

Mental Wellness Strategy

2023-2028

Douglas College respectfully acknowledges that our campuses are located on the unceded traditional and ancestral lands of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the territories of the ἀĺcəỷ (Katzie), q'wa:ἀλ'əᢥ (Kwantlen), kwikwəλ əm (Kwikwetlem), xwməθkwəỷəm (Musqueam), and qiqéyt (Qayqayt) First Nations.

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Introduction

The 2020–2025 Douglas College Strategic Plan identified healthy and effective work and learning environments as a key theme. Douglas College is specifically committed to focusing on "strategic, structural, and process changes that will help create the necessary conditions for wellness." This includes long-term planning and preparation at a College-wide level, as well as strategies to address wellness at an individual level" (Douglas College, 2020). Initiative 4.1.2 of the strategic plan is to develop a College-wide mental wellness strategy for students, faculty, staff and administrators.

This work was completed between 2020 and 2022 through the formation of a mental wellness committee, which included members from across various areas of the College. The committee engaged in a comprehensive community engagement process, a gap analysis and consideration of qualitative and quantitative student and employee data in order to identify key priorities for the strategy. The committee chose a socio-ecological model as a framework to help guide the focus of the strategy and recommends adoption of the Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting Universities and Colleges.

The Douglas College Mental Wellness Strategy outlines goals, commitments, principles and potential actions and is intended to guide work in this area from 2023–2028.

DEFINING MENTAL WELLNESS

For this strategy, our definition of mental wellness is as follows:

Mental wellness involves both individual and community aspects. At an individual level, Douglas College strives to support students and employees to thrive and to benefit from full engagement in their learning and work. Individual mental wellness is a holistic concept, which includes having a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, social justice and personal dignity. At a community level, Douglas College strives to create an inclusive environment where policies, practices and supports are in place to promote psychological safety of students and employees.

This definition is informed by the Public Health Agency of Canada's definition of mental health (2014) and discussions with the mental wellness committee on the importance of both individual and community dimensions of mental wellness.



Goals, Commitments and Principles

OVERALL GOALS

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- 1. Douglas College creates an environment that supports students and employees in achieving positive mental wellness, promoting full engagement in their learning and work experiences.
- 2. Douglas College fosters a culture of psychological safety and resilience for members of the College community.

COLLEGE COMMITMENTS

Douglas College will adopt the Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting Colleges and Universities. The charter was developed in 2015 by engaging researchers, practitioners, administrators, students and policy makers from 45 countries and provides institutions with common language, principles and framework to become health and well-being promoting campuses (Okanagan Charter, 2015).

Douglas College will use the principles from the Okanagan Charter to integrate mental wellness into all aspects of our community. As a health-promoting college, we recognize the interconnectedness of individuals and their environments. The whole college benefits when students and employees are well and can fully engage in teaching, learning and our campus community.

Health promoting universities and colleges infuse health into everyday operations, business practices and academic mandates. By doing so, health promoting universities and colleges enhance the success of our institutions; create campus cultures of compassion, well-being, equity and social justice; improve the health of the people who live, learn, work, play and love on our campuses; and strengthen the ecological, social and economic sustainability of our communities and wider society. (Okanagan Charter, 2015)

PRINCIPLES FOR ACTION

In adopting the Okanagan Charter, Douglas College commits to the following principles for action:

- Use settings and whole-system approaches
- Ensure comprehensive and college-wide approaches
- Use participatory approaches and engage the voice of Douglas community members
- Develop collaborations and partnerships within and outside the College
- Promote innovation and evidence-informed action
- Build on strengths

• Value local and Indigenous communities' contexts and priorities

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• Ensure health action embodies principles of social justice, equity, dignity and respect for diversity

We will join more than 30 Canadian higher education institutions making a commitment to two calls to action of the Charter in addition to their individual Charter commitments:

- 1. Embed health into all aspects of campus culture, across the administration, operations and academic mandates
- 2. Lead health promotion action and collaboration, locally and globally

Context of the Mental Wellness Strategy

The development of our Mental Wellness Strategy marks a significant milestone for the Douglas College community. This strategy is the first of its kind, with a College-wide focus on the mental well-being of all our community members. It will serve as a catalyst for engagement, dialogue and actionable initiatives. Over the next five years, it will guide our priorities in the realm of mental wellness, building upon the existing efforts dedicated to supporting mental well-being within the College.

