

Progress Report on Mental Health and Wellness at the University of Ottawa 2020/2021

November 2021



Elizabeth Kristjansson, PhD,
University Advisor on Mental Health and Wellness,
Office of the Provost, University of Ottawa

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We pay respect to the Algonquin people, who are the traditional guardians of this land. We acknowledge their longstanding relationship with this territory, which remains unceded. We pay respect to all Indigenous people in this region, from all nations across Canada, who call Ottawa home. We acknowledge the traditional knowledge keepers, both young and old. And we honour their courageous leaders: past, present, and future.

My work would not have been possible without the generous participation of many members of the University of Ottawa community. Their insight, initiatives, concerns, and aspirations inspired me to become an even more passionate advocate for mental health and wellness. Therefore, I would like to acknowledge:

- Jill Scott, our Provost and Vice-President, Academic Affairs, for her vision, wisdom, guidance, and compassion, as well as for the mandate to carry out this important work.
- Our President, Jacques Fremont, whose vision, dedication, and caring are helping to make this university a better place to learn, teach and work.
- Kevin Kee and all other members of the President's Committee on Mental Health and Wellness, who did outstanding work in developing the 12 Recommendations for Mental Health and Wellness at our university. These recommendations have guided much of my work.
- The remarkable people on the Mental Health and Wellness Steering and Advisory committees who have so generously given their time, energy, and insights as members of the committees and working groups to help us work towards wellness and health for all.
- The team at Student Affairs: Eric Bercier (Associate Vice-President), Rachelle Clarke, April McInnes, Julie Tam, Jaclyne Mooney, Colin Timm, Jennifer Keays, Olivia Faucher, Andrée-Anne Maranda, the mental health counselors, and all the others who work so hard on the development of top-quality programs and services to help ensure that our students are supported in their mental health and wellness.
- The Associate Vice-President of Human Resources, Karina Adam, as well as Marie Parish, Sophie Ménard, Sylvie Seguin-Brant, Benoit Lefebvre, and many others on the Human Resources team who are working to ensure fair and psychologically safe working conditions for all employees.
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- The deans, vice-deans, department chairs, and student advisors within each faculty, who have developed strong programs and mental health initiatives for our students and employees.
- The strong student leaders at the University of Ottawa and several inspiring student groups who have developed important student initiatives on mental health and wellness.

- Anne McIlroy, Jonathan Bodden, Ann Watt, and Lucy Caron for their outreach to generous donors to assist in programs and projects surrounding student mental health.
- Patrick Charette, Eileen Barak, Brendan Donovan, and the rest of our excellent Central Communications team.
- The other special advisors on EDI: Boulou Ebanda de B'Béri, Steffany Bennett, Brenda Macdougall, and Noel Badiou, Human Rights Office. We all share a common vision of a diverse, equitable, and healthy campus.
- Manon Desgroseilliers at Institutional Planning and Research, who ably supports a great deal of research that gives us critical data on mental health and wellness issues, among other things
- Annie Garant, Julie Gareau, and others in the Provost's office, whose wisdom, insights, and practical help have been of enormous assistance to the cause of mental health and wellness.
- The students, professors, and staff with whom I have talked and who have shared their wisdom on the strengths and gaps they see in mental health at the University of Ottawa.

These people have made a tremendous contribution to the University of Ottawa and to my work through their rich insights. Without their dedicated support, our work and the work of the Mental Health and Wellness Steering and Advisory committees would not have been possible. It is a privilege and a pleasure to work so collegially and collaboratively with them.

FOREWORD

This report is intended to celebrate some of the many ways in which members of the University of Ottawa community have promoted and supported mental health and well-being over the past year. It is also intended to identify gaps that remain and make some recommendations to fill them.

When I started this mandate last July, I was given guidance on whom to talk with to learn more about the mental health landscape at uOttawa. This snowballed into engaging and productive conversations with more than 200 members of the uOttawa community, including students, professors with expertise in mental health, deans, vice-deans, student leaders and advisors, members of the Student Affairs teams, the Human Resources leadership, community experts and the four other University advisors (Anti-Racism, EDI, Indigeneity, and Human Rights). I also had the opportunity to meet with several groups and committees that play a key role in advancing mental health and wellness priorities, including the Psychological Functional Occupational Health and Safety Committee, the Strategic Committee to support Teaching and Learning, the Council of Administration and Directors, leaders of the University of Ottawa Students Union, the anti-racism Student Experience group and its subgroup on mental health, and many more. Everyone whom I talked with cares deeply about the mental health of members of our community and is strongly committed to advancing mental health and wellness at the University of Ottawa.

Since the production of the [President's Advisory Committee on Mental Health and Wellness Report](#), many mental-health related activities have been sustained, initiated, or enhanced across the campus. Some progress has been made on all 12 recommendations, with work on some recommendations begun before my official appointment. While considerable steps in the right direction have occurred, it is important to recognize that there is still more work needed to address the remaining gaps, institute a culture of caring in our community, and improve the well-being of our students and employees. We need to continue to bring even more people together around this issue to foster a "whole of campus" approach. This approach is even more critical as the University continues to deal with an ever-changing environment and is navigating the gradual resumption of in-person, on-campus activities.

