



# IACAPAP 2018

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## What can we do to prevent severe mental illness in children at risk

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Severe mental illness includes some of the most disabling chronic diseases: schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and major depression. Most cases of severe mental illness have onset in adolescence or early adulthood. If we can identify risk of severe mental illness in childhood, pre-emptive interventions may prevent disability. I will outline recent developments towards early indicated prevention of severe mental illness, including the Families Overcoming Risks and Building Opportunities for Well-Being (FORBOW) study of youth at risk. Youth aged 1-21 years have been enrolled through identified parents and followed up annually with diagnostic and risk assessments. One in two eligible youth are randomly selected to be offered the Skills for Wellness (SWELL), a personalized skills-learning intervention based on cognitive-behavioral therapy. A combination of antecedents including affective lability, anxiety, psychotic symptoms and basic symptoms accurately predicts new onsets of severe mental illness and allows effective selection of individuals for early intervention. SWELL is highly acceptable to youth and effectively targets these antecedents. Ongoing projects aim to answer questions about personalization, timing and the long-term effects of early interventions on mental health.

### Learning objectives:

1. Evaluate the implications of heterotypic continuity of developmental psychopathology for the timing of prevention.
2. Describe developmental antecedents to severe mental illness.
3. Discuss the potential of pre-emptive early interventions to reduce the risk of several mental illness.