

Mid-Career Award Winner



Dr. Justin Presseau

Written by Seint Kokokyi, PhD (Regina)

Dr. Justin Presseau is an Assistant Professor at the University of Ottawa's School of Epidemiology & Public Health, and School of Psychology. With over 100 publications and 3000 citations, his research focuses on the development and evaluation of interventions to support change in health care professional behaviours as well as health behaviours in patients and the public. Dr. Presseau is also the chair of Health Psychology and Behavioural Medicine Section within the Canadian Psychological Association. He has been recognized for his contribution to the discipline of Health Psychology with the CPA Health Psychology and Behavioural Medicine Mid-Career Award. I had the pleasure of corresponding with him to discuss his research, accomplishments, and vision for the future of the field.



What inspired you to pursue a career in research?

A few different threads aligned to inspire me to want to be a researcher. Firstly, I always wanted to be a writer growing up, and I realized that one way to do that is to be a researcher because writing is literally part of the job. Secondly, the undergraduate courses I took in psychometrics and research methods in psychology really spoke to me, highlighting the rigour with which it is possible to conduct psychological research, and that really appealed to me to the extent that it gave me focus on what I needed to learn in order to keep doing this work.

How did you come to specialize in your specific area of research?

I was lucky enough to get a summer research job working in a hospital during my undergraduate years, involving applying what I was learning in my psychology courses to a study that was using questionnaires to measure psychological constructs to understand what factors were associated with physicians' prescribing and referral activities. It was such a rewarding experience to be applying psychology to real-world research questions and I felt I finally knew what I "wanted to do when I grew up"; that helped to focus on how to approach my graduate studies.

What work or accomplishments are you most proud of?

I'm really proud of the Psychology and Health Research Group launched in 2018 in Ottawa (ohri.ca/pahrg/), and building collaboration with other great Canadian health psychology and behavioural medicine groups and labs.

(cont'd)



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What lessons have you learned in your professional life so far?

My professional life is a constant learning experience, but a few things stand out so far. **Lesson 1:** 'get over myself' and recognize that critique and rejection are part of the process and not an assessment of me personally. **Lesson 2:** continuing to develop my methodological and theoretical skills has allowed me to be able to be flexible and opportunistic in the research that I conduct. **Lesson 3:** conducting and disseminating research is not sufficient for ensuring it will be used in practice for the benefit of patients and the public, and that is why I now also do research into how to move research evidence into routine practice. **Lesson 4:** work-life balance is really challenging, but essential. I ultimately do better research when I make sure to also live a balanced life.

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What ongoing or upcoming research are you most excited about?

I'm really interested in advancing theory, methods and designing and evaluating interventions to change multiple health behaviours. As part of that research, we were fortunate to get some funding to use Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging data to investigate how multiple health behaviours cluster together. I'm also really excited about our ongoing work on altruistic health behaviour, including organ donation, organ donation registration, and blood plasma donation, to name a few.

In what direction(s) do you see your field of research going?

There are two main areas that I foresee health psychology and behavioural medicine focusing more on in the coming years: a great focus on better understanding and promoting maintenance of health behaviour change over time, and more focus on the practical applications of dual process models that suggest that our behaviour is a result of not only our reflective decisions of which we are consciously aware but also an impulsive process that more automatically cues our behaviour.

What do you hope to accomplish throughout the rest of your career?

A big question! It is really important to me to continue to provide applied training and research career opportunities to people trained in psychology generally, including health psychology and behavioural medicine. It is an exciting time to be in health psychology and behavioural medicine, and there is much that we can contribute. I really hope to be able to contribute to raising the profile of our discipline, and the central importance of understanding and promoting behaviour and behaviour change as part of achieving that.