We all know how hard the pandemic has been on our individual and collective physical, mental, and social health. The pandemic has resulted in the deaths of more than five million people worldwide (Worldometer, November 7, 2021), exacerbated existing health inequities (Glover et al, 2020) forced many more people to struggle to make a living (Kawohl and Nordt 2020), isolated us from our friends and families, and subjected us to worry and stress (Kahn et al, 2020). In terms of mental health and well-being, these stressors have exacerbated many existing mental health and substance abuse problems and led to heavier drinking among the general population who drink alcohol (Khan, 2021, Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse, 2021). The pandemic has also deeply affected the way we teach and learn in universities (Khan, 2020). Our whole community has had to pivot several times, moving from all in-person classes and services to all online and now to online and hybrid courses. The stress of these pivots, separations, isolation, and anxiety about the pandemic

has been hard on students. For example, among students, a uOttawa health survey in the early summer of 2021 revealed that 37% of 709 students rated their mental health as fair or poor (Clark and Pauze, 2021). The pandemic and resulting changes have also been hard on professors, and many other employees who have had to quickly pivot to adapt to changing learning and teaching environments. The 2021 spring Wellness Check Survey results indicated that 47% of professors and 41% of employees had self-reported problems with their mental health (Adam and Kristjansson, 2021).

We are all responsible for each other's safety and well-being, whether we are students, professors, deans, administrators, or other employees. It is critical that everyone have the tools, skills and support needed to be well and to help others when needed. Each one of us has an important voice; I encourage you to get involved to positively influence the University's priorities regarding mental health resources

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Elizabeth Kristjansson". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Elizabeth Kristjansson
University Advisor on Mental Health and Wellness

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1. Context

The [President's Advisory Committee on Mental health and Wellness Report](#) (President's Advisory Committee, 2020) serves as a roadmap to guide the University of Ottawa (uOttawa) community efforts towards a multi-faceted, comprehensive approach to mental health and wellness at uOttawa. It provided 12 concrete recommendations for changes to improve the mental health and well-being of all members of our community.

In the wake of the report, Elizabeth Kristjansson was appointed University Advisor, Mental Health and Wellness effective July 1, 2020, for a three-year mandate. Her mandate is to ensure that uOttawa implements the recommendations of the President's Advisory Committee in an effective and timely manner, while identifying and addressing remaining gaps and working towards improving the well-being of the whole University community. Her vision is to foster a culture of caring and wellness in our uOttawa community by breaking down the silos that exist and bringing people together around the issue of mental health.

2. An action-oriented approach

2.1. A representative planning and governance structure

Because supporting the mental health and well-being of the uOttawa community requires a coordinated effort, we opted for a collaborative, interdisciplinary and intersectoral approach by creating the [Mental Health and Wellness Steering Committee](#) (MHSC) and the [Mental Health and Wellness Advisory Committee](#) (MHAC). Together, these committees have formed action-oriented working groups that bring together the representative stakeholders needed to identify and holistically address mental health and wellness issues.

Mental Health and Wellness Steering and Advisory committees

The MHSC supports the University Advisor, Mental Health and Wellness in advancing mental health and wellbeing at uOttawa by providing strategic direction, oversight, and leadership. The MHSC comprises members who have the expertise, experience, and authority to carry out actions within their mandate at uOttawa.

The MHAC serves as a representative forum to bring emerging issues related to mental health and wellness to my attention. Furthermore, it is consulted on all major initiatives and serves as a mechanism for reporting progress on mental and wellness initiatives to the uOttawa community. The MHAC comprises students, staff, professors, and community experts who represent the diversity of the uOttawa community and who provide important perspectives.

Focused working groups

The specific components of the recommendations from the President's Advisory Committee Report are implemented through mandate-specific [working groups](#) that focus on concrete action and solutions. The actions developed are informed by identified needs, leading practices at uOttawa, peer organizations, and available resources.

Members of the MHSC oversee specific working groups. Each working group comprises representation from the MHSC and the MHAC, experts across the uOttawa community, and experts from the wider community.

Given that the responsibilities and the initiatives of the working groups may overlap with each other, effective coordination and communication for planning, implementation, and reporting are paramount. The working groups, through their leads, report regularly to the MHSC, which monitors progress and assesses and mitigates interdependencies between the working groups.

The work of the working groups, and their collaboration with faculties and services, are highlighted under the appropriate recommendations, along a portrait of projects and activities planned for the coming year.

2.2. A "Whole Campus" approach

Solutions cannot be found if we work in silos. Consultation with the other special advisors and with the Human Rights Office is key because they have many problems and solutions in common. We need to consider systemic root causes of many mental health and wellness challenges, including poverty, discrimination, systemic racism, academic culture, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdowns. We see great innovation and resolve to overcome these challenges in our community. Careful thought, along with coordination to implement the recommendations and to address the remaining gaps, is essential.

The University of Ottawa possesses well-established mental health and wellness support services and programs that need to be better promoted. Although we recognize the need to improve our approach to mental health and wellness, numerous activities highlighted in this report are excellent initiatives that are already underway across uOttawa.

In addition, although the members of the MHSC, the MHAC, and working groups have been instrumental in shaping new initiatives aimed at implementing the recommendations, it is important to recognize that many people from outside these groups have a fundamental role in implementing high-impact mental health-related initiatives, advancing the mental health and wellness of our community, and inspiring others to embrace a community of care. The wealth of mental health and wellness expertise within our faculties and services cannot be stressed enough.

