

SUPPORTING STUDENT AND COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Ontario's universities are committed to supporting and strengthening the mental health and well-being of students and communities. Universities continue to do this by offering vital resources such as providing on-campus and virtual mental health supports including 24/7 counselling, expanding inclusive and welcoming spaces, organizing events to encourage supportive campus communities for new and existing students, offering courses to help manage stress and more.

Below are just a few examples highlighting how Ontario's universities continue to find new ways to deliver high-quality supports and services, provide timely and accessible care to students and promote the mental health and wellness of students, faculty, staff and communities.



● Helping students access mental health supports

● Students can access same-day counselling through **Brock University's** Drop-In Mental Health Counselling sessions or they can access counselling supports 24/7 through the telephone counselling line. Through the Student Health and Wellness Hub, mental health trained Peer Health Educators provide peer support and hands-on workshops on a variety of topics, such as nutrition, sleep and mental health, to name a few.

● To help direct students to a curated list of on and off-campus mental health and wellness resources, **Carleton University** developed the online Wellness Services Navigator in collaboration with faculty researchers, support staff, and various student groups. Students can answer a series of questions that will lead them to customized resources relating to healthy living, spirituality, substance use health and more.

● Providing inclusive and welcoming spaces is important for student well-being. The Grove Hub is a coordination between the Grove Wellington Guelph Hub and **University of Guelph's** Student Wellness to offer further mental health and wellness resources to students on campus, providing pathways for both U of G students and local youth to access the wellness services they require.

● For students looking for support from a counsellor, **Laurentian University** offers regular counselling options as well as immediate resources for crisis counselling. All students can access keep.meSAFE mobile app and for crisis intervention services, a 24-hour crisis line is available in cases of urgent support.

● Through self-directed resources, individual and group counselling, and educational workshops, **Trent University's** Counselling Services takes a proactive approach to supporting student mental health. Groups and workshops provide students with opportunities to connect to a community with shared experience and engage in discussions on mental health-related topics, such as emotion regulation, managing low mood, and mindfulness practice.



● Through the implementation of a Stepped Care Model, customized to **University of Toronto**, two initiatives have significantly increased access to student mental health support. This includes implementing a same/next day counseling model across three health clinics, reducing wait times and increasing mental health service capacity by 23%. A unique hospital partnership with CAMH, part of a CIHR study with U of T's INLIGHT Student Mental Health Research Initiative, aims to support complex students. Preliminary data suggests low rates of return to the hospital Emergency Department, indicating a smoother transition back to academic and community supports. The project is set to expand to UTSC and UTM sites later in 2024/2025.

● Two new digital mental health supports for students have been launched by **Western University: Togetherall** and **Wellness Navigator**. Togetherall, a global peer-to-peer support service students can access for free, is monitored by trained therapists, and participants remain completely anonymous, creating a safe and inclusive environment for students to connect with others around the world. The Wellness Navigator offers a confidential self-assessment for students to monitor their own mental health and well-being and will recommend resources, based on their scores. These new apps are designed to help students manage their well-being remotely, while also directing them to access in-person resources when they need them.

● Mindful programming

● To help students and faculty develop a more grounded perspective on work and personal life experiences, **McMaster University** has developed an initiative called Mac Mindfulness, which encourages faculty and students to participate in a 4-session mindfulness program to better manage stress and focus. The initiative also offers online resources including meditation and mindfulness videos. Participants who have completed the program have learned and applied the mindfulness-based, stress-management strategies and reported that they feel improved calmness and greater self-compassion and awareness.

● Mindfulness training provides students with strategies to support them should they face mental health challenges. **OCAD University** offers a Mindful Campus program, geared specifically to support art and design students in developing the skills to support and maintain their physical, psychological and emotional health and well-being. The program is offered in partnership with the Centre for Mindfulness Studies and a collaborative pan-Canadian network of post-secondary art and design schools and faculties. The initiative includes mindfulness-training activities, in both self-directed and group-based experiential learning, to help students develop self-awareness, increase self-regulation, develop perspective-taking skills, learn coping skills, increase optimism and strengthen connections all with the outcome of supporting them in their academic and personal success.



● To support students' mental and emotional well-being, the **University of Waterloo** takes a unique approach to identity-based programming that engages students in wellness conversations. The programming balances a variety of topics, such as fostering a sense of belonging, self-discovery and coping strategies to navigate the pressures of academic and personal expectations. Faculty and staff have opportunities to participate in mental health literacy training sessions, enhancing their understanding of mental health barriers, responding to a student in distress, ensuring all members of our campus community are equipped to support students.