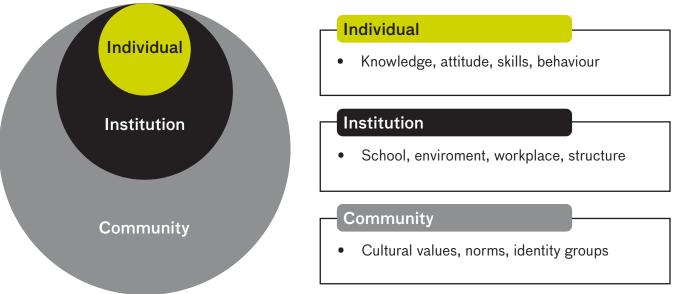
Throughout the consultation process, students, staff, and faculty members have highlighted numerous strengths within our College community. At its core, Douglas College is a supportive community that recognizes the pivotal role of wellness in both the employee and student experience. Many facets of the College, including Human Resources, Student Affairs and Services, Athletics and Recreation, among others, have already initiated various programs, policies, and services aimed at addressing the mental wellness needs of our community members. This strategy will serve to fortify the culture of wellness within the College.

During this consultation process, one crucial theme that emerged was the importance of equity and inclusion. While this strategy does not delve into the specifics of creating a more inclusive and equitable environment, we are concurrently developing a College strategy for equity, diversity and inclusion to address these identified needs comprehensively. This parallel effort will further strengthen our approach to fostering a supportive community.

Additionally, we acknowledge the significance of physical spaces in promoting mental wellness. While this strategy recognizes the role of the physical environment in supporting overall wellbeing, it's important to note that implementing changes to existing spaces will require time and resources. Therefore, the development of 808 Royal offers a unique opportunity to consider how physical spaces can contribute to our community's mental wellness. For instance, the new building will include a purpose-built prayer and meditation space. Factors such as natural light, social gathering areas and the incorporation of Indigenous cultural representation will all contribute to creating a space that fosters mental wellness. Lastly, it's essential to recognize Douglas College's role as a post-secondary institution. A fundamental aspect of post-secondary education involves engaging with diverse ideas, some of which may be novel or even challenging. However, the ability to explore, critically analyze and openly discuss these ideas in a healthy and respectful manner is a lifelong skill that supports long-term mental wellness and resilience. While this concept may not be explicitly stated, it underpins the entire Framework for Action outlined below.

Framework for Action: Systems Approach and the Socio-ecological Model

Douglas College has chosen the Socio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; American College Health Association [ACHA], n.d.) as a framework to guide the College's Mental Wellness Strategy based on feedback from the College community and the Okanagan Charter principle of using a whole systems and campus-wide approach.



Socio-ecological Model:

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The socio-ecological model views the individual and the wider environment as having interrelated influences on health. The spaces, policies and processes of Douglas College influence a person's mental wellness. Likewise, students and employees can be positively or negatively impacted by the cultural norms of our campus community. This model recognizes that individuals are deeply affected by the different levels in their environment and provides a holistic approach to addressing mental wellness and resilience on our campus. It is important that our Mental Wellness Strategy focuses on actions at each level of our environment, rather than approach mental wellness as solely an individual responsibility.

Often when we think of improving mental health... we start with the individual: How can we improve coping strategies, help someone to be mentally healthy, and help them find support? If we focus on only the individual..., however, we miss a range of factors that might influence mental health. (BC Campus, 2020)

Priorities for Mental Wellness at Douglas College

The Douglas College Mental Wellness Strategy identifies eight key action areas for promoting mental wellness on campus. Using the socio-ecological model, these action areas are divided into three levels: Individual, Institutional and Community.

MENTAL WELLNESS AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Wellness at the individual level refers to one's knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours.

In 2022., 31.73% of Douglas College students reported low mental wellbeing. 37.47% fell into the category of having severe mental distress in the previous 30 days. (Canadian Campus Wellbeing Survey) There are many individual factors that safeguard mental health and well-being, such as the ability to cope and manage stress (resilience), problem-solving and help-seeking, experience and confidence in managing multiple demands, health promotion activities (such as self-care) and self-esteem (CSA, 2020).

At Douglas College, we will help students and employees overcome barriers to their mental wellness. The College community will have access to culturally diverse mental health supports, training and resources; mental health knowledge will be integrated into student and employee learning. The following actions aim to improve the mental well-being of our campus at the individual level.

ACTION 1: Douglas College will implement mental wellness promotion programs for employees and students that aim to shift the narrative around seeking help and increase awareness of services and resources.