The work of the MHSC and of the MHAC, as well as the ongoing open exchanges with members of uOttawa community, have supported the prioritization of the activities for the first year and will continue to orient our efforts for the years to come.

2.3. Advancing partnership opportunities

Implementing the innovative initiatives necessary to improving mental health and wellness requires appropriate resources. While day-to-day adjustments are made within our existing support services, identifying internal and external funding opportunities that will help us move forward is critical. Over the past year, uOttawa has worked successfully with several internal and external partners to secure funding to advance specific mental health and wellness needs, as well as to develop or expand interventions that address common mental health and wellness priorities:

- **The Alumni Association's pledge of \$500,000** over the next 10 years will support student mental health by expanding existing counseling services by up to 500 additional sessions per year, enhancing front-line support in the late afternoons and evenings, a time when demand is high.
- **The one-time Ontario Government grant of \$557,200**, part of [Ontario's Roadmap to Wellness: a plan to build Ontario's mental health and addiction system](#), will support innovative approaches to address student mental health needs, focusing on the unique and increased needs arising out of COVID-19. This grant, titled uOResilience, will allow us to implement a three-pronged, evidence-based approach to building MH support at uOttawa: peer-to-peer support; case management for students at risk; and enhanced communication to raise awareness, reduce stigma, and improve health literacy. Details about these initiatives appear under the corresponding recommendations.
- **The Bell Let's Talk Post-Secondary one-time \$25,000 Kickoff Grant** will support consultations to initiate the implementation of [the National Standard of Canada for Mental Health and Well-Being for Post-Secondary Students](#). The grant will be used to build on a current audit tool in order to initiate a comprehensive community consultation. This consultation process will use targeted focus groups to establish our baseline understanding of current barriers, especially for vulnerable groups. Furthermore, it will provide ideas on how to operationalize suggestions to create a more inclusive "whole campus" approach.

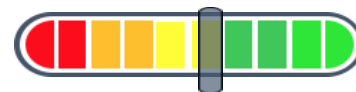
These grants are a testament to our institution's ability to establish effective interventions to build capacity, prevent mental illness, and provide support in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and post-pandemic recovery. The alignment of federal and provincial government priorities with our vision of instilling a culture of caring and wellness confirms the critical need for mental health and wellness resources. It is thus vital that we continue to seek out these opportunities.

3. Overview of our progress in implementing the recommendations

This section summarizes the major activities surrounding each recommendation of the President's Advisory Committee Report. It also looks forward, describing activities for the year to come. This work includes the efforts of the working groups, as well as other services that offer mental health and wellness support to the uOttawa community, but it is not an exhaustive listing of the many mental health supports and initiatives that have occurred on campus over the past year. To minimize redundancy, in the case of some cross-cutting initiatives, we have focused on describing how the

initiative implements one recommendation, even though the initiative may impact several recommendations. In collaboration with the MHSC and the MHAC, we have assessed the progress toward each recommendation and identified priorities for next year.

3.1. Recommendation 1: Sign the Okanagan Charter and implement the Workplace and Student Standards



Select highlights 2020-2021

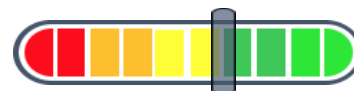
- On January 18, 2021, uOttawa signed the [Okanagan Charter](#). The adoption of this charter strengthens uOttawa's commitment to embed health into all aspects of campus culture and to lead health promotion action and collaboration locally and globally.
- Aligning with the [National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace \(CSA-BNQ, 2013\)](#) through the adoption of the [Excellence Canada Framework](#) that builds on [Thirteen Factors of Psychological Health and Safety \(PH&S\) in the Workplace](#) (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2021). This framework serves as a roadmap for organizations that want to encourage and achieve measurable results by having exemplary mental-health related policies, programs, and practices in the workplace. Led by Human Resources, in collaboration with Excellence Canada, and with representatives from faculty, staff, and management, members of Human Resources conducted a gap analysis and implemented an actionable plan. Actions include:
 - On November 9, 2021, we received Silver Certification from Excellence Canada. The silver certification signifies that "A solid methodology is in place across the organization based on the requirements, implemented in key areas. The organization is in transition from a focus on reacting to issues to a more proactive approach, and positive results are being achieved from improvement efforts in key areas." (Excellence Canada, n.d.)
 - Outreach activities to uOttawa leaders and our community to increase understanding about the Standard and its application through Excellence Canada.
 - Information webpage, as well as workshops, on the thirteen factors that impact mental health in the workplace.
 - Completing the Stay Healthy and Connected Listening Tour to further gain a better understanding of three key psychological risk factors: Workload, Work-Life Balance, and Recognition. (see Section 4.1. *Consider the well-being of our employees in all that we do*).
 - Updating a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) Dashboard with data and trends provided by Human Resources, Canada Life (uOttawa provider for benefits and long-term disability) and LifeWorks (uOttawa's Employee and Family Assistance provider) as important indicators of employee well-being.
- Beginning to implement [the National Standard of Canada for Mental Health and Well-Being for Post-Secondary Students](#) developed by the Mental Health Commission of Canada. The Standard provides post-secondary institutions with an evidence-based framework to support their ongoing commitment to student mental health and well-being while sharing expert knowledge and insight. The Students Standard Working Group is currently conducting an initial assessment and gap analysis exercise to identify priority areas within uOttawa's context.

