been a champion of innovation in Inuit education for many years, most recently as the chair of the national committee on Inuit education.

She praised the program in a news release.

"This project will help young Inuit connect with larger communities in Southern Canada, and perhaps more importantly, it will help them connect with each other."

## Mental health innovation

This fall, 'Connected North' will use the similar technology bring psychiatric and youth mental health services to some Nunavut health centres in partnership with the Tele-Link Mental Health Program developed by Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children.

That program has been helping bring more services to rural youth in Ontario since 2009, and it's something that's desperately needed in Nunavut.

For example, [a major study into the high rates of suicides in the territory](#) found that 61 per cent of people who died by suicide and 24 per cent of a control group interviewed were diagnosed with major depressive disorder. In comparison, 8 per cent of the general Canadian population will experience major depression at some point in their lives.

Meanwhile, only a handful of psychiatric nurses are distributed through Nunavut's remote communities.

David Willis works with Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children. He says speaking with a psychiatrist over a video link can be easier for young people.

"It takes away barriers," he says. "It takes away that uncomfortable feeling of sitting in front of sixty year old when you're sixteen. Now you're in front of a screen we work with these screens every day. It makes it much easier."

Ten psychiatrists from the Sick Kids Hospital will work with youth around Nunavut.

Cisco Canada will invest \$1.6 million in the program overall.

The tele-psychiatry program will also be funded by the Royal Bank of Canada Foundation. SSI Micro donated bandwidth to the pilot project.

