

Moving Towards a More Inclusive Campus Culture on Mental Health

an HM|HC learning event

Overview

What is the culture around mental health like at Vancouver Island post-secondary campuses?

How can institutions work together to improve the environments on their campuses?

These questions animated the dialogue at a regional forum held March 12, 2020 at Royal Roads University to discuss the state of campus mental health and well-being. Thirty-two participants signed in (9 students, 20 campus professionals and 3 community partners). Through a presentation, workshop, nature walk and World Café guided dialogues, the participants shared information and explored ideas, models and challenges. They left ready to apply what they learned together to their individual campus settings.

Setting the Foundation

Three frameworks were presented to the group to set a foundation for the day’s learnings.

The **first framework** presented was that of a *whole campus* approach. In order to create more inclusive campus cultures towards mental health, it is important to understand that everyone plays a part in creating, maintaining, and changing the campus culture. Using the ideas of *universal design*, we must think of how our approaches impact people of diverse backgrounds, cultures, and abilities.

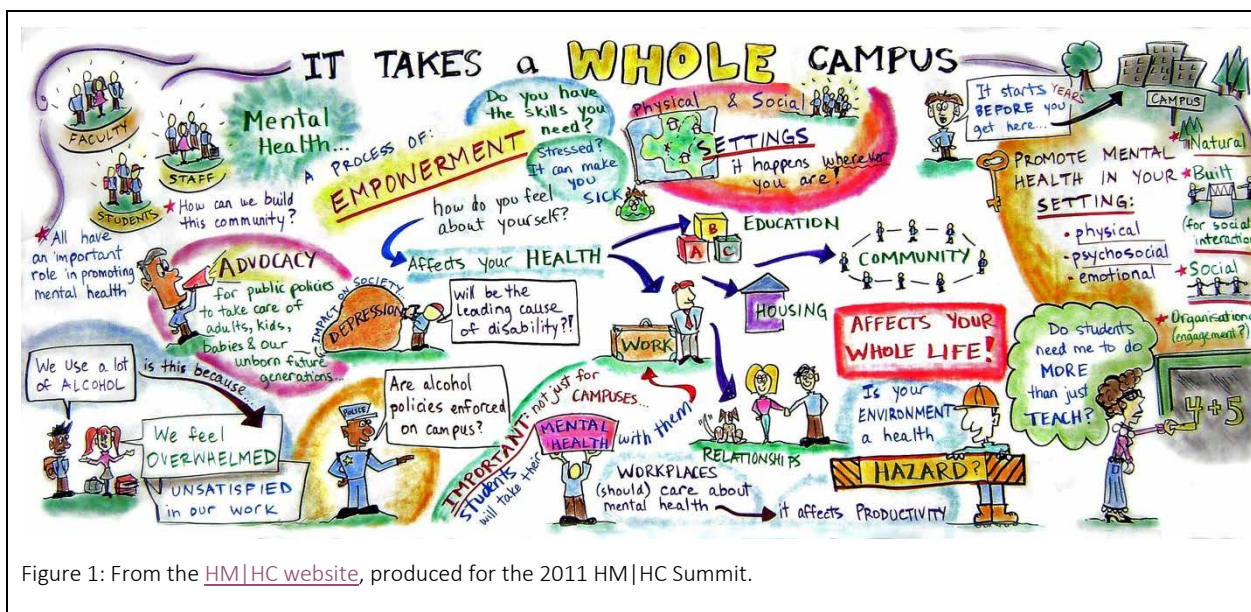


Figure 1: From the [HM|HC website](https://www.hmhc.ca/), produced for the 2011 HM|HC Summit.

The **second framework** was that of a proactive systems approach to campus mental health. Mental health is often addressed in a reactive way, where resources and measures are put in place in response to urgent mental health concerns. As we shift towards inclusive campus cultures and health promoting universities, we must consider how we can work to promote health and well-being for all and prevent the progression of poor mental health and situations of mental health crisis. Considering how we can work at a proactive level and support all members of the campus community should be our strongest investment as it can prevent students from entering into a crisis stage and will take the strain off of our reactive supports such as counselling services.

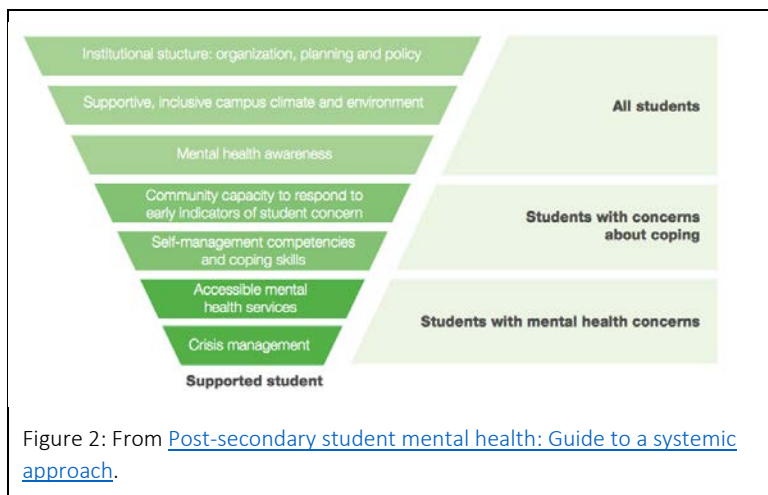


Figure 2: From [Post-secondary student mental health: Guide to a systemic approach](#).

