

SUPPORTING STUDENT AND COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS THROUGHOUT THE PANDEMIC



Ontario's universities are committed to supporting the mental health and well-being of our students and communities during the pandemic. Our universities continue to support student and community mental health and wellness through the delivery and creation of new and existing services, research, events and courses to help foster supportive campus communities both online and in-person throughout this challenging time.

Below are just some examples showcasing how Ontario's universities continue to find new ways to deliver high-quality supports and services and promote the mental health and wellness of our students, faculty, staff and communities during COVID-19.



● Virtual resources and services for students

- Providing students with supportive online spaces to share their experiences with other students can help them find common ground and realize they don't need to face their challenges alone. **Algoma University** is leveraging the TalkCampus smartphone app to provide students with 24/7 mental health peer support as a safe outlet for students to talk about the struggles they may be facing.
- Helping students better understand their mental health allows them to identify and address key issues. To help students keep track of their mental health, **Laurentian University** provides students with access to the WellTrack smartphone app which provides them with tools to maintain their mental health such as custom wellness assessments.
- Recognizing the challenges students are facing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, **McMaster University** developed Take Care Mac, a mental health resources booklet filled with valuable insights, anecdotes, reflections and resources for new and returning students.
- Student athletes often face added pressure as they manage both classes and field practice. To better integrate mental health and wellness into the lives of student athletes, **Nipissing University** launched REAL TALK – an initiative developed by the university's

Student Counselling Services in partnership with Lakers athletics. REAL TALK includes student prevention and awareness training, assigns a designated athlete per team who acts as a support person for their team members and also provides mental health support training for coaches.

- Providing timely and accessible mental health and wellness resources helps ensure students receive support when they need it most. To offer real-time mental health support to students, **OCAD University** launched a new program called keep.meSAFE – a confidential online appointment-based wellness platform available to students 27/4 that matches students with a counsellor based on their language, culture or shared experiences to limit as many barriers to mental health support as possible.
- The start of a new school year can sometimes be overwhelming for students, especially after more than a year of working and learning remotely. To help students cope with feelings of social isolation, grief and stress, **Ontario Tech University** is hosting a mental health and wellness workshop series called Better Together to help students learn more about fostering social growth, resilience and wellness.



- Peer support offers students the opportunity to speak to someone who can relate to the challenges they may be facing. For students seeking peer support, the **University of Ottawa** created the Wellness Lounge which provides an on-campus space for students to meet with peer educators, take a break or spend time with friends. To ensure students have access to the support they need, the Lounge also offers a virtual peer wellness chat.
- To make it easier for students to find mental health services and resources at all three campuses, as well as those of partner organizations in the community, the **University of Toronto** launched a new online portal that makes tools, strategies and mental health experts more accessible.

● Mental health training opportunities for faculty and staff

- Faculty and staff are often the first point of contact for a student in distress. To help faculty and staff identify when a student may require additional support, **Brock University** has shared a series of online resources highlighting strategies for responding to a student in distress, making referrals and supporting mental health and mindfulness in the classroom.

- Teaching staff play an important role in supporting student mental health which is why **Queen's University** is providing mental health training sessions to help professors, instructors and teaching assistants identify when a student is in distress and when to refer them to available supports and resources.
- Equipping faculty, staff and teaching assistants with the tools to support students' mental health and wellness can help foster a supportive campus environment. For faculty, staff and teaching assistants who have direct contact with students, **Trent University** created the Student Support Certificate to enhance the capacity of faculty and staff to effectively assist students through a variety of challenges and help build students' life skills and coping strategies.
- To help increase mental health literacy among faculty and staff, the **University of Waterloo** offers a virtual module-based Mental Health Literacy Certificate Program. Those who participate in the program learn how to promote and sustain mental wellness, address stigma, foster equity and support individuals in distress so they can help address mental health within the university community.
- Administrative staff are a key support system for students which is why it is important they also have access to resources that support their mental health and wellness. To help staff adjust to the changes brought on by COVID-19, the **University of Windsor** created a Supervisor's Toolkit to share best practices with those in leadership positions. The Toolkit consists of a series of informational sheets highlighting how to navigate key topics such as promoting a culture of wellness, having supportive conversations and leading a hybrid work team.

- To help promote kindness as students, faculty and staff return to campus, **York University** launched the Kindness Campaign. Through both digital and print materials, the campaign focuses on encouraging patience and non-judgmental support and creating a continuous dialogue about the importance of kindness when interacting with one another on campus.

● Supporting Community Well-being

- To help make mental health and well-being research available and accessible to students, faculty, staff and also members of the local community, **Carleton University** is offering virtual science-based hands-on mental health and wellness seminars through its Mental Health and Well-being Research and Training Hub with the goal of improving the mental health and wellness of those in the campus and local community.
- Farmers often experience higher rates of psychological distress and mental health concerns than the general population. To help provide Ontario's agricultural community with accessible mental health supports and services, researchers at the **University of Guelph**, in partnership with the Canadian Mental Health Association and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, developed In the Know – a mental health literacy workshop geared towards helping agricultural workers better identify, understand and cope with mental health challenges.



- Access to regular physical activity is an important part of maintaining individual and community health and well-being. A research project from **Lakehead University** is looking more closely at the link between barriers to physical activity and its impact on student mental health. The research program aims to identify health-promoting strategies to inform and develop future programming at both Lakehead campuses during pandemic and post-pandemic times.
- As the pandemic continues to take a toll on the mental health of frontline and essential workers, researchers at **Ryerson University** have pivoted their studies to create new and accessible mental health resources to support those who are providing vital services to our communities. These include an online guided self-help tool and a free mobile app that creates tailored playlists to an individual's unique cognitive response and desired outcome such as reducing stress.
- To help public health units address mental health and addiction within the local community, researchers at **Western University** are using artificial intelligence to develop a social media search tool that can help identify vulnerable groups living with addiction based on keyword searches. The language-processing technique built into the tool has already helped researchers search social media for clues on the state of people's mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- As communities across Ontario continue to implement social distancing measures, researchers at **Wilfrid Laurier University** are studying the mental health of workers. Their work aims to determine the impact on family relationships and overall well-being in order to help inform policies that can mitigate these effects.