500,000 Canadians, in any given week, are unable to work due to mental health problems or illnesses. (Mental Health Commission of Canada) It is important that students and employees know where, when and how to seek help when a problem arises. Social stigma and self-stigma are often reasons that people do not seek help or engage with mental health serivces. Willingness to seek help may be impacted by cultural norms about helpseeking and a sense of cultural safety with available services. It should feel easy and non-stigmatizing to get help.

ACTION 2: Douglas College will integrate mental health literacy into the student learning journey, and into employee training and development.

In the 2022 Canadian Campus Wellbeing Survey, 26.13% of Douglas College student respondents indicated that they strongly disagreed that they would be able to recognize the signs of mental illness in people, including themselves. Only half of our surveyed students (52.58%) agreed that they know how to maintain their positive mental health. Mental health literacy encompasses information and beliefs related to mental health, as well as skills to navigate the mental health care system. The benefit of understanding mental health is prevention, early recognition and intervention (Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health [CAMIMH], n.d).

For mental health knowledge to be useful, skill development and empowerment to help students and employees make informed decisions related to their mental wellness is an important consideration.

MENTAL WELLNESS AT THE INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

At the institutional level, student and employee mental wellness is influenced by Douglas College as an organization and how it interacts between the individual and community levels.

Douglas College will create a healthy learning and working environment through programs and policies, essential support services and creating physical spaces that support wellness goals.

ACTION 3: Douglas College will support physical wellness through opportunities to participate in accessible recreation activities and access to healthy food options on campus.

Participation in physical fitness and recreation supports physical and mental health while providing opportunities for meaningful social connections and a sense of community. While food insecurity can negatively impact mental well-being, having a nutritious diet can positively impact both mental and physical health. A focus on physical health will contribute to employee and student mental wellness.

ACTION 4: Douglas College will support a healthy, psychologically safe campus through its policies, practices and systems.

There are some policies and practices of an institution that directly affect wellness, while others can have a more indirect impact. Many practices and policies that are indirectly related or which appear to have little or no observable link, may be the most relevant and have a significant impact (CSA, 2021). It is important to consider both when taking a systemic approach to supporting mental wellness.

ACTION 5: Douglas College will offer diverse mental wellness services and programs for students and employees.

Having a robust network of services for mental wellness is important for students and employees. While Douglas College fits within a larger ecosystem of community mental health services, on-campus supports for students in crisis and those struggling with mental health issues, as well as accessibility supports for students living with mental illness, are critical for supporting mental wellness. Employees can benefit from robust extended health benefits, including the employee and family assistance plan. Douglas College will focus on strengthening services and programs for students and employees, and ensuring there are strong connection points for referrals to these resources.

Mental health and well-being supports are a critical component of a systemic and holistic approach to mental health and well-being for postsecondary students. These may include: e-mental health, substance use/ addictions counselling, harm reduction, mindfulness, sweat-lodges, landbased initiatives and professional counselling and psychiatric services. (CSA, 2020)

ACTION 6: Douglas College will create a physical environment that encourages wellness.

The indoor and outdoor spaces that make up our campuses are one of the most tangible aspects of the student and employee experience. They also signal to the community what is important and valued. Spaces specifically designed to support wellness can signal that mental health matters. Spaces to study, hold social gatherings, access nature, and connect with culture and spirituality are integral to mental wellness.

MENTAL WELLNESS AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL

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The community level refers to the cultural values, norms and identity groups that make up Douglas College. A community that supports mental wellness actively fosters a sense of belonging and expects all community members to act with civility and respect.

Douglas College will intentionally promote a culture of wellness, respect and inclusion within our community and with the communities around us.

Civility and respect are based on showing esteem, care, and consideration for others while acknowledging their dignity. In an institution with good civility and respect, people treat each other with kindness and consideration; conflicts between stakeholders are handled effectively; [people] from all backgrounds are treated fairly; and inappropriate behaviour is effectively addressed" (CSA 2021).

ACTION 7: Douglas College will strengthen a sense of connection amongst its students and employees.

Both the National Standard for Mental Health and Well-being for post-secondary students (2020) and the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (2013) recognize the importance of belonging and social support for mental wellness. Building a stronger sense of community within the College and strengthening connections with the broader community will allow students and employees to develop meaningful relationships that are supportive of mental wellness.

ACTION 8: Douglas College will foster a campus culture that is respectful and characterized by trust, honesty, fairness and inclusivity.

