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# NEW VISION OF WELLNESS: A TIMELY STRATEGIC SHIFT

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Report on Mohawk's  
Mental Health  
& Wellness Plan

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# New Vision of Wellness: A Timely Strategic Shift

## A Report on Mohawk's Mental Health and Wellness Plan

*A Healthy Campus Community is one where the people, processes and spaces contribute to well-being and success for all. It is the words people speak; decisions that are made; actions that are taken, and the culture and systems that are created.*

*Simon Fraser University Healthy Campus Community Initiative*

## Introduction

Student success is Mohawk's core purpose— to graduate students with the education they need to have sustainable and meaningful careers or to pursue further education. Safeguarding students' mental health and wellness is integral to fulfilling that purpose.

Mohawk College is moving away from the direct delivery of medical health services for students. This phase-out is in direct relation to the increase in health service providers in the local neighborhoods of each campus. The shift is from providing direct medical services for students to a comprehensive wellness delivery model that emphasizes health promotion. Mohawk Counselling and Wellness services will support students to access health services from community providers close to the campuses.

As the increasingly complex mental health needs of post-secondary students continue to gain attention, momentum is growing for a new way to think about mental health and well-being on campuses across Canada and around the world. This new approach, known as *Healthy Campus Community*, takes the perspective that student mental health and wellness is a collective responsibility of the entire institution.

Maintaining Mohawk's commitment to provide responsive, relevant academic and personal supports to students, the college is developing a new Mental Health and Wellness Plan to create a Mohawk Healthy Campus Community.

This Report outlines the Plan's context and key features, and describes how it will address the multi-dimensional mental health needs of Mohawk's student population now and in the future.

## Growing concerns about the mental health of postsecondary students

Numerous studies have found that college and university students are increasingly reporting anxiety, depression and sleep loss.

The increase in reports is in part due to greater general awareness about mental health issues and a broad social trend toward destigmatizing mental illness that encourages open discussion.

A 2013 survey on the health of Canadian post-secondary students, which collected data from 34,000 students, found that:

- 89.3% felt overwhelmed by all they had to do
- 56.5% felt overwhelming anxiety
- 37.5% reported feeling so depressed it was difficult to function

The survey also found that more students are requesting mental health assistance and using on-campus counselling services than ever before:

- More are taking prescription medications such as antidepressants that are used to treat or manage a psychiatric symptom or challenging behavior.<sup>i</sup>

## Mental health influences academic performance

Students report that anxiety, depression and sleep difficulties, adversely affect their academic performance, including lower grades on exams and in courses, and incomplete or dropped courses and programs. Many report experiencing a significant disruption in their studies and placements.

The predominant causes of students' stress include:

- Lack of academic preparedness and/or preparation for independent living
- Financial pressures and high levels of debt
- A competitive job market with limited prospects on graduation<sup>ii</sup>

<sup>i</sup>American College Health Association, National College Health Assessment, Canadian Reference Group Data Report, 2013 [http://www.acha-ncha.org/docs/ACHA-NCHA-II\\_CANADIAN\\_ReferenceGroup\\_DataReport\\_Spring2013.pdf](http://www.acha-ncha.org/docs/ACHA-NCHA-II_CANADIAN_ReferenceGroup_DataReport_Spring2013.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup>Hanlon, Christine. State of Mind, Addressing Mental Health Issues on University Campuses, University Manager, CAUBO, 2012, page 2

## Mohawk students reflect research findings

In 2012, the total number of student contacts with Counselling and Accessible Learning Services, including for more intensive services, was 12,306. In 2013, this number increased by 27% to 15,618, and continued increases in demand for service are anticipated. This group of students includes individuals with depression and anxiety.

The top five stressors for Mohawk students are:

1. Academic demands
2. Sadness/ relationship issues
3. Loneliness
4. Anxiety and depression
5. Overall stress

Mohawk's diverse population includes:

- Well-supported high school students away from home for the first time
- Non-traditional students from vulnerable and marginalized groups, such as at-risk youth
- International students with high expectations from home, lack of community support and language barriers

### Fast Facts<sup>iii</sup>

- In Canada, 1 out of 5 people will have a mental illness at some point in their lives.
- Young people between 15-24 are more likely to report mental illness and/or substance abuse disorders than other age groups
- Suicide is the leading or second leading cause of death among 15-24 year olds
  - In Canada almost 10% of students surveyed in 2013 reported 'seriously considering suicide' within the previous past 12 months

<sup>iii</sup>Popovic, Tamara. Mental Health in Ontario's Post- Secondary Education System Policy Paper, May 2012.  
<http://collegestudentalliance.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Mental-Health-in-PSE-Tamara-Popovic-May-20121.pdf>

## Mental health and well-being are essential to student success

Studies consistently show that students' mental health and well-being contribute to their learning and academic achievement and have a positive effect on retention.

