J.D. STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

2016-2017

BACKGROUND

The rising incidence of post-secondary students with mental health needs has had an impact across university campuses.

The October 2014 Report of the Provostial Advisory Committee on Student Mental Health from the University of Toronto makes the following observation:

> Within the post-secondary environment, much attention has been paid to the increase in both the complexity of student mental health issues and the demand for mental health services. Counselling services across Canadian universities report seeing an increase in the complexity of student mental health issues. As an example, at the University, the number of students registering with Accessibility Services for reasons related to mental health has doubled in the past five years.
>
> … The increase in mental health issues among university students and the corresponding increase in demand for services have been linked to a host of factors, including biological, developmental, social, cultural and environmental. Universities are being challenged to respond to these trends within the student population (Storrie, Ahern & Tuckett, 2010).

The trends being observed within the post-secondary environment correspond directly with broader societal experience of mental health among young people in Canada. Approximately 70% of mental health problems have their onset in childhood or adolescence. According to Statistics Canada, young people aged 15 to 24 years are more likely to experience a mental health and/or substance use disorder than any other age group in this country. In 2015, the federal government reported that the greatest relative increase in mental health services use over a 14 year period was among adolescents.

The experience at the Faculty of Law has been consistent with these broader societal and university-wide trends. In response, the law school has developed a series of positive mental health initiatives as part of a comprehensive strategic action plan to address all of these factors. The following document sets out the definitions, principles and priorities underlying this plan. Based on the articulated priorities, this plan identifies objectives, existing programming and steps forward. This plan is based on research and recommendations for best practices from a range of sources. For more information on these sources and further resources in the area of post-secondary student mental health, please see the attached bibliography.

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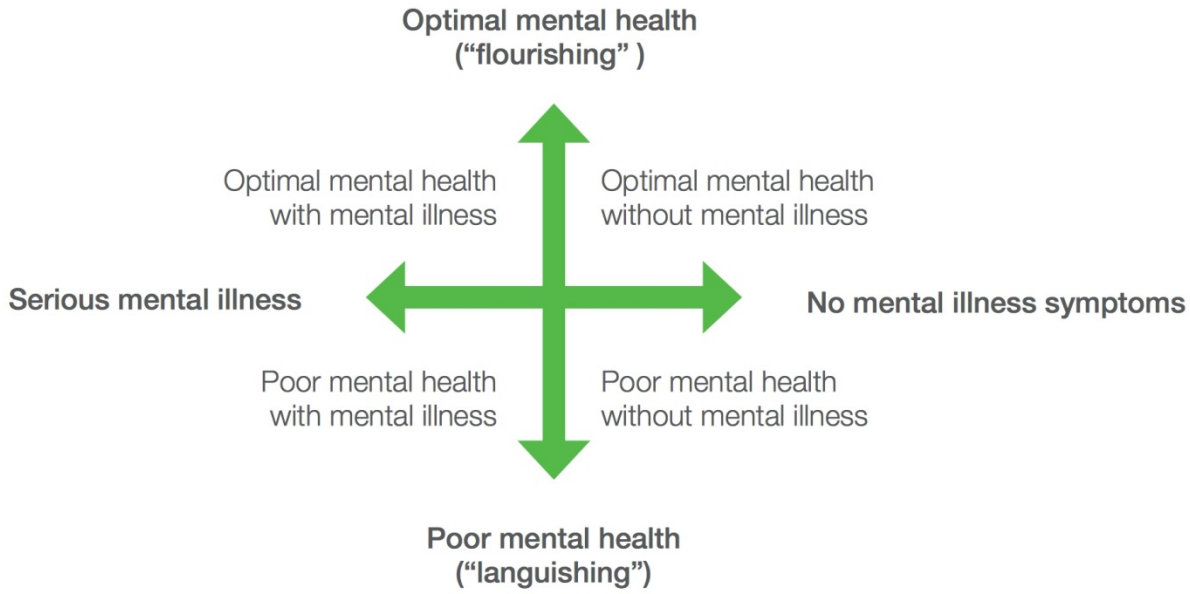
The law school recognizes that while the language commonly used in the context of this discussion is quite general ("post-secondary students" and "youth"), in fact the Faculty of Law's student community represents a diverse range of experiences and identities as it relates to mental health. The law school also acknowledges that students engaged in second entry, professional degree programs such as law school may have different mental health needs than the average undergraduate student, about whom much of the literature tends to focus.