Being respectful and considerate with one another is a key aspect of a healthy campus environment. For students and employees, equity, civility, and respect greatly influence the culture of the College community. Individual experiences can either support or damage one's mental wellness. Prioritizing respect, trust, honesty, fairness, and inclusivity aligns with our values and will help to create a more psychologically safe work and learning environment. This work is also supported by other initiatives, such as the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion initiatives and the Indigenization Professional Development committee.

Moving to Action

This Mental Wellness Strategy will guide us in the next five years as we work to achieve the overarching goals of creating an environment that supports students and employees in achieving positive mental wellness and fostering a culture of psychological safety and resilience for all members of the college community.

To become a health-promoting college takes continuous commitment from all levels and all areas of the institution. Human Resources and Student Affairs and Services will provide leadership to facilitate a process where the College community can prioritize the activities, initiatives and projects that will allow us to work towards achieving the eight actions identified within the Strategy. We will also develop a comprehensive assessment strategy to monitor our progress.

Our next step as a College will be to develop an implementation plan, which will outline milestones for this first five-year Mental Wellness Strategy. We will further identify areas of strength and prioritize the areas that require urgent attention, through a process of College-wide engagement and consultation. Appendix 1 includes potential activities that could contribute to the success of the Strategy; these were identified during the initial consultation phase. These activities are not set in stone – they will evolve over time and as we continue to engage with the College community on the best path forward. The work will be ongoing and will live beyond the life of this Strategy.

APPENDIX 1: POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

Throughout the consultation and gap analysis phase of strategy development, several potential activities were identified for each of the actions within the Strategic Plan. This appendix outlines these potential actions. Of note, the list of potential actions is not exhaustive; the intention is to provide a range of sample activities that could be explored or implemented to support each of the actions. As the College moves towards implementation of the Strategic Plan, additional activities may be explored in addition to the ones listed below.

MENTAL WELLNESS AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

ACTION 1: Douglas College will implement mental wellness promotion programs for employees and
students that aim to shift the narrative around seeking help and increase awareness of
services and resources.

College-Wide		Students	Employees		
 campaign the reducing still Normalize he groups iden likely to see 	th education nat focuses on	 Invest in peer-to-peer education and awareness initiatives Promote services and mental health information while addressing common sources of stigma around seeking help Develop a coordinated wellness resource communications plan built into semester student cycle 	 Review the mental health resources currently available to identify gaps in programs and resources including education focused on increasing awareness and reducing stigma. Develop an employee wellness program to address the four key elements of wellness. 		

ACTION 2: Douglas College will integrate mental health literacy into the student learning journey and into employee training and development.				
College-Wide	Students	Employees		
• Ensure that mental wellness information reflects the diversity of identities in our community	 Integrate mental health knowledge within student academic and co-curricular activities 	• Offer mental health and psychological safety training for managers, leaders and faculty		
	 Ensure mental wellness is part of a growth and development plan for student leader training 	 Provide professional development training for employees to improve mental health literacy 		

MENTAL WELLNESS AT THE INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

ACTION 3: Douglas College will support physical wellness through opportunities to participate in accessible recreation activities and access to healthy food options on campus.

C	College-Wide		Students		Employees	
•	Consider opportunities to increase recreation program offerings	•	Increase awareness of food security resources on campus and in the community	•	Implement a health promotion program to promote physically healthy	
•	Complete an EDI and accessibility review of recreation programming	•	Incorporate movement components into co-curricular programs (e.g., orientations,		lifestyles	
•	Partner with external organizations to increase physical activity offerings		leadership training, etc.)			
•	Consider cultural, nutritional and affordability aspects when negotiating food contracts					

ACTION 4: Douglas College will support a healthy, psychologically safe campus through its policies, practices and systems.				
College-Wide	Students	Employees		
• Provide opportunities for students and employees to learn about and understand policies that impact mental	 Create plain language guide to policies and standard operating procedure (SOPs) for students 	• Ensure performance development programs promote psychological safety and wellness		
 Wellness Ensure there are clear complaints processes for students and employees to report incidents that contravene policies (e.g., Human Rights Policy) 	 Develop resources and professional development for instructors to embed wellness-supporting practices into their courses Outline pathways and establish role clarity to effectively respond to crisis situations during and after the event 	 Offer professional development for leaders on best practices for creating a psychologically and culturally safe work environments Develop resources for faculty on creating psychologically and culturally safe learning environments 		

ACTION 5: Douglas College will offer diverse mental wellness services and programs for students and employees.

