

J.D. STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN (Updated January 2020)

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

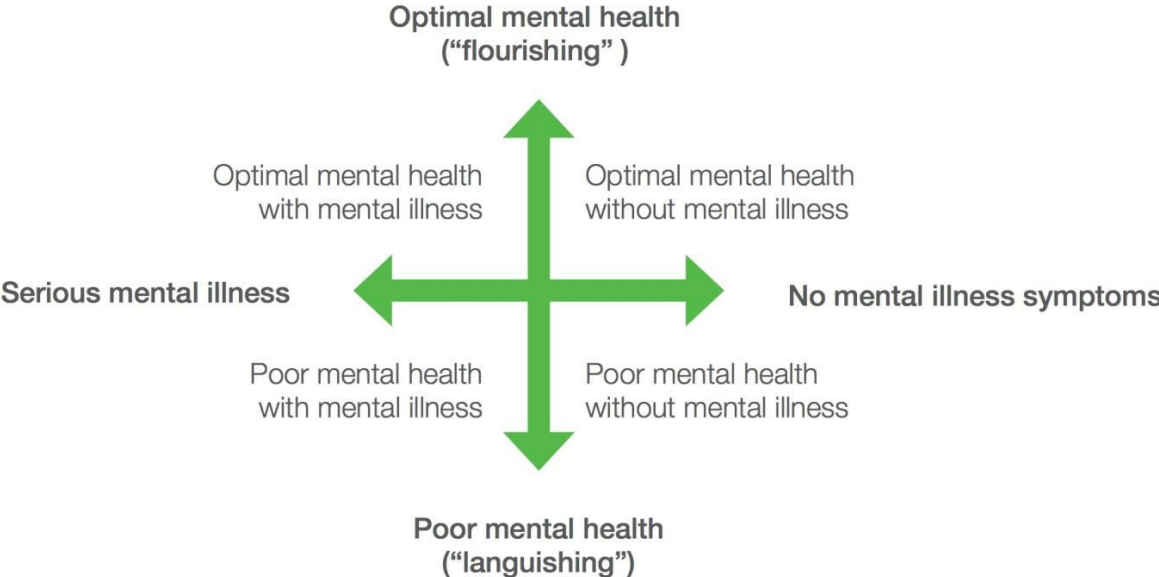
student mental health, please see the attached bibliography.

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

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:

- 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.

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.

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.

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APPENDIX A

Summary of Initiatives 2016-2017 Academic Year in Accordance with Faculty of Law Mental Health Strategic Plan

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 practitioners, 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)

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
- 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

Appendix B

Summary of Initiatives 2017-2018 Academic Year in Accordance with Faculty of Law Mental Health Strategic Plan

Mental health and wellness information and skill development opportunities for students

- O-week Presentation for in-coming 1L class on “Successful Failure”
- Mental Health literacy training for Peer Mentorship Program
- “Working with students experiencing distress” training for upper year tutors
- OCI interview preparation session in collaboration with CDO
- 1L recruitment strategies in collaboration with CDO
- Exam preparation workshop in collaboration with Assistant Dean’s Office
- Presentation during Professionalism & Ethics training for entire 1L class on mental health and professional regulation
- New workshop for 3Ls on smooth transitions to articling and the profession

Educational workshops for staff and faculty to increase mental health literacy and skills

- Training for faculty on “Understanding and supporting students in distress”
- Training for student services staff on student distress
- Training for library staff on understanding and supporting students in high stress environments

Suicide Prevention Training

- Facilitated SafeTalk suicide prevention training for student mental health volunteers, student services staff and faculty

New Trauma-Informed Lawyering program for students

- In collaboration with Indigenous Initiates Office, developed and implemented a trauma-informed legal practice with Indigenous clients workshop for ILSA members and Indigenous alumni
- In collaboration with Office of Experiential Education, provided opportunity for clinical education students to participate in special facilitated workshop on Trauma-Informed Lawyering with expert facilitators from University of Windsor

Full year launch of Peer Mental Health Support Program

- 12 1L students matched with upper year peer mentors with lived experience and specially trained to provide peer mental health support
- Training on new peer support volunteers

First annual Wellness Week event for Faculty of Law

- Organized and implemented by Student Health & Wellness Committee, in partnership with other student groups including SLS and Intramurals Group
- Series of events and activities throughout week to promote community-building and health & wellness literacy and engagement