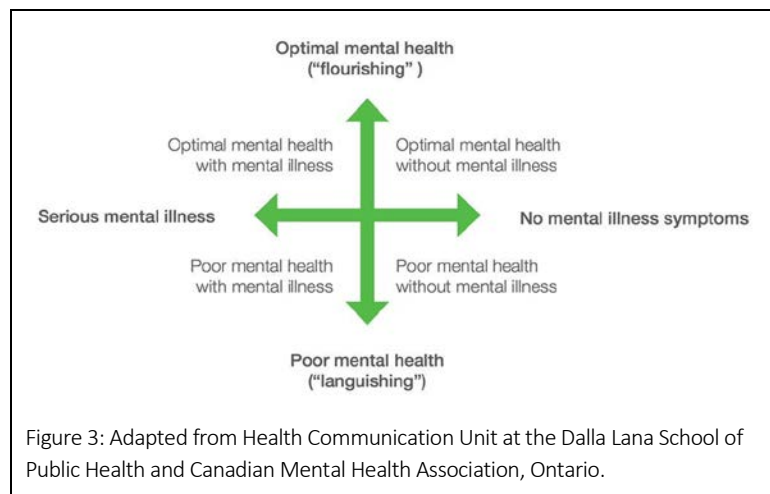


Figure 3: Adapted from Health Communication Unit at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health and Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario.

The **third framework** was the dual continuum model of mental health and mental illness based on the work of Corey Keyes. As we advance our work in addressing mental health, we must understand that mental health in the sense of well-being sits along a different continuum than mental illness. This allows us to recognize that addressing mental illness is not the same as promoting mental health. Promoting and supporting positive

mental health for all is an important part of building positive campus cultures, as is providing supportive services for those with mental illnesses.

Nurturing the Learning Community

Participants were asked to consider what their needs/wants/desires in attending the forum were and write it down on a post-it note. They then posted their ‘asks’ on a large wall in the room, and throughout the forum attendees were invited to review the prompts and provide an answer or response to the requests if they were able to. Participants were encouraged to include their contact information so they could continue the connection and collaboration following the day’s events. For example, some attendees requested more information on creating peer support programs and alternate funding options. Other participants who’ve had experience in these areas were then able to provide a response in order to support those who had sought guidance.

Presentation with Dr. Peggy Wilson

Peggy is a visiting scholar at Royal Roads University and is of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation. She has experience as a classroom teacher, high school administrator, college professor, curriculum writer, and researcher on Aboriginal issues. In an open conversation with the group, Peggy related her experience as professor at a remote northern university. During her first year as a faculty member there, she noticed that her students who were a visual minority were consistently scoring lower in her class, and so she sought to offer extra tutoring to support their learning. What she discovered was that those students were experiencing isolation and there was a need for them to connect. She then worked to foster this connection and support, and saw the direct impact that community made on their academic and personal success. Peggy spoke on the importance for faculty to create a space where students feel safe in order to support their success. In her experience and her continuing research, when students and faculty build relationships, they also create mutual accountability and positive outcomes.

Workshop with Dr. Tim Dyck

Tim is a University of Victoria Research Associate in knowledge mobilization at the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research (CISUR). He is part of HM|HC's Support Team and has served the Changing the Culture of Substance Use initiative. Tim guided a session exploring comparisons and contrasts of use prevention, harm reduction, and health promotion in viewing and responding to substance use. Participants firstly considered how these three perspectives look at aspects/issues such as the reality of use, right to use, reasons for use, other influencers, as well as benefits and harms from use. Participants then reflected on how these respective approaches when applied tend to engage in communication (how the audience is viewed and what type and style, thrust and goal for messaging is taken up) and in policy initiatives (how the recipients are regarded, the process is pursued, and the thrust and goals are understood).

“The Nature of Wellness” Walking Tour

Royal Roads groundskeeper Paul Allison offered attendees the opportunity to participate in a walking tour of the beautiful surroundings in which Royal Roads University is situated and shared some of the campus's horticultural history.

World Café Questions and Conversation Summaries

For the afternoon portion of the forum, a World Café was hosted to facilitate a deeper investigation and knowledge exchange among the campus stakeholders. The principles of World Café encourage all participants to share their thoughts and ideas openly as each person is considered an expert in their lived experience. Students, staff, administrators, and community organization representatives shared their thoughts collectively to provide a whole-campus perspective. For each of the four café questions, participants sat in small groups at a table and discussed the question. Key ideas, answers, and responses were recorded and shared with all participants at the end of each discussion period.

The discussion questions, and common