Steps forward 2021-2022

- Drafting **commitments** to two of the Okanagan Charter's calls for actions. Our community will be able to weigh in and help validate these commitments. This work is being led by the Okanagan Charter Working Group.
- Creating **accountability frameworks** to ensure the action plans and priority areas developed in support to the Okanagan Charter, the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace, and the National Standard of Canada for Mental Health and Well-Being for Post-Secondary Students, are aligned and complementary.
- Developing **communication strategies** with our community to demonstrate uOttawa's commitment to mental health and wellness and to engage everyone in implementing the Okanagan Charter and both standards.
- Continuing to work with Excellence Canada by reviewing and implementing their recommendations to obtain the **Gold Level Certification** for Mental Health at Work.
- Aligning resources to implement recommended actions on the psychological risk factors of work life balance, recognition, and workload, as identified further to the **Stay Healthy and Connected Listening Tour**.

3.2. Recommendation 2: Implement a coordinated approach to mental health and wellness

Select highlights 2020-2021

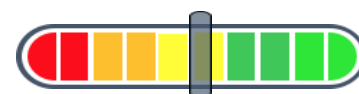


- Establishing a **planning and governance structure** to align resources, initiatives, and offices as well as to facilitate consultation and collaboration with uOttawa's community. Strengthening student, support staff and faculty **engagement** by ensuring their participation in the mental health and wellness governance structure.

Steps forward 2021-2022

- Guided by the calls to action in the Okanagan Charter, leveraging both Standards frameworks and, in consultation with the Mental Health and Wellness Steering and Advisory groups and others in the uOttawa community, initiating the development of a viable **uOttawa long-term mental health and wellness strategy**, in alignment with the [Transformation 2030](#) objective to *"Nurture a sustainable campus culture that promotes overall well-being, embraces diversity, and fuels employee engagement."*
- **Creating communication strategies** to report on our goals, progress, and challenges through the University Advisor on Mental Health and Wellness website.

3.3. Recommendation 3: Develop a transparent mental health and wellness communications strategy and revisit protocols



Select highlights 2020-2021

- Reviewing uOttawa's **approach to mental health communications and its postvention response to crisis**, in alignment with leading practices. This work is led by the Suicide Prevention Working Group.
- Making strides to develop **easily accessible 24/7 support options and crisis hotlines**, including an [emergency button](#) ("Immediate Mental Health Support") on platforms that include Brightspace and the Health and Wellness Website.
- On World Suicide Prevention Day (September 10), launching a **Suicide Prevention awareness campaign** that focused on building resilience, in partnership with Suicide Prevention Ottawa, Ottawa Public Health, and Orleans Cumberland Community Resource Centre. We will continue to align with World Mental Health Day in October.
- Preparing for a **health literacy campaign** led by Student Affairs, in collaboration with the Communications Team and community experts. The targeted campaign will lead to **increased awareness** and understanding of peer and professional support services and programs offered by uOttawa. It will also improve health literacy and help reduce stigma.
- Launching the University Advisor on Mental Health and Wellness [webpage](#). The page highlights key achievements in advancing the 12 recommendations, as well as additional initiatives across uOttawa.

Steps forward 2021-2022

- We must **strengthen communications with various groups** by developing **appropriate engagement strategies**. This will better highlight uOttawa leadership's commitment to mental health and wellness, further promote existing initiatives, reduce stigma, and build the mental health literacy of our community. This involves the Building Bridges Working Group, the Mental Health and Wellness Awareness and Promotion Working Group and the Suicide Prevention Working Group.

3.4. Recommendation 4: Strengthen and increase the profile of the Wellness Hub and implement a virtual Health and Wellness Hub



Select highlights 2020-2021

- To make the search for resources easier, and to ensure connection to virtual services during the pandemic, uOttawa rebuilt and launched the [Health and Wellness Website](#) in September 2020, in partnership with Human Resources Health and Wellness Sector. The Health and Wellness Website **centralizes** useful mental health and health information and resources on campus and in the community. This initiative is being led by the Wellness and Recreation Sector of Student Affairs.

- In August 2021, the Health and Wellness website was updated to uOttawa's new Drupal 8 platform.
- Further to consultations held with students and employees in the winter and spring of 2021, several improvements were made to provide an online experience that better meets the needs of students and employees. **Enhanced features** include extended hours for online peer chat, links to immediate help, links to the current online counselling booking service, as well as a self-care section that includes a **multitude** of services and resources to help students and employees take care of their physical, mental, and emotional health.

Steps forward 2021-2022

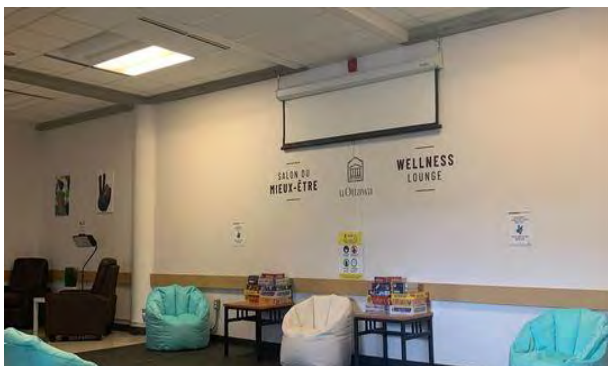
- Ongoing improvement of the Health and Wellness Website through community feedback, adaptation to the new Drupal 8 platform and the planned evaluation of the website redesign.
- Marketing and promotion campaign to direct members of the uOttawa community to the Health and Wellness Website and to increase its profile and the resources available.

