

# Building Momentum in Campus Mental Health

## The National Standard of Canada for Mental Health and Well-Being for Post-Secondary Students



### What is the Standard?

The first of its kind in the world, the National Standard for Mental Health and Well-Being for Post-Secondary Students (the Standard) is an **evidence-informed resource** outlining **flexible, voluntary guidelines** to promote student mental health and well-being.

Grounded in a commitment to continuous improvement, the Standard is designed to be **adapted to each institution's needs and circumstances**, so they can determine their own priorities over time, no matter where they start. Since the release of the Standard in 2020, campuses of all sizes and settings have been using it to enhance their mental health initiatives and advance student well-being.

### BENEFITS OF ALIGNING WITH THE STANDARD

- Provides a common language to talk about mental health efforts within and across institutions.
- Serves as a baseline to assess strengths and gaps in campus mental health efforts and identify areas for improvement.
- Fosters stigma reduction and improved mental health literacy, equipping students to recognize and respond to mental health challenges effectively.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Student centred
2. Equity, diversity, and inclusion
3. Knowledge informed
4. Health promotion and harm reduction
5. Thriving community and culture of well-being
6. Continuous improvement

### Methodology

In collaboration with the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC), the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) interviewed representatives from four Canadian post-secondary institutions varying in type, size, and location, to explore their differing approaches to aligning with the Standard.

These conversations provided valuable insights into how institutions are bringing the Standard to life in meaningful and impactful ways.

### PROFILES OF THE PARTICIPATING POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

#### University of Calgary

- University
- Calgary, Alberta
- 37,000 students

#### Humber Polytechnic

- College
- Toronto, Ontario
- 86,000 students

#### Collège de Bois-de-Boulogne

- CEGEP
- Montreal, Quebec
- 3,300 students
- French language

#### Dalhousie University

- University
- Halifax, Nova Scotia
- 21,000 students

### A holistic approach to well-being

The Standard is based on a student-centred and holistic approach that incorporates factors that impact student well-being at every level – from individual needs to the broader campus environment. Institutions working with the Standard will not only look at mental health supports on their campus(es) but also the social, economic, and environmental factors that shape a student's overall well-being and academic journey.

**The Standard helps institutions assess and improve their programs to support students in a more comprehensive way. Institutions have done this by:**

- offering initiatives to address challenges like food or housing insecurity
- creating spaces that encourage relaxation or social connection
- ensuring that students have access to diverse resources that help them thrive

### Connecting the Standard to institutional strategies

- The Standard can be **used in tandem** with other established frameworks like the Okanagan Charter as well as local frameworks.
- The Standard's alignment with other frameworks enhances its usability and helps institutions gain support for its **uptake within broader institutional initiatives** and goals for student well-being.
- For many institutions, integrating the Standard with these frameworks has allowed them to **create a unified strategy** that streamlines implementation without the need to reinvent existing strategies.
- By aligning with institutional values and priorities, the Standard supports **practical, achievable progress** while fostering leadership buy-in.
- Dalhousie University and the University of Calgary have also integrated the Standard alongside the *National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace* to reinforce their commitment to fostering mental health and well-being across their campus communities.

*"The Standard incorporates aspects of various strategies that existed even before its official launch, as well as key documents like the Okanagan Charter. Our strategy was already aligned with the Standard, so it felt like a natural progression to adopt it."*  
- University of Calgary

### Integrating the Standard within existing programs

**Here are some real-life examples of how the Standard complements existing programs and provides guidance on how to enhance them:**

- **Collège de Bois-de-Boulogne** centralized student services by bringing psychosocial, financial, and guidance services under one roof to provide more accessible, coordinated care.
- **Dalhousie University** reviewed the design and development of physical and social campus spaces as they relate to health and well-being.
- **Humber Polytechnic** engaged students in co-design processes to inform services and review proposals for campus programs and initiatives.
- **The University of Calgary** introduced certificate programs on mental well-being and resilience, strengthening students' mental health literacy skills while reinforcing the Standard's implementation.

*"We constantly have to demonstrate to students the value of participating in these types of activities and show them how taking care of their mental health and overall well-being will have a positive effect on their academic success, rather than the opposite."*  
- Collège de Bois-de-Boulogne

### Building support for the Standard

#### Identify champions:

Rallying staff, faculty, and administrators committed to prioritizing mental health and wellness to support the Standard is a key to successfully integrating it with existing strategies, fostering buy-in across the institution, and encouraging cross-departmental collaboration.

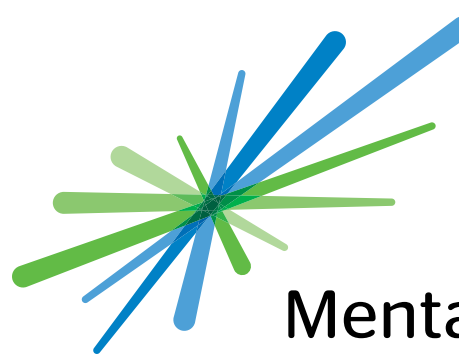
#### Leverage commitment to collaboration:

Leadership becomes even more critical when there are resource and capacity limitations. Institutions that prioritize collaboration are able to use resources more efficiently to drive more meaningful change with mental health initiatives.

#### Use the Standard as a framework for collective action:

By adopting the Standard, institutions have been able to strengthen their collaboration with local post-secondary partners. For example, Humber Polytechnic partnered with four other Greater Toronto Area colleges to apply jointly for grant funding, enabling the colleges to pool resources and achieve a greater impact in their initiatives.

*"The idea of adopting the Standard as a collective of colleges gave us a greater sense of ownership, recognizing that we operate differently than universities and need each other's support."*  
- Humber Polytechnic



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