- Activities included a Running Event with students, staff, faculty and alumni, Mental Health Awareness Art Show, and Speaker Panel

Launch Mindfulness Program for Faculty of Law

- New Mindfulness Program at the law school, including two launch events and monthly follow-up session provided by expert facilitator and geared to topics relevant to law school student population
- Participation by students, staff and faculty members

Direct counselling services to JD student body and service enhancements

- Inclusion of advanced standing MSW practicum student into the Health & Wellness Office who, under direct supervision of Manager, has been supporting the health promotion activities of the Student Health & Wellness Committee and providing direct counselling services to students
- Manager, Academic/Personal Counselling & Wellness provided on-going clinical supports

New Communication Plan re: health & wellness related activities, events, and opportunities at the Faculty of Law

- Organized pro-active communication around issues of academic accommodations, health & wellness activities and supports provided on multiple platforms to increase awareness and participation by JD student body

New graduate student mental health communications

- Development and launch of a Graduate Health and Wellness page, which provides information about a wealth of supports and services available for graduate students at the University and beyond.

Enhanced relationship with the Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education student health & wellness programs

- Direct referral and service coordination relationship with the MoveU HappyU and S.P.A.R.K. programs allowing for facilitated access for law students to physical training and behavioral support programs.

Appendix C

Summary of Mental Health Initiatives (2018-2019) that are responsive to the Student Mental Health Framework

Direct counselling services to JD student body and service enhancements

- Manager, Academic/Personal Counselling & Wellness provided on-going clinical supports
- A new 0.6 FTE Health & Wellness Counsellor (MSW) was hired by the law school to provide increased capacity for clinical support appointments

Mental health and wellness information and skill development opportunities for students

- Mental Health literacy training for Peer Mentorship Program
- “Working with students experiencing distress” training for upper year tutors
- Exam preparation workshop in collaboration with Assistant Dean’s Office
- Presentation during Professionalism & Ethics training for entire 1L class on mental health and professional regulation
- Workshops on “Trauma Informed Lawyering & Self-Care” for students enrolled in the Faculty of Law Externship program.

Suicide Prevention Training

- Roll out of the “Suicide Safer Faculty” initiative in which a series of four SafeTALK training workshops were provided for all members of the law school community. Sixty-nine participants registered for this training this year, including staff, faculty and students.

Peer Mental Health Support Program

- Trained Peer Mental Health Support Mentors and launched a “Peer Support Drop-In” program open to all students at the law school, which provided a weekly facilitated opportunity to connect with fellow law students and receive peer support in a safe environment.

Annual Wellness Week event for Faculty of Law

- Organized and implemented by Student Health & Wellness Committee, in partnership with other Faculty and University groups
- Series of events and activities throughout week to promote community-building and health & wellness literacy and engagement
- Activities included a Running Event with students and alumni, a yoga and fitness class, a very successful Community Kitchen event in collaboration with Health Promotion Team from the central Health & Wellness Centre, and a roundtable discussion on issues pertaining to mental health and young lawyers.

Mindfulness Program for Faculty of Law

- The Mindfulness Program at the law school continued for the first semester of year, which included a launch event and monthly follow-up sessions provided by expert facilitator and geared to topics relevant to law school student population
- Participation by students, staff and faculty members

Communication Strategy re: health & wellness related activities, events, and opportunities at the Faculty of Law

- Organized pro-active communication around issues of academic accommodations, health & wellness activities and supports provided on multiple platforms to increase awareness and participation by JD student body

Dean's Mental Health Committee

- The results of the 2017-2018 Mental Health & Substance Use survey of the student body were presented at Faculty Council
- The Dean's Committee identified the issues of high risk alcohol behaviors, as identified in the survey, as a priority area to develop recommendations and an action plan with respect to
- The "Framework to Address High Risk Drinking and Alcohol Harms Reduction on Canadian Campuses" from the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse was endorsed by the Committee as the guiding framework for program and policy development at the Faculty.
- Consultations with student leadership on the Framework

Enhanced relationship with the Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education student health & wellness programs

- Direct referral and service coordination relationship with the MoveU HappyU and S.P.A.R.K. programs allowing for facilitated access for law students to physical training and behavioral support programs.