DEFINING MENTAL HEALTH

In the 2014 Provost's report, the following definition of mental health offered by the Public Health Agency of Canada was endorsed: "*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*" (Government of Canada, 2006). This definition is aligned with the conceptual work of Corey Keyes, a sociologist and psychologist at Emory University, who describes mental health as measured along a dual continuum, with stages of "flourishing" and "languishing" on the axes of illness and health. See Figure 1 below for an illustration.

Figure 1: Dual Continuum Model of Mental Health and Mental Illness



MacKean, 2011. Adapted from: The Health Communication Unit at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto and Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario; based on the conceptual work of Corey Keyes

DRAFT

Specifically within the context of post-secondary student mental health, the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CACUSS) and the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), articulate the following underlying premises with respect to student mental health:

- Mental health is essential to students' academic success as well as their ability to participate fully and meaningfully throughout all aspects of their lives and throughout their lifespan.
- Empowering students to participate actively in maintaining their well-being as well as addressing mental health issues sets the foundation for increased ability to sustain well-being throughout their lives.
- Addressing discrimination and inequalities is essential to student mental health and learning.
- Physical, cultural, spiritual, political, socio-economic and organizational health are interrelated and impact the student learning experience and academic achievement.

PRIORITY

The Faculty of Law identifies mental health as a priority. Our objective is to take a systemic approach to creating a supportive and inclusive environment for students to optimize well-being and learning potential. This approach includes understanding the underlying stressors associated with poor student mental health, enhancing programming that increases the capacity of students to cope with those stressors, developing preventative programming to increase resiliency, and identifying opportunities for institutional responses and collaborative community building that promote a healthy Faculty culture. This approach also includes facilitating appropriate academic accommodations for students with mental health needs. "Resiliency" in this context refers to a set of coping skills that allow individuals to respond to adverse experiences in ways that reduce or eliminate lasting negative psychological impacts.

To maximize the efficacy of its efforts to address student mental health, the law school will emphasize achievable, measurable programming situated within the experience of student mental health and the institutional parameters of the post-secondary, educational context. As such, the Faculty of Law will seek to make informed, evidence-based decisions regarding mental health programming, which maximize beneficial impact on student well-being, while being cognizant of institutional factors and limitations, including principles of academic freedom, maintaining the academic integrity of the program, and the realities of the funding of post-secondary education.

GOALS

Corresponding to the principles and priorities articulated above, the Faculty of Law has identified the following action areas:

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1. **Creating a Healthy Community**
2. **Increasing Mental Health Literacy & Competencies**
3. **Provision of Effective, Accessible Mental Health Services**

1. Creating a Healthy Community

The structure, strategic goals, policies and practices of the law school, as well as the University as a whole, impact student mental health, which in turn impacts student learning. A supportive educational/campus environment requires all community members to recognize their responsibility to one another as well as to themselves. By reinforcing positive values, beliefs and behaviors around mental health, the organizational structure of the law school can foster an inclusive climate of supportive student engagement. By modeling constructive, pro-mental health behaviors, the student body similarly facilitates help-seeking behaviors in peers and is empowered to contribute in a positive way to the health of the broader learning environment.

Objectives:

- Articulate and endorse a vision and goals regarding promoting student mental health and a healthy community.
- Examine the underlying stressors associated with student mental health.
- Establish responsive, robust academic support services.
- Encourage academic program elements that are conducive to positive mental health.
- Provide opportunities for inclusive, student-led community building with a pro-mental health focus.
- Encourage positive, constructive student engagement with peers, staff, faculty and administration around mental health issues.
- Ensure a comprehensive, integrated network of institutional policies that support students with mental health concerns.