3.5. Recommendation 5: Respond to student concerns regarding staffing of student support services and access



Select highlights 2020-2021

- **Expanding the counselling service.** A total of 20 counsellors are available at uOttawa. This includes two counsellors from racialized groups to support BIPOC, Indigenous and racialized students. Thanks to Alumni Association funding, two evening counsellors support more than 580 additional appointments per year.
- The implementation of the **Case Management Model** is a critical new service, led by Student Affairs. As of September 2021, a newly created student support team, comprising six case managers and one coordinator, deliver case management services to students who have complex academic, health, financial, or other needs. Funded by the uOResilience Grant, Student Affairs, GSAED, and participating faculties (which have embedded case managers), the case management approach supports students through an enhanced referral system by working directly with them and making referrals to appropriate resources until they have reached their personal goals. system [Here is an example of its referral form.](#) Between this model's inception in summer 2021 and November 1, 2021, the case management team has supported 183 students with mental health needs, financial needs, and other needs related to life circumstances.

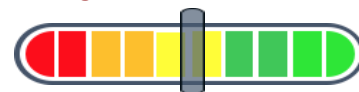


- **The Wellness Lounge**, located in Room 203 of the Jock Turcot University Centre, has been open to all students since June 14, 2021. Supported by the uOResilience Grant, and led by **peer educators**, the Wellness Lounge aims to provide a **welcoming space** for all students to get support, learn wellness skills to support them in life and their academic success, and stay connected. The space is inclusive, non-judgmental, and is built to help vulnerable groups. Activity delivery can be done virtually or in person. The Wellness Lounge also has two study rooms: a light therapy room and a plant room. Students can come every week or drop-in occasionally, as needed. Since the in-person space opened, and with required reduced capacity due to public health restrictions, the service has had 1910 visits in 90 days.

Steps forward 2021-2022

- Introducing a new **Crisis Management Team** to respond 24/7 to student mental health crises. Led by Protection Services and Student Affairs, the team is comprised of student volunteers (fourth-year or graduate students from appropriate disciplines) who will have received thorough training in crisis management and de-escalation. This team will allow students in crisis situations to be first met by a peer rather than a Protection Services officer. The team will be available at all times of the day and night, and will ensure a warm handoff to the appropriate support service.
- Opening of the **uOttawa Student Health Clinic in the Minto Building** in May 2022. Under the auspices of Student Affairs, the clinic will include all services for student physical health, mental health, and health promotion. The mental health model for the new student clinic will include exclusive access for students to a psychologist and a psychiatrist, as well as a multi-disciplinary medical team to support student mental health and wellness.

3.6. Recommendation 6: Strengthen partnerships with community-based organizations and hospitals



Select highlights 2020-2021

- Expanding partnerships for the delivery of mental health services within the new student clinic.

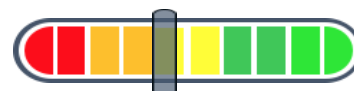
- Reviewing the [telepsychiatry agreement](#) with the Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre. Students who are struggling will be given the opportunity to have a one-time, one-hour consultation with a psychiatrist via videoconference.
- uOttawa, Carleton University, and Algonquin College have partnered with the [Community Addictions Peer Support Association \(CAPSA\)](#) to offer weekly virtual support meetings in **both official languages** for those affected by substance use and addiction. [All People, All Pathways \(APAP\)](#) is a peer support group, based on principles of harm reduction, facilitated by trained people with lived experience. The group welcomes those in recovery or wishing to recover from any form of addiction. APAP is an open, drop-in group with no weekly commitment or expectations of abstinence and is also open to family and friends of those struggling with substance use.

Steps forward 2021-2022

- Student Affairs wishes to increase the Wellness Lounge capacity to invite community professionals **onto the campus** (either in-person or via a hybrid model) in order to break down access barriers and more effectively integrate the services of community stakeholders. Twenty community partners have already confirmed interest in delivering services to students within the physical and virtual lounge.

3.7. Recommendation 7: Expand training for professors and staff

Select highlights 2020-2021



- **Mental Health and Wellness workshops** are included in the orientation session for onboarding faculty. Led by the Centre for Leadership.
- Virtual workshops, coaching services, and group coaching have been organized by Human Resources Services to support managers and employees to thrive during the pandemic. The offering also includes a [Stay Healthy and Connected through COVID-19 and a Leading Through Covid-19 webpage](#). This website provides information on available resources such as ergonomics, mental and physical health resources, guides, and information on absences and return to work.
- **Ongoing capacity building:**
 - Twenty more facilitators have been trained to deliver the [More Feet on the Ground training](#).
 - Over 250 employees on campus have been trained to provide [Mental Health First Aid](#) to employees and students.

Steps forward 2021-2022

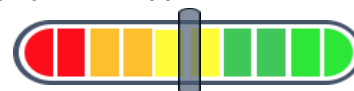
- Finalizing an **early intervention guide** for professors and support staff to equip them with the knowledge to recognize, respond to, and refer students who are exhibiting warning signs of mental health and well-being issues to appropriate resources and services. The guide suggested wording for different scenarios. This important reference for the uOttawa community will be

available in time for the winter 2022 term. The platform to host the tools, and the promotion approaches, are under consideration. This work is led by the Awareness and Promotion Working Group.

