SUPPORTING STUDENT AND COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

ONTARIO'S
UNIVERSITIES
Partnering for a better future

As mental health needs continue to rise across the province, Ontario's universities remain committed to providing the resources and services that support the well-being of students and their communities.

Because campuses are often the first point of contact for students, universities work to ensure a whole-of-community approach to mental health care, taking a triage role and partnering across the mental health-care system to connect students with the right supports.

Through 24/7 counselling, virtual and multilingual services, peer-led programs, inclusive and welcoming spaces, community-wide wellness initiatives, and innovative mental-health research, universities are working to meet the evolving student needs and deliver the best possible outcomes.

To further support students, universities are also partnering with postsecondary mental health organizations, including the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health and Good2Talk, which provide students with tools and strategies to help manage their mental health.

Below are examples of how Ontario's universities play a vital role in mental health and wellness education, including helping students understand how they can access supports and services, both on campus and within the community.

Connecting Students to Campus Mental Health Supports

By offering students meaningful peer connection, specialized therapy groups at the **University of Guelph** are strengthening pathways to campus mental health care. They provide sustained support for navigating shared challenges such as processing grief, managing stress, building coping skills, participating in meal support groups and more.

To support students' emotional health and well-being, **Laurentian University**'s Peer Wellness Program offers confidential one-on-one support, with trained Peer Wellness Specialists providing a safe and welcoming space for students.

For students experiencing distress or complex mental health challenges, **McMaster University**'s Student Case Management team offers comprehensive support. The team coordinates medical, behavioural, housing, academic, and financial assistance while providing regular check-ins to help students maintain their well-being.

Through mental health awareness programming, educational outreach and vetted resources, **Nipissing University**'s NUlistens program supports students' well-being by helping them recognize mental health challenges and understand where to find support on campus.

Student well-being is supported year-round through **OCAD University**'s Student Wellness Centre, which offers accessible and flexible mental health services provided by a multidisciplinary team. The centre offers low barrier options through peer support and peer wellness programs, same-day availability, single-sessions and scheduled counselling.

To reduce wait times, improve access to resources and create a more collaborative approach to mental health support for students, **Ontario Tech University** uses the Stepped Care model offering supports from self-help to peer support, therapy and specialized services like clinical counselling, crisis intervention and accessibility support.

Through the adoption of the Mental Health Commission of Canada's Stepped Care Model which includes same-day counselling to eliminate wait times, 24/7 multilingual telephone counselling, and a chat bot called NAVI that enables quick access to information for students, **University of Toronto** has more than doubled mental health response capacity since 2019.

For student-athletes seeking timely mental health support, the **University of Windsor** offers on-campus counselling, community services and online mental-health programs that provide tailored care for their well-being.

Designed to personalize student wellness, the Virtual Well-being Hub at **York University** offers a safe space with resources across six well-being dimensions including mental, physical, financial well-being and more. Through an online 3D assessment, students create a tailored profile and receive an email with campus supports matched to their needs.

● Programs that Advance Wellness Across Communities

● Communities across northern Ontario are gaining stronger mental health support through **Algoma University**'s Master of Psychotherapy program, which trains psychotherapists to deliver responsive, high-quality clinical care shaped directly by local needs and voices.

● To support individuals with acute or persistent mental-health concerns, community psychiatric services at **Queen's University** offer care across multiple sites in the region, delivered by a team of occupational, behavioural, recreational, and vocational specialists, as well as addictions and peer workers, nurses, social workers and psychiatrists.

● Community mental health, crisis response and well-being are supported across the region through **Trent University**'s community-based programs with the Peterborough Youth Services. Together, they advance applied research for existing programs, improve service accessibility, and develop practical tools to better support youth, care givers and families.

● To support survivors of intimate partner violence, the iHEAL program at **Western University** connects women with specially trained registered nurses who provide personalized, evidence-based care to improve safety and well-being. Developed with researchers from University of British Columbia and University of New Brunswick, the program is delivered through Ontario public health units, with plans to expand nationally.

● Specialized crisis-response training for front-line police officers is strengthening community well-being across Ontario through **Wilfrid Laurier University**'s Mental Health Crisis Response Education and Applied Training Program, which builds evidence-based skills in crisis recognition, compassionate response and de-escalation.

● Leading Innovation in Mental Health Research

● By boosting engagement and creating safer therapeutic spaces, **Brock University** researchers found virtual reality (VR) is improving counselling experiences for anxious youth. The immersive VR-enhanced sessions show increased openness and participation, offering a promising tool for youth mental health.

● Tailored approaches grounded in biology, psychology, and social factors can improve treatment responses and move mental health care beyond one size-fits-all models, according to a **Carleton University** study. By examining biological markers and early-life stress, the research aims to create more personalized approaches for mental illness.

● Real-time data is revealing the scale of workplace mental health challenges across northwestern Ontario through a live regional study led by **Lakehead University**. Thousands of workers share insights into how job conditions drive burnout and well-being, helping employers and policymakers improve mental health supports.

● Faster, more effective bipolar disorder care is emerging **University of Ottawa** research that combines patient data, advanced brain imaging, and monitoring to reduce delays in diagnosis and better assess treatment outcomes.

● AI-driven research that builds stronger, more supportive online communities for people experiencing depression is being developed at **Toronto Metropolitan University**. The algorithm matches users by shared interests and social proximity to build connected peer groups that boost emotional support.

● Early mental health supports can ease job-search stress for first-year co-op students, new **University of Waterloo** research shows. The study found guidance, peer connections, and access to campus resources lead to better outcomes and highlight the importance of proactive, empathetic support from advisors, instructors, and employers.

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