● Fostering campus community well-being

● To help students deal with costs of food-price inflation, **Algoma University** and Algoma University Students' Union (AUSU) have created a new food pantry on the University's Brampton campus and expanded the existing food pantry in Sault Ste. Marie. To support the initiative, Algoma donated \$50,000 to AUSU and continues to offer students an Emergency Relief Fund to help with urgent needs like rent and provides a suite of student supports, including free mental health care.

● By providing culturally sensitive forms of counselling and psychotherapy, and collaborating with racialized student groups and international students, Student Counselling Services at **Nipissing University** are supporting BIPOC mental wellbeing. They use a racial equity and intersectional lens to effectually respond to the range of unique experiences held by students who identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Colour (BIPOC) in addition to backgrounds that vary by race, ethnicity, religion, and language.

● To help promote a culture of wellness in the community, **University of Ottawa** hosts a week of wellness on campus that aligns with the university's mental health and wellness priorities and with their commitment to implement the principles of the Okanagan Charter. Wellness Week offers a variety of activities, such as Wellness app launches, therapy dog sessions, online workshops and much more, to help students navigate their wellness journey on campus.

● Plans for an eight-storey centralized wellness hub at the heart of campus are underway at **Toronto Metropolitan University**. The Student Wellbeing Centre will incorporate sustainable materials and green roof elements, and the university will also work with Indigenous design consultants to ensure opportunities for Indigenous placemaking within the project. This purpose-built hub will bring many health and well-being services to students, including counseling, mentoring, nursing, dietetics, and more, all under one roof.



● Students who are experiencing food insecurity can access a range of supports and resources, all at little or no cost, through various campus initiatives at **Wilfrid Laurier University**. The Mini Market at Veritas Café on the Waterloo campus, run by the Graduate Students' Association, allows students to pay what they can for fresh produce, canned goods, and hygiene products. The Free Weekly Distro, as well as the Student Food Bank operated by the Students' Union, offer up free groceries, food parcels, and hygiene products to students. Additional initiatives include the Brantford Breakfast Bar, the Brantford Student Wellness Centre Food Pantry, Fresh Fruit Fridays, and resources for Indigenous students experiencing food insecurity.

● Students from across the **University of Windsor** campus can find a supportive peer to talk to at The Peer Support Centre. Volunteers at the drop-in centre have gone through extensive training to better enable them to give support to their peers and with flexible hours, students can find help when it fits their schedule without an appointment.

● A new smudging program at **York University** is providing all students, faculty and staff with a welcoming place to clear their minds and experience the benefits of sacred Indigenous medicines. Launched by York's Centre for Indigenous Knowledges & Languages, the program aims to support Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members by making smudging accessible to everyone, fostering positivity and providing a safe place for prayer and learning about traditional Indigenous practices.



● Innovative mental health research

● With an aim to provide faster support and enhance emotion regulation strategies for distressed youth on outpatient service waitlists, Dr. Aislin Mushquash, Associate Professor at **Lakehead University**, has been awarded a SickKids/ Canadian Institutes of Health Research New Investigator Research Grant to study on the effectiveness of the JoyPop™ app. The research explores the potential benefits for adolescents with mild to moderate mental health symptoms.

● Participation in Special Olympics programming, as revealed by a study from **Ontario Tech University's** Faculty of Health Sciences, significantly reduces the risk of depression by 49% in young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Analyzing data from over 51,000 individuals with IDD from 1995 to 2015, the research underscores the positive impact of inclusive physical activity on mental health. The study emphasizes that socially inclusive programs like Special Olympics contribute to improved mood, self-worth, skill mastery, and the development of friendships among participants.

● The U-Flourish Centre for Student Mental Health Research has been launched by **Queen's University** and the Department of Psychiatry in collaboration with The Rossy Foundation. The center aims to amplify the influence and outreach of U-Flourish, a multi-disciplinary group of researchers at Queen's dedicated to exploring how to best support student well-being and mental health research. The Centre will generate and translate evidence into resources, tools, educational assets, and integrate care models and pathways to support student well-being and mental health. The Centre will help inform policy and build capacity in student mental health by training the next generation of educators, researchers, and academic clinicians in the field.