To provide the kind of campus environment that helps students learn and thrive, many post-secondary institutions are implementing a Healthy Campus Community strategy, an approach predicated on *positive mental health*, also described as 'well-being'. This approach views mental health as a crucial part of overall health and an essential resource for living, rather than just the absence of mental illness.

Well-being is a state that includes positive emotions such as happiness, or 'feeling good on a regular basis', personal satisfaction, being optimistic and purposeful.

A learning environment that generates a sense of community and belonging and promotes student wellness and 'well-being' fosters self-esteem, independence and resilience, and helps with coping, all attributes which promote academic and personal success and support students to become functional leaders.

## What is positive mental health?

Positive mental health is the capacity of each and all of us to feel, think and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice, interconnections and personal dignity.

*Source: Public Health Agency of Canada*

## New vision of wellness to foster 'future-ready' students

In addition to providing students with education and training, today's post-secondary institutions are also expected to equip them with the skills and abilities they need to succeed in the complex and challenging world beyond the campus – resilience, coping strategies, motivation, creativity, collaboration.

To foster these 'future-ready students', Mohawk is incorporating the Healthy Campus Community approach in a new service delivery model that will promote student wellness, engagement and success. This innovative model ensures an integration and synergy of services, with the view that student wellness is maintained by the whole community.

As Mohawk changes how it delivers mental health and wellness services, the emphasis is on a Mental Health and Wellness Plan that promotes the positive mental health and well-being of the entire college community, and is:

- student-centred and directed
- socially-inclusive
- integrated and aligned with related services
- strengths and resilience-based
- sustainable

## Healthy Campus Communities – Learning from best practices across Canada

- Simon Fraser University
- University of Manitoba
- Queens University
- Algonquin College
- University of British Columbia
- White Paper on Postsecondary Student Mental Health

The overarching goal of Mohawk's plan to develop a Healthy Campus Community is to build collective responsibility and a shared vision for mental health and wellness. The plan emphasizes opportunities for cross-college connection and collaboration in the action areas of health education and awareness, training, and resource development. To that end, the new service delivery model integrates Mohawk's, Counselling, Health and Accessible Learning Services, including health education, to ensure service coordination and leverage expertise across departments.

## Community partners play a pivotal role in the new service delivery model

A key feature of the Mohawk Healthy Campus Community is strongly-linked partnerships with external health organizations to collaborate on services that provide the right service for each student at the right time.

The 'health landscape' surrounding the college has numerous service providers near campus, and partnerships have been established with:

- **St. Joseph's Mental Health Hospital's Youth Wellness Clinic** – for individuals age 17-24 requiring intensive mental health and addiction services
- **Hamilton Mad Students Collective** – peer support and advocacy program for students age 16+ at any school and those preparing to return to school who have personal experiences with mental illness, mental health disability, or psychiatric systems

Other partnerships are in development with Public Health, Crisis Outreach and Support Team (COAST) and the Canadian Mental Health Association, and more will be established as the new plan is implemented.

The coordination of health education and wellness services for Mohawk students remains a core responsibility of Counselling, Health and Accessible Learning Services including but not limited to roles such as to:

- Assess student risk and provide or facilitate emergency response
- Triage student emergencies through staff including counsellors, nurses and security, as well as staff/student medical concerns, to internal and external community
- Support program and service areas with student needs
  - Residence staff
  - Social Inclusion
  - Student Success Advisors
  - Access programs
  - Counselling
  - Accessible Learning Services
  - Safety and Security Services
- Support high-risk students and students with complex mental health conditions, from their acceptance into college forward
- Partner with the Student Rights and Responsibilities office to ensure or facilitate service support for high needs students, time away from college and/or re-entry when appropriate, without any academic penalties
- Offer Initial response from professional counsellors to students with emerging complex mental health issues with referral to community partners for longer intervention
- Provide support and counselling for students in distress or crisis with referral through to community partners where appropriate
- Connect to Public Health, Immunizations and Health Awareness promotions offered on site to students and staff
- Coordinate evening and weekend response with external parties

The Counselling, Health and Accessible Learning Services areas will also have primary responsibility to ensure regular interaction between internal and external student health and wellness providers and with other pertinent college departments. All staff and students will share responsibility for teaching wellness to others across campus.



## Diverse initiatives contribute to Mohawk's Healthy Campus Community

Current and planned mental health and wellness initiatives reflect the findings of a comprehensive needs assessment on how health concerns and wellness have been addressed at Mohawk to date. This review included the institutional structure, policies and procedures, the physical and social campus environment, mental health and wellness resources and services, and specific services for students with mental health issues.