- **We need to enhance and coordinate a suite of training sessions with internal and external partners.** These are intended to increase the abilities of faculty, staff, and students to recognize, respond to people who are in mental health distress and refer them to the appropriate campus and community resources. This work, led by the Suicide Prevention Working Group, includes:
 - Expanding online [START training](#), a key suicide prevention tool, developed by [Living Works](#).
 - Expanding the reach of [More Feet on the Ground training](#), developed by the Council of Ontario Universities in 2015, and the updated version now hosted by the Centre for Innovation for Campus Mental Health. Specific sub-training activities will also be offered, depending on the trainee's status.
 - A "Train the Trainer" model will be adopted for the More Feet on the Ground training to expand the facilitator capacity and reach of the program.
 - Expand the Mental Health First Aid Training to the Volunteer Crisis Response Team.
- Leveraging the expertise within our faculties and services, **advance anti-racist and anti-oppressive mental health care** with internal and external partners.

3.8. Recommendation 8: Provide both University-wide and community-specific support

Select highlights 2020-2021



- **Peer support groups** for racialized students are being offered by Counselling Services.
- **The Inclusive Admissions program** has been updated to encompass students with mental health challenges. This program, established at uOttawa in 2019, focuses on potential students whose academic average is below the accepted range and whose grades have been impacted by discrimination, racism, low income, and other inequities.
- Including [Occupational Performance Coaching \(OPC\)](#) in the student support services on offer. OPC is an action-oriented, strengths-based approach to help students build **autonomy and confidence**, as well as identify, work toward, and achieve their goals while **developing problem-solving skills** that can be applied to future challenges. OPC sessions are offered by senior occupational therapy students during their practicums; they are supervised by a registered occupational therapist.

What can OPC do for you?

- *Build autonomy and confidence*
 - *Help identify, work towards and achieve goals*
 - *Develop problem-solving skills for future challenges*
-

- **This spring, we ran the Canadian Campus Wellbeing Survey (CCWS) and wellbeing support for students.** This is the first year that this survey, which was developed and tested in Canada and

led by a group at University of British Columbia and national experts (Faulkner et al. 2019; Weatherson et al, 2021), was run in universities across Canada in the winter term of 2021. The CCWS covers a wide range of topics, including the student experience at the university, university openness to mental health, mental health assets and deficits, substance use, health, and health behaviours, and food security. In total, 1628 students completed this survey. Descriptive results will be used to identify student experience issues that require action. We will also learn about student mental health assets and deficits and substance use needs. A small team at uOttawa validated the translation, as we were the first institution to conduct a French version of this survey.

Steps forward 2021-2022

- Implementing the **Bridge to Academic Success – Inclusive Admissions and Transition Project**. The project builds on the Inclusive Admission Program and comprises three components: the coordination of our Inclusive Admissions process, the Wellness Institute; and wrap-around support through case management.
- The **Wellness Institute** will provide students admitted under the Inclusive Admissions program with comprehensive, evidence-based, pre-class workshops and support to enable them to build resilience through improving their academic, financial, and wellness skills. Furthermore, the Wellness Institute will provide students with social activities, knowledge about the student services offered by uOttawa, and a sense of belonging to the uOttawa community.

3.9. Recommendation 9: Support student-led initiatives



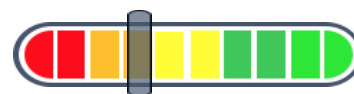
Select highlights 2020-2021

- Ensuring that students are part of the MHAC, working groups, and consultations led throughout the year on the initiatives reported in the report.
- Fostering additional opportunities for students to be involved in **mentoring and peer support groups** activities.
- Promoting student-led resources and initiatives via the Health and Wellness Website
 - The [Initiative 1 in 5](#) founded by graduate students in the School of Psychology
 - [Peer support groups](#)
 - [Compass](#) (formerly Wellness World)

Steps forward 2021-2022

- Undertake a review of existing student-led initiatives within each faculty and services with a view to including them in a centralized repository.

3.10. Recommendation 10: Expand support within faculties



Select highlights 2020-2021

- Discussions with deans, vice-deans, managers and student advisors about the mental health and wellness initiatives within their faculties.
- Supporting the review of current practices and processes to **strengthen student support and workflow** between faculty-based, student-facing academic services (BEPCs, BESSs, secretariats) and Student Affairs by focusing on referral mechanisms, two-way communication, sharing of responsibilities, and sustainable collaborations. The objective is to have sustainable and seamless transition mechanisms established within a culture centered on student needs and well-being. This work is led by the Building Bridges Working Group.
- Interviews with key stakeholders to better understand what is working, as well as areas for improvement are currently being completed. An environmental scan of mental health, wellness, and support services on campus for students is also being conducted. This work is being led by the Building Bridges Working Group.

Steps forward 2021-2022

- This work will be finalized and analyzed to identify best practices and to standardize these across faculties and services.

3.11. Recommendation 11: Include mental health and wellness in syllabi and develop and offer mental health curricula



Select highlights 2020-2021.

