

PRESIDENT'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS: PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Context

The recommendations below are an excerpt from the Advisory Committee's Preliminary Report, currently in the final editing and translation stages. The full Preliminary Report will be available in the coming weeks.

In the meantime, we are releasing the preliminary recommendations to receive feedback on our direction from the uOttawa community. Our goal with these recommendations is to address some of the most urgent needs raised by our students, staff and faculty in regard to mental health and wellness.

In the weeks and months to come, as we engage in a fuller discussion with our community members, we expect to add to and expand upon these recommendations. These are starting points for what will be a vast, multi-year process of change, requiring ownership at all levels of the University.

Our vision is a campus where mental health and wellness is everyone's business, where wellness is embedded in what we do and how we think, and where, in this highly rigorous academic setting, people come first.

More details on the Advisory Committee, its membership and mandate can be found on its [Web page](#).

1. SIGN THE OKANAGAN CHARTER AND IMPLEMENT THE NATIONAL STANDARDS

We recommend that the University of Ottawa sign *The Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting University and Colleges*, which calls upon universities to embed health into all aspects of campus culture and lead health promotion action and collaboration locally and globally. We also recommend that the University implement the *National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace* and the *Standard on Psychological Health and Safety for Post-Secondary Students*.

2. APPOINT A SPECIAL ADVISOR

We recommend that a Special Advisor in Mental Health and Wellness be appointed to ensure that all resources, initiatives, and services across the campus are aligned, and to develop and implement a long-term strategy for mental health and wellness at the University of Ottawa.

3. IMPROVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND PROTOCOLS

Mental health and wellness must become a central theme in the University of Ottawa's communications.

4. PROMOTE AND IMPROVE THE WELLNESS WEBSITE AND IMPLEMENT A VIRTUAL WELLNESS HUB

The Mental Health and Wellness website should be updated to add more resources and a new wellness assessment to help members of the University community quickly find the best services and resources for their needs. We also recommend that a Virtual Wellness Hub be developed.

5. FACILITATE ACCESS TO STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

We recommend that the University of Ottawa provide resources as required for professional counsellors to ensure access to support and services with minimal wait times. An evaluation into the need for specialized counsellors (e. g. areas including, but not limited to racism, discrimination, sexual violence, LGBTQ2S+, disordered eating ...) in both French and English should be carried out and further steps taken as appropriate.

6. STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS AND HOSPITALS

The University of Ottawa must review and expand its existing partnerships to prioritize access to services for students most in need (e. g. consultations with psychologists and psychiatrists), and to help offer better and more effective support services in regard to mental health and wellness, including suicide prevention.

7. EXPAND TRAINING FOR PROFESSORS AND EMPLOYEES

We recommend that mental health and wellness training opportunities become more visible and accessible to faculty members and staff, including expanding the SafeTalk training to all student staff on campus. Programs for professors who want to play a more active role in supporting others should be developed.

8. FACILITATE ACCESS TO COMMUNITY-SPECIFIC SUPPORT SERVICES AND RESOURCES

We recommend that the University promote both University-wide and community-specific support services and resources to better address the needs of a diverse student population. At this moment we are especially mindful of the needs of black students and students of colour. This will allow for embedding of resources into campus spaces and centres that are dedicated to the support of specific communities (such as the Mashkawazìwogaming: Indigenous Resource Centre).

9. SUPPORT STUDENT PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP IN MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS INITIATIVES

We recommend that the University provide support to student-lead initiatives on mental health and wellness within the University and its faculties (e.g. mentoring, support groups...). Students should be encouraged to engage with researchers in evidence-based research and participate in conferences and workshops.

10. FOSTER A SENSE OF BELONGING WITHIN THE FACULTIES

We recommend that Faculty-based initiatives be implemented to reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness, such as Faculty-based support programs and wellness advisors.

11. DEVELOP AND OFFER A MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS CURRICULA

We recommend that the University offer a credit course for all first-year students to focus on transition to the university, with special attention to services and resources. Mental health and wellness resources should also be part of course syllabi. We also recommend that an embedded Mental Health and Wellness Certificate be offered as a complementary specialization for students during their studies and other community members.

12. LAUNCH A MULTIDISCIPLINARY MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS RESEARCH CLUSTER

As a research-intensive university, we recommend that the University of Ottawa bring together diverse scholarly experts and practitioners to engage in evidence-based research, conferences, workshops, and ultimately provide opportunities to generate knowledge and practices to strengthen the community. With dedicated funding, the cluster could launch research initiatives, including, but not limited to, national and local conferences, especially focusing on psychiatry, internal assessments and reviews of mental health and wellness initiatives on campus, as well as pilot projects to test the use of problem-solving therapies.