Mohawk's new Mental Health and Wellness Plan is a 'next-step' initiative in alignment with related key Mohawk initiatives that have been implemented in the past two years to engage and support students:

- **Student Success Plan** – The approach to mental health and wellness as a comprehensive, campus-wide collaboration echoes the Student Success Plan's holistic approach which facilitates collaboration among cross-functional, trans-disciplinary areas of the college to include staff and faculty participation. A central focus of the Student Success Plan is student engagement, which helps students make meaningful connections with faculty, staff and their fellow students.
- **Social Inclusion** – Social Inc., which works within a health and wellness framework, promotes social inclusion and diversity through a range of student-driven events and activities and provides an on-campus physical positive space. It was established following the *Report on Social Inclusion at Mohawk, A Sense of Belonging, to encourage full participation by all students.*

The new Mental Health and Wellness plan incorporates a range of wellness initiatives to support a Healthy Campus Community for students, faculty and staff:

### FOR STUDENTS

*Health education and awareness to create a healthy campus*

- **Wellness4U** – new health and wellness branding for students. Wellness4U @ Mohawk will provide a forum for wellness initiatives to increase healthy behaviour
- **Wellness4U Website** – a website with information on a wide variety of health and wellness topics and community resources
- **Learning Communities/Groups** – to promote student well-being and connectedness with peers will be offered by Mohawk College staff and community providers to engage both current and potential future students

**WELLNESS  
4U@  
MOHAWK**

- **Student Health 101** – a digital monthly magazine will be sent monthly to students with information on a wide variety of health and wellness topics.
- **Student Success Blog** – to connect students with strategies for individual success through online and social media tools
- **Mohawk Student Association Clubs** –to promote student connections aligned to academic success
- **Registered Student Groups** – to engage students through social relationships with peers
- **Mohawk Student Leadership Academy** – to train students to become leaders at college and into the future



## *On-campus health and wellness initiatives*

- **Brief counselling interventions** – includes personal counselling , self-management, social support and coping methods
- **Academic accommodations** – to support students with disabilities while in their program of choice in the teaching and learning environment, in support of student success; and to provide the option for facilitated time away from college, with re-entry when appropriate without academic penalty
- **Monthly wellness events** – with internal partners, including Social Inc., Student Associations, Student Engagement, Student Success Advisors and Academic program areas, to address stress management and reduction, smoking cessation, healthy relationships, alcohol addiction, and other mental health concerns
- **Physical fitness and recreation** – in partnership with the college’s Athletics and Recreation department for optimal use of the David Braley Athletic and Recreation Centre

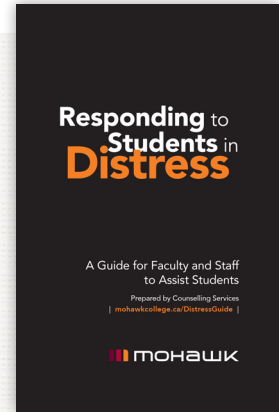
## *Career counselling and advising*

- **Academic skills, career development & career clarity advising** – for students deemed at academic risk
- **Career Central** – weekly drop-in career planning workshops offered by the Counselling department

## FOR FACULTY & STAFF – IN SUPPORT OF STUDENTS

### *Health education and awareness*

- **Best practices knowledge exchange** – on college student health, informed by survey assessments to address campus health issues and service delivery
- **Responding to Students in Distress Guide** – Updated and re-launched in a user friendly format to support faculty and staff at each campus to understand unique student needs. The Guide has resources for both college and community services, including an after-hours section on services in the community. It will be posted on MoComotion in the Counselling, Accessibility, Health and AODA sections



### *Training*

- **Mental Health First Aid Training** – train a broad range of Mohawk faculty, staff and students to understand and respond to student distress and crisis and to provide support. Attended by 150+ staff to date, it will continue to be offered through the academic year
- **safeTALK** – prepares anyone over age 15 to identify persons with thoughts of suicide and connect them to suicide first aid resources

## FOR EVERYONE

### *Health Education and Awareness*

- **Accessibility Awareness Day** – to promote the work of our community, college and Accessible Learning Services
- **Mental Health Week** – to promote healthy well-being
- **Stress Buster** – to promote stress reduction including during exam periods
- **Alcohol and Addiction Awareness** – to support students in making informed choices
- **Athletics and Recreation Activities** – to promote wellness for staff and students
- **Engagement Activities** – to engage students to be successful learners
- **Mohawk Student Association** – ongoing activities to promote student wellbeing
- **Multi-Sensory Lab** - to help students reach/advance their education and therapy goals through an environment that blends sights, sounds, textures, aromas and motion to provide stimulation of ones' primary senses
- **Take Back the Night** - organized by SACHA: Sexual Assault Centre, Hamilton & Area — a powerful opportunity for all woman-identified individuals to actively build connections, assertively reclaim rights to safety, and courageously stand up against violence

## Community Resources

**Good2Talk** is a free, confidential and anonymous helpline that provides professional counselling, information and referrals for mental health, addictions and well-being to post-secondary students in Ontario, 24/7/365. Promotional posters and information for students have been shared across all campuses.