- Offering the Friday afternoon [Seminars on wellbeing](#) that aim to improve student ability to manage stress, increase effectiveness when studying, and enhance overall wellbeing. This seminar series is open to any student during the fall and winter terms. This initiative is led by the Mental Health Curricula Working Group.



- The Mental Health Curricula Working Group is **leading an environmental scan** of the current curricula of each faculty to identify courses or learning activities that are relevant to mental health and wellness, with the goal of developing a micro-program in mental health and wellbeing. We have

reviewed leading practices at peer universities to identify requirements and core components for a new program.

- **Including mental health and wellness information on Brightspace.** Since the onset of the pandemic, Virtual Campus is the main, if not only, platform for students and professors to connect and develop a sense of belonging. This interface for professors and students is being updated to reference key mental health and wellness awareness resources, to post a link to the Wellness Website, and to highlight crisis hotlines via an emergency button (“Immediate Mental Health Support”). This initiative is being led by the Brightspace Working Group.
- The [Teaching and Learning Online Experience survey](#), led by the Vice-Provost, Academic Affairs, was conducted in May 2020, December 2020, and April 2021 to survey instructors, students, and teaching assistants (TAs) in order to gain a better understanding of the online teaching and learning experience and to further enhance instructional and learning supports. The April 2021 survey had specific questions about the mental health of students, professors, and instructors. A preliminary qualitative analysis of the responses highlights the need to build more flexibility into the classroom environment, the need for clear and open communication, as well as the need to foster a kinder and more supportive environment. Throughout the three surveys conducted in 2020-2021, students identified their most difficult challenges as: lack of motivation; the psychological strain of distance/isolated learning, and; the lack of face-to-face interaction with classmates. These results will help in developing tools to assist faculty members in fostering a supportive learning environment.

Steps forward 2021-2022

- Continuing to identify and promote **seminars and workshops** to support student mental health and wellness, including for students in financial need. This initiative is led by the Mental Health Curricula Working Group.
- **Developing a micro-program** in mental health and wellbeing. This initiative is led by the Mental Health Curricula Working Group.
- Including the concept of a “**caring classroom**” in **course evaluation and in training**. The aim of this objective is to encourage professors to take a more active role, and be evaluated for, building a caring and compassionate classroom. This initiative is led by the Awareness and Promotion Working Group with the support of TLSS.
- Establishing a **community of practice**. This objective aims to provide support to professors who are already on board with teaching with wellness in mind and who wish to connect with like-minded peers. Specifically, the project intends to hold monthly meetings to discuss ideas and challenges, host guest speakers, and share resources. This work will be led by the Awareness and Promotion Working Group.

3.12. Recommendation 12: Launch a multidisciplinary mental health and wellness research cluster

Select highlights 2020-2021



- Engaging faculty and employee experts to support the working groups in fulfilling their mandate.

Steps forward 2021-2022

- Exploring the development of a **research group** for the advancement of mental health and wellness that would consolidate the expertise of, and support to, professors who have committed to advancing research in mental health and wellness.

4. Beyond the original 12 recommendations

In addition to our open exchanges during the MHSC and the MHAC meetings, throughout the year, my virtual door has been open to all, and many community members have proactively and openly shared with me some of their personal or workplace mental health and wellness challenges, as well as viable solutions. These have allowed me to better understand issues that required immediate attention from the MHSC and the MHAC.

4.1. Consider the well-being of our employees in all that we do

Results stemming from the Stay Healthy and Connected Listening Tour and related surveys, as well as interactions with the Office of Vice-Provost, Faculty Relations, the Office of the Vice-Provost Academic Affairs, and the Teaching and Learning Support Service, prompted me to consider another recommendation, namely that we consider the well-being of our employees in all that we do. This recommendation links to the calls to actions of the [Okanagan Charter](#), the [National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#) and the [Thirteen Factors of Psychological Health and Safety \(PH&S\) in the Workplace](#).

We monitor the well-being of our employees on an ongoing basis via the [Stay Healthy and Connected Wellness survey](#). This survey was administered by HR in May 2020 to assess the wellbeing of employees and whether the information, tools, and support provided were meeting their needs. A February 2021 survey was administered to better understand the challenges faced by our employees. This survey contained quantitative questions but also included an open-ended question. In total, 1742 employees, including 432 professors and 1289 staff members, responded to the survey. The analysis of the responses highlighted several challenges faced by respondents over the past year, including:

- overload (80% of professors and 67% of staff members selected this as a moderate or significant challenge),
- problems with work-life balance (68% of professors, 51% of staff respondents),
- mental health issues (47% of professors and 41% of staff respondents),
- physical health (44% of professors and 35% of staff respondents)
- anxiety (57% of professors and 48% of staff respondents) and
- social isolation (57% of both professors and staff respondents)

The Stay Healthy and Connected Listening Tour was developed in response to the February survey. The tour was aimed at better understanding the following psychological risk factors: work-life balance,

workload, and workplace recognition challenges. Employees could participate in focus groups (93), by providing written responses to questions (145), or by commenting via uOSatisfaction (20).

Professors, support staff, and managers who participated shared key concerns and offered insightful suggestions to help improve overall work satisfaction, engagement, and a healthy workplace. Several initiatives have been implemented by HR to address the concerns raised. These initiatives include:

- Revising the employee recognition program to add several categories, including the Healthy Workplace Award.
- Modernizing performance management to focus on inclusion, diversity, equity, and mental health
- Enhancing the leadership program by including coaching programs for leaders
- Offering workshops on workload for managers
- Analyzing telework policies, guidelines, and leading practices with a view to implementing such guidelines at uOttawa.

