



# ENSURING A WHOLE-OF-COMMUNITY APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH

**The Issue:** Providing effective support for mental health challenges is one of the most pressing issues facing Ontario students on university and college campuses today. Government, educators, health-care providers and community organizations need to work together to adopt a comprehensive approach that ensures students have access to supports and services that address the spectrum of student mental health needs.



## KEY FACTS

# 75%

Percentage of mental-health problems that appear before the age of 25

# 46%

Percentage of postsecondary students who reported in 2016 feeling too depressed to fully function, up from 40% in 2013

## The background

- The number of students on college and university campuses with identified mental health disabilities has more than doubled over the past five years.
  - Three-quarters of mental health disorders first appear among people before the age of 25.<sup>1</sup> Universities have also seen an increase in the number of students coping with anxiety and depression, and attempting suicide.
  - Many students already rely on the many services universities offer, but offering the right mental health supports won't happen through a campus-centric approach only, and universities cannot meet this challenge alone.
  - Student mental health is not just a post-secondary concern; it is a societal issue with ripple effects on everything from health care, to the workplace and the economy. This is why it requires a whole-of-community approach that includes government, health-care providers, postsecondary institutions, student associations and community agencies.
- A 2017 survey of on-campus student health service usage determined the second most-used billing code by on-campus physicians was directly related to mental health.

## In It Together: Taking Action on Student Mental Health

Ontario's colleges, universities and student groups have developed a whole-of-community strategy on postsecondary student mental health that begins in kindergarten and continues through high school, postsecondary life and adulthood. The strategy is based on three key principles to help guide and strengthen the delivery of mental health supports and services across the province.

Read more at [campusmentalhealth.ca/initttogether](http://campusmentalhealth.ca/initttogether)

<sup>1</sup>Kessler, R.C., Berglund, P., Demler, O., Jin, R., Merikangas, K.R., & Walters, E.E. (2005). Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 62(6), 593-602

## What Ontario's universities are doing

Ontario's universities are committed to the well-being of our students. That's why we are committed to:

- Addressing mental health on campus – We offer an extensive suite of mental health services to respond to student needs, undertake mental health research and integrate mental health strategies into our governance models to ensure we're able to respond and adapt to mental health challenges.
- Partnering on mental health – We have partnered with colleges, students and mental health associations to develop an action plan on postsecondary mental health to help guide and support the delivery of mental health services across Ontario. We also co-founded the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health, whose mission is to enhance the capacity of Ontario universities and colleges to support student mental health and well-being.

### Partnerships on mental health:

The university sector has developed More Feet on the Ground to teach faculty, staff and student leaders how to recognize, respond, and refer students experiencing mental health issues on campus. The educational website has had over 7,000 users from the university sector. Based on its success, its scope is being expanded to Ontario colleges.

At Ryerson University, the Centre for Student Development and Counselling partners with Loft Community Services in Toronto to provide referrals to Loft's Youth Programs division for students with complex case management needs. The program helps connect students to specific community resources and programs that are beyond the reach of Ryerson staff.

To see more examples of how Ontario's universities are helping support student mental health, visit [ontariosuniversities.ca](http://ontariosuniversities.ca).

## How government can help

To make Ontario a leader in developing effective care for the health and well-being of its students, the Ontario government should:

- Support a whole-of-community approach to mental health and wellness that incorporates the recommendations in *In It Together: Taking Action on Student Mental Health*, including:
  - Clearly defined roles and responsibilities for government ministries, postsecondary institutions, student associations, health care and community organizations;
  - Ensuring that all postsecondary students, regardless of geographic location, can access gender and culturally-sensitive mental health services and supports that are timely, effective and flexible, and provided in a safe and comfortable environment – all at no cost to students whether they live on or off campus; and
  - Emphasizing prevention and harm reduction as important elements of mental health priorities.

## Partnering for a better future

- By taking a whole-of-community approach to mental health, Ontario can close the gaps in primary mental health care and ensure that students thrive throughout their studies and graduate ready to fulfil their potential.

## Stay informed

- Go to [ontariosuniversities.ca](http://ontariosuniversities.ca) to learn more about how to invest in a whole-of-community approach to mental health.



### KEY FACTS

# 65%

Percentage of postsecondary students who in 2016 reported overwhelming anxiety, up from 58% in 2013

Ontario's universities partnered with colleges and students to create *In It Together*, a report promoting a whole-of-community approach to student mental health

### CONTACT US

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Email: [contact@ontariosuniversities.ca](mailto:contact@ontariosuniversities.ca)  
Website: [www.ontariosuniversities.ca](http://www.ontariosuniversities.ca)