College-Wide		Stu	udents	En	nployees
and le menta	e campus managers eaders are aware of al health resources	•	Implement a comprehensive Early Alert program at the College	•	Regularly review employee benefits Promote existing employee
appro	ervices and can make opriate referrals for oyees or students in	•	Recognize need for mental health services as "24 hours/7 days a week" – identify what can be provided		benefit services
partne agenc	blore options for therships with external encies to bring awareness		on campus, and what services are available off-campus and after hours		
	mpus on substance nd harm reduction on us	•	Advocate for increased services when gaps are identified		

AC	ACTION 6: Douglas College will create a physical environment that encourages wellness.				
Co	llege-Wide	Students	Employees		
•	Establish prayer/meditation spaces on campuses	• Create spaces and programs where students can engage	 Future office space planning recognizes the 		
•	Explore opportunities for regular use of outdoor space (e.g., school field in the summer; outdoor programming in 808 Royal outside spaces)	 in wellness activities, connect with supportive peers, and find information about services (on campus and in the community) Ensure student services 	importance of physical and mental wellness, as well as accessibility		
•	Support community art projects on campuses	are welcoming spaces for all students and safe for			
•	Create spaces for collaboration and learning in new renovations	marginalized groups			
•	Increase or update recreation spaces on campus				
•	Ensure low-barrier access to Indigenous cultural practices in all spaces, and with any new facilities; ensure students, faculty and employees are aware of any related policies or practices				

ACTION 7: Douglas College will strengthen a sense of connection amongst its students and employees.			
College-Wide	Students	Employees	
Host opportunities for dialogue on issues that affect the College community	 Work exploring this is underway via another Strategic Initiative, but it may not be worthwhile to implement Strengthen orientation and transition programs Develop tools and resources to help faculty create more inclusive and supportive classroom environments Strengthen programs by enhancing connections; more peer-to-peer support in cohort programs, modelled after the Nursing mentorship program Create a fund for activities that promote student connection and positive relationships within courses, programs and faculties 	 Explore community service opportunities for employees to connect with and give back to the community Create opportunities for wellness activities to increase employee connections on campus, such as running groups, social groups, or employee resource groups 	

AC	ACTION 8: Douglas College will foster a campus culture that is respectful and characterized by trust, honesty, fairness and inclusivity.				
Co	llege-Wide	Students	Employees		
•	Create an institutional statement and commitments towards anti-racism	 Include anti-racist active bystander training in student leader program 	 Develop onboarding modules for employees focused on Equity, 		
•	Finalize and launch the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion		Diversity and Inclusion and Indigenization		
	strategy		 Launch the Indigenous PD framework 		
•	Develop and enhance anti- racism awareness programs		Growth and development		
•	Integrate Indigenous ways of knowing into learning and professional development		are promoted among equity seeking groups through mentorship, resource groups or other initiatives		
•	Celebrate diverse cultural days of significance		or other initiatives		
•	Create a campus-wide accessibility plan				

APPENDIX 2: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A diverse group of College community members contributed to the development of this Strategy.

Leadership and oversight were provided by:

- Sherry Chin-Shue, APV, HR, SMT Initiative Lead
- Sarah Dench, VP, Student Affairs, SMT Initiative Lead
- Patty Hambler, Director, Student Affairs and Services, Committee Co-lead
- Laura Ward, Manager, Human Resources, Committee Co-Lead

Research, coordination and consultation efforts were supported by:

- Erin Smith, Counsellor, Mental Wellness Initiative Consultant
- Oommen George, Student Intern

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- Members of the Mental Wellness Strategic Initiative Committee included:
- Nate Batara, International Student Life Supervisor, Committee Member
- Stephanie Durand, Student Life Manager, Committee Member
- Olya Galianova, DSU Accessibility Rep, 2021–22, Committee Member
- Ashley Gordon, Services Coordinator, DSU
- Valerie Lockyer, Executive Director, The Training Group, Committee Member
- Manjit Mandher, Administrative Officer, SAS, Committee Member
- Brian McLennon, Director, Athletics and Recreation, Committee Member
- Deepa Singh, Organizer Advocacy, DSU, Committee Member
- Lisa Smith, Faculty, Sociology, Committee Member
- Janette Tilley, Associate Dean, LLPA, Committee Member
- Anne Trebunski, DSU Accessibility Rep 2022-23, Committee Member

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APPENDIX 3: REFERENCES

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