Over the next year, we will continue to work on implementing the recommendations that stem from the Listening Tour.

4.2. Coordinate support to students in financial need

A growing body of evidence shows that financial stress and student mental health are intricately linked (Richardson, 2017). Longitudinal research has shown that among university students, financial stress and worry at baseline was linked with increased depression and anxiety symptoms (Cooke, 2004; Richardson, 2016) as well as increased alcohol dependency for time periods ranging from four-to-six months to three years later (Richardson, 2017). The relationship between financial health and mental health goes both ways, since global mental illness and alcohol dependency can also lead to financial stress. This may start a vicious cycle in some students: financial stress leads to poor mental health and poor mental health then leads to financial difficulties, etc.

At present, students are not always well-equipped to handle their finances. Moreover, they may not always be aware of available financial support, or able to maximize such support. Over the coming year, we will work on several fronts to help students overcome financial difficulties:

- Leveraging existing financial skill-building seminars and workshops, and offering more of them to students, including through the Wellness Institute and seminars on wellbeing. This work will be led by the Mental Health Curricula Working Group.
- Improving communication with faculties on the services provided by Financial Aid and Awards Service and improving coordination between faculties and Financial Aid and Awards Service in providing support to students struggling with financial issues. This work will be led by the Building Bridges Working Group.

4.3. Implement continuous measurement, monitoring, and evaluation

“You cannot change what you do not measure, and you should not measure what you will not change.” (p. 150, Peterson, 2004). Repeated, regular measurement of the current state of mental health of our students and employees is critical for understanding and for taking appropriate action. We also must evaluate those actions to know what is working, what is not, and why. Thus, we recommend that:

- The Canadian Campus Well-Being Survey be administered campus-wide to a random sample of students every two years.
- The Wellness Check Survey continue to be administered every year, with the addition of the employee version of the Canadian Campus Well-Being survey to be administered every two years.
- A survey on teaching and learning should be administered every year.
- Mental health and wellness programs at uOttawa be evaluated to determine their impact on the mental health and wellness of all members of our community.

5. Moving forward

This first year has been one of development and deployment of initiatives by numerous faculties and services to answer the recommendations. Some initiatives were well underway, some could be included within existing resources, and others were rapidly implemented thanks to short-term funding. Other initiatives will require longer consideration and consultation across the campus to ensure they have the most significant impact. These efforts by all of us have resulted in improvements; however, significant challenges remain.

A holistic and coordinated approach between and within faculties and services is vital if we want to honour our commitment to advancing mental health and wellness. Therefore, over the next year, we will focus on developing a mental health and wellness strategic plan. This plan will be part of the pathway to realizing uOttawa’s vision of creating a learning environment and organizational culture that enhances the health and the wellbeing of our entire community.

Impact and sustainability are two key drivers in uOttawa’s Transformation 2030 strategic plan. In these fiscally challenging times, investing in projects that are sustainable can mean the difference between success and failure. Many of the initiatives highlighted in this report embed the principles of capacity building, collaboration, and viability. The University of Ottawa must expand its funding capacity to convert investments in mental health initiatives with proven impact into tangible and sustainable gains.

As we move forward, I will continue to work with senior leaders to ensure that existing mental health and wellness services and support, related prevention structures across uOttawa, and new initiatives that demonstrate positive impact, receive adequate funding within existing budget structures. Ongoing financial support and appropriate prevention and support structures for mental

health and wellness are essential. The University cannot achieve its goals of excellence if it does not invest in the fundamental wellness of its entire community.

With this in mind, we will ensure that we evaluate all initiatives to confirm that they are meeting the needs of our community. Using an evidence-based approach, we have started and will continue to establish both qualitative and quantitative methods to determine the effectiveness of initiatives, identify corrective action to address gaps, and review and update our objectives and plans.

Each working group has been mandated to develop an ongoing accountability framework that identifies roles and responsibilities. Periodic reviews of the needs of the uOttawa community, and of specific groups in our community, will be conducted by the MHAC as well as through surveys. The MHSC will provide coordinated oversight over this process.

We must continue to advance research, communities of practice, teaching, caring for one another, and training for mental health. Collaboration and outreach opportunities to mobilize knowledge and build capacity will be key. The University of Ottawa has enjoyed and benefited from collaborative partnerships within the community and campuses across Canada and internationally. We must continue to set the stage for ongoing collaborations between uOttawa and mental health partners.

6. Conclusion

Much work has been accomplished over the past year. Momentum has been built. The challenge for the year to come is to maintain this momentum, consolidate gains, strengthen the many partnerships developed over the past year, and ensure the sustainability of the projects undertaken and to come, while continuing to adapt to an ever-changing pandemic environment and planning for a post-pandemic reality.

A “whole of community” approach is vital to improving the services that support the mental health and well-being of our students and employees while being attuned to specific needs. We must embrace differences and recognize our interdependence, with the aim of empowering all members of the uOttawa community to take actions that meet their needs as well as the needs of others.

The commitment and engagement of our entire community are at the heart of this culture change and its sustainability over the long term. I am confident that uOttawa possesses the community and the stamina to create an environment where academic excellence and a culture of caring go together.

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