Current programming:

- Early and consistent messaging encouraging self-identification of mental health challenges and help-seeking behaviors, and identifying resources for on-going support. Examples include:
    - Email to incoming 1L cohort before arriving at the law school directly inviting students with experiences of disability or illness to contact the law school and/or Accessibility Services to arrange support services;
    - Orientation Week information session on wellness issues and health and wellness support programs at the Faculty and university;
    - Law school website with several pages dedicated to student wellness, including a broad range of resources and referrals;

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    - Open-door policy in which students are encouraged to speak with the Assistant Dean, J.D. Program, and other members of the law school's staff and faculty if they need help.
- Establishing the Health & Wellness Student Advisory Committee to facilitate student consultation and collaboration (2012).
- Encouraging student voices through Mental Health Townhalls (2013, 2016).
- Creating the Dean's Advisory Committee on Student Mental Health (2015) with student, staff and faculty members to examine the issue of mental health experiences of students and make recommendations on such to the Dean.
- Restructuring the 1L academic program to promote an environment more conducive to positive mental health, including semesterizing of all subjects except for the small group; addition of a Fall reading week.
- Providing robust academic support services including:
    - Peer tutoring program, in which top performing upper year students are paid by the administration to provide free and confidential academic assistance to 1L students;
    - Making available a Learning Strategist from the Academic Success Centre and a Writing Instructor from Woodsworth College's Academic Writing Centre at the law school on a weekly basis.
- Reviewing the internal accommodations policy for students with episodic or one-off accommodations needs, making several changes to improve clarity about procedures and decision-making (2014, 2016).

<u>Steps forward 2016 - 2017:</u>

- Develop a J.D Student Mental Health Strategic Action Plan to be reviewed and endorsed by stakeholders including students, administration, staff and faculty.
- Review and enhance the Faculty of Law's Admissions & Recruitment materials to reflect priority on student mental health experience.
- Survey student mental health experiences.
- Develop a communication strategy for promoting mental health, wellness, and academic support services at the law school, university and in the broader community.
- Create and deliver mental health training for peer support participants (PMP, academic tutors).
- Develop a resource package of materials re: best practices for course design and mental health.
- Collaborate with student leadership to create pro-mental health opportunities for student activities.
- Review the network of existing policies directly related to student mental health (eg. Accommodations Policy and Appeals Policy) by the Assistant Dean JD Program,

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Associate Deans and Dean on an annual basis to ensure internal consistency and appropriateness. Communicate to law school community the nature and scope of reviews.

- Provide annual report to Faculty Council of activities and deliverables in accordance with J.D. Student Mental Health Strategic Plan.

2. INCREASING MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY

Mental health literacy is the knowledge and skills needed to acquire, comprehend and apply mental health information. By promoting mental health awareness initiatives, the Faculty of Law strives to improve student mental well-being by increasing knowledge and understanding of the determinants, nature, impact, prevention and management of mental health issues. Increased mental health knowledge builds the resiliency and capacity of individuals to maintain well-being and de-stigmatizes mental health issues. It also promotes a life long skill set that serves to equip students to manage their mental health and well-being as they enter the profession. As with the promotion of healthy community development, the most effective framework for increasing mental health literacy involves shared responsibility among a network of community members, including staff, faculty, administration and students, for promoting pro-mental health conversations and encouraging constructive help-seeking behaviors.

Objectives:

- Develop and enhance education and information about mental health resources available at the law school, on campus, and in the broader community.
- Provide educational opportunities for staff, faculty and students to understand the continuum of mental health and illness and to recognize when to seek/refer to help.
- Set expectations for mental health experiences and facilitate self-assessment.
- Develop communication tools and systems to disseminate mental health awareness information.
- Develop specific initiatives aimed at stigma reduction.

Current Programming:

- Early and consistent messaging encouraging self-identification of mental health challenges and help-seeking behaviors, and identifying resources for on-going support as noted above.
- Including Health and Wellness webpages on the Faculty of Law website promoting law school specific programming, providing information about accessing mental health services within the broader university environment as well as community-based resources.