**Centre for Innovation on Campus Mental Health** — an Ontario-wide initiative for post-secondary staff. This is a private online community of practice designed to facilitate and support knowledge sharing and collaboration among Ontario's postsecondary mental health service providers and partners which includes student services, counselling, accessibility, health, faculty, administration, student leaders and community partners.



## A new Mohawk Health focus group provides stakeholder input

A focus group with a broad range of both college and external members is in the process of being established to provide ongoing input and oversight to the development and evolution of the Mohawk Healthy Campus Community initiative.

Among its responsibilities, the committee will recommend new policies, procedures, practices and environmental changes to support the mental health and wellness needs of the college community. It will also identify mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of mental health and wellness initiatives at Mohawk.

The internal members include the Directors and staff representatives of Counselling and Accessible Learning Services, Student Engagement and Athletics, Student Rights and Responsibilities, as well as Deans, faculty and students.

The external members include people and family with 'lived' experience of mental health problems, and representatives with social service experience and expertise, from the St. Joseph's Mental Health Hospital's Youth Wellness Clinic and the Hamilton Mad Students Collective.

## Mental Health and Wellness Plan aligns with Academic and Student Success Plans

Mohawk recognizes that student success depends on the entire experience students have at college, both inside and outside the classroom.

A transformative experience requires both a stellar academic program and exceptional student services to support and enhance learning. A student success, first year experience subcommittee health and wellness team will be introduced in the 14-15 academic year.

In addition to the college's forward-thinking academic approach to build the skills required for the knowledge economy, its supportive faculty and staff, the design and location of physical facilities, fully-available technology and germane policies and procedures all make Mohawk a welcoming place that generates a sense of community and belonging.

## Recommendations supported by Mohawk Board of Governors on February 12, 2014

Creating an inclusive and supportive Healthy Campus Community will have a positive impact on Mohawk students, contributing to their academic and personal success at the college and in the community when they graduate. It is therefore recommended that:

- Mohawk, through the Dean of Students' team lead and adopt the Healthy Campus Community model to create a learning environment where students feel welcome and respected, especially when faced with challenging personal experiences
- The college continue to develop strongly-linked partnership with external providers to coordinate and deliver health services in support of students and the college community

## Key Terms

### Healthy Campus Community

A Healthy Campus Community is one where the people, processes and spaces contribute to well-being and success for all. It is the words people speak; decisions that are made; actions that are taken, and the culture and systems that are created.

Source: *Simon Fraser University Healthy Campus Community Initiative*

### Positive mental health

The capacity of each and all of us to feel, think and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice, interconnections and personal dignity.

Source: *Public Health Agency of Canada*

### Social Inclusion

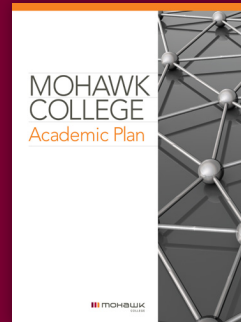
Social inclusion is a broad notion that incorporates concepts of social capital, social networks, social connectedness, social trust, reciprocity, local democracy and group solidarity.

Source: *The Arts and social exclusion, Review prepared for the Arts Council of England, London, 2001*

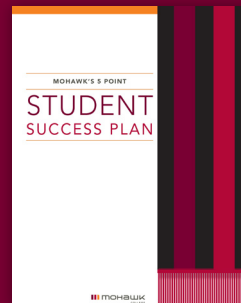
Social inclusion has dimensions of both content and structure. In terms of content, it is about supportive relationships, involvement in group activities and civic engagement. Its structural dimensions are about a socially inclusive society 'where all people feel valued, their differences are respected, and their basic needs are met so they can live in dignity.'

Source: *Creative connections: promoting mental health and wellbeing through community arts participation, VicHealth 2002*

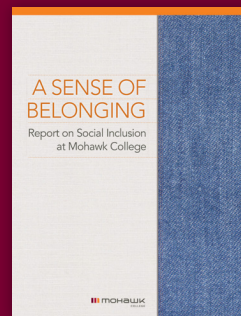
## Foundational Mohawk Documents



**Mohawk College Academic Plan**  
[mohawkcollege.ca/academicplan](http://mohawkcollege.ca/academicplan)



**Mohawk's Student Success Plan**  
[mohawkcollege.ca/studentsuccessplan](http://mohawkcollege.ca/studentsuccessplan)



**A Sense of Belonging: Report on Social Inclusion at Mohawk College**  
[mohawkcollege.ca/senseofbelonging](http://mohawkcollege.ca/senseofbelonging)

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