

Alberta Doctors' Digest

AMA Medal for Distinguished Service 2022

For more than three decades, Dr. Christopher Wilkes has been a force for change as a clinician and as a leader in advocating for quality mental health supports for children and adolescents.

He received his medical training in England, followed by internships and residencies in pediatrics and psychiatry in England, Scotland and Canada. He has been practicing in Alberta since 1987, first in Lethbridge and then, since 1990, in Calgary, where he has maintained a clinical practice and an academic position at the University of Calgary. He is currently section chief for outpatients in Child and Adolescent Addiction and Mental Health Community and Specialized Services, Calgary Zone, Alberta Health Services (AHS); the University of Calgary/AHS Division Head of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and a member of the pediatric and psychiatry faculties; and professor of psychiatry and current curricula chair for the PGY-5 and PGY-6 Child and Adolescent Training Residency Program at the University of Calgary.

Dr. Wilkes has worked tirelessly to advocate for mental health literacy and supports provincially and nationally, educating the public about such issues as marijuana and the developing brain, kids in crisis, mood disorders and suicide. During the pandemic, he has worked for child and youth welfare, arguing for the importance of recreational activities for building resilience.

He has lobbied hard to reinstate the grant for regional collaborative service delivery, which gave families access to special education programs including mental health, occupational, physical, and speech-language therapists. He has promoted health equity as a member of the Population, Public and Indigenous Health Strategic Clinical Network for AHS since its inception in 2016 and has provided psychiatric consultation for the First Nations settlement in Morley for more than 10 years. Even during his sabbatical year in 2011, which he took to recover from metastatic head and neck cancer, he continued working on behalf of Alberta's young people.

Dr. Wilkes has received numerous awards for his work, including the Professional Association of Interns and Residents in Alberta award for teaching, a certificate of appreciation for his years of service as a physician examiner with the Medical Council of Canada, the People First Award as part of the Complex Kids Collaborative Team, and the inaugural Friends of Canada Award presented by the mayor of Calgary for bringing the International Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Allied Professions (IACAPAP) to Calgary. This vital conference brought together multiple disciplines into one location for a unique collaborative opportunity to integrate mental health services. Hence, this was an important vehicle for increasing awareness of child and adolescent mental health, decreasing stigmatism, advocating for local services and research, and delivering trauma-informed education.

As Dr. Wilkes transitions to part-time work, this Medal for Distinguished Service Award recognizes the great debt that the AMA, the medical profession in this province, and the people of Alberta owe him for his years of dedicated service and advocacy.