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- Including accessible web-based information regarding support services for students who may experience additional challenges or systemic barriers to wellness including Indigenous students, LGBTQ students, mature students, students with family responsibilities, and students with experience of disabilities.
- Participating in the www.justbalance.ca website focusing on law students and mental health and wellness.
- Integration of mental health self-care information in 1L Professionalism and Ethics training program.
- Including mental health resources in Faculty of Law student services promotional information materials.
- Providing professionally facilitated workshop on financial literacy (including budgeting, debt management, financial management tools) and providing opportunities for individual coaching support around financial matters to address issue of financial stress.
- Providing "lived experience" presentations by lawyers and other professionals with experiences of mental health challenges.

<u>Steps Forward 2016 – 2017:</u>

- Develop a "roadmap" of the full range of mental health services at the law school and broader university, as well as community-based resources.
- Provide mental health trainings for staff and faculty to increase capacity for early intervention and connection of students to appropriate mental health supports.
- Incorporate information regarding academic accommodations and mental health accessibility issues into mental health trainings for staff and faculty.
- Review and re-develop on-line communications about mental health resources specific to law school community, including Faculty of Law Health and Wellness webpages, on-line assessment tools, social media, justbalance.ca, etc.
- Develop and implement a communication strategy to ensure on-going, consistent communication regarding mental health literacy in connection with key law school events (eg. O-week activities, OCIs, exams, etc.)
- Establish and enhance partnerships with university service providers (Health & Wellness, Health Promotion, Student Life, Accessibility Services, etc.) and external service providers (eg. Homewood Health, law school mental health professionals at other institutions, etc.) to promote collaborative initiatives and comprehensive services for students.
- Develop and implement a communication strategy regarding Academic Accommodations policies and procedures including information regarding range of supports and services available through Accessibility Services, other University of Toronto providers, and at the law school.
- Enhance "lived experience" workshops/presentations/events.

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- Foster collaborations with the student government and other student-led groups, especially the Student Health & Wellness Committee, to solicit and incorporate student voices into mental health programming with a particular focus on voices of traditionally marginalized groups.

3. PROVISION OF EFFECTIVE, ACCESSIBLE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mental health services are a critical part of a systemic approach to supporting student mental health. Comprehensive mental health services designed to meet the needs of a broad range of students on different parts of the mental health/mental illness continuum are essential. The Faculty of Law recognizes that services of this breadth should include resiliency-promoting skill development initiatives, direct counselling support services, academic accommodations for students experiencing mental health challenges, integrated systems of university-wide and community-based services, and targeted outreach and programming for vulnerable populations of students. The Faculty further recognizes that the scope of student experiences with mental health and illness are impacted by a broad range of biological, developmental, social, cultural and environmental factors that go well beyond the influence of a post-secondary educational institution. The law school will strive to allocate available resources and give due consideration to institutional limitations in a manner that will most effectively meet student needs, while incorporating constructive student input into this process.

Objectives:

- Provide psycho-educational programming with a focus on personal skill development.
- Explore opportunities for peer support mental health programming with a focus on populations of particular need.
- Promote existing networks of accessible, community-based mental health service providers and explore options for network expansion and enhancement.
- Offer embedded clinical support services and mental health accommodations within the Faculty of Law.
- Ensure a comprehensive strategy for supporting students with complex and/or urgent mental health needs.

Current Programming:

- Developing and maintaining a strong relationship with the U of T Health & Wellness Centre. Law students are encouraged to access services by booking appointments directly with the Health & Wellness Centre. For the past several years, an embedded counsellor from the Health & Wellness Centre has offered counselling support for students at the law school one day per week (2013-16).

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- Creating a new positon of Manager, Academic/Personal Counselling & Wellness. This role provides supportive counselling services to law students, guidance to students seeking academic accommodations, and implements a range of wellness programming at the Faculty.
- Developing and maintaining a strong relationship with Accessibility Services, the central university service that manages accommodations for students with health and disability-related issues.
- Providing wellness activities throughout the year, such as yoga classes, meditation classes, nutrition and wellness workshops, and targeted stress reduction activities at exam time, including dog visits, healthy food in student lounges, games, and arts and crafts.
- Collaborating with university-based and community partners involved in student mental health to coordinate support for students with acute mental health needs.

<u>Steps Forward 2016 – 2017:</u>

- Identify skills development opportunities that connect with existing programs/services such as the CDO, Orientation Week, Academic Success program, Ethics and Professionalism Training etc., and provide issue specific workshops (eg. managing interview stress, exam preparation) within a broader resiliency-promoting framework.
- Develop and offer information and skills training opportunities for graduating students focused on maintaining and adapting appropriate health promoting and help seeking behaviors in the professional practice of law.
- Explore opportunities for peer-based support among law students and promote connections and collaborations with existing peer support services within the university.
- Promote an established network of community supports, and reach out to new community partners to enhance current referral network. Explore options for increased accessibility of long term therapeutic supports.
- Provide short term therapeutic counselling support and skills development services to law students experiencing mental health challenges. Provide effective triage services for students with complex mental health needs. Define and articulate the model of counselling services at the law school encompassing these supports.
- Review existing policies and protocols for identifying and supporting students at risk. Articulate a crisis response and re-integration process in a comprehensive plan.

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APPENDIX A

REPORT OF ACTIVITIES:

J.D. STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGIC PLAN

2016-2017

Goal: Creating a Healthy Community

- Review of research re: post-secondary student mental health
- Development of Mental Health Strategic Action Plan; circulation to stakeholders; consultation on Strategic Plan, including Town Hall (Jan '17)
- Coordination with University and community mental health providers; creation of integration referral network of mental health services (including insurance provider, community-based mental health practioners, UofT Health Promotion department, UofT Health & Wellness Centre, OISE Psychology Clinic, etc.)
- Integration of Faculty-based academic support services into mental health plan and supports
- Employ enhanced communication strategies to promote mental health supports and services (eg. enhanced email communication re: accommodations, social media, MH/accommodations template in all course syllabi, revised admission materials and communication to newly admitted students)
- Training of faculty, staff and students re: mental health supports and services (Identify, Assist, Respond (IAR) training to student services staff, PBSC, teaching faculty, as well as mental health training for ASP and PMP mentors)
- Coordination with student organizers of O-Week to encourage pro-mental health activities
- Facilitation of broad range of student-led health and wellness related initiatives through Student Health & Wellness Committee (including, Athletics & Nutrition Working group, running club, Anti-stigma MH Art show, Speaker series working group, Community Building working group, Peer Mental Health Support Program)

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Goal: Increasing Mental Health Literacy

- Redesign Faculty Health & Wellness webpages, including "roadmap" of supports and services, self-assessment tools, external resources and health promotion resources
- Provide early and on-going communication re: mental health services (eg. admission materials, o-week presentation, syllabi insert etc.)
- Develop law school specific Identify, Assist, Respond training for faculty, staff and students to recognize and appropriately respond to students in distress
- Provide training to faculty, staff, students (ASP, PMP) on IAR
- Facilitate "lived experience" opportunities for students on mental health in legal profession, eg. Orlando Da Silva presentation
- Develop and implement Joint Professionalism and Ethics workshop on Mental Health and Professional Ethics
- Facilitate Anti-Stigma Mental Health Art Show through Student Health & Wellness Committee
- Develop model for Peer Mental Health Support Program; provide training for peer mentors, intake services and on-going clinical support

Goal: Provision of Effective, Accessible Mental Health Services

- Incorporate coping skills training opportunities with other existing programs/services (eg. O-week, CDO recruitment panels, PMP training, learning strategies workshop)
- Develop and provide on-line resources through Faculty website to promote resiliency skills
- Promote established network of community supports (eg. Good2Talk, Homewood Health, crisis services) to students at risk

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- Develop and promote network of community-based mental health providers
- Coordinate with University-based health services (Accessibility Services, Health & Wellness Centre, SCAP, Community Safety) to ensure integrated service provision; provide effective and efficient referrals
- Provide enhanced counselling appointment schedule during peak demand periods, eg. exams, recruitment
- Provide more than 350 counselling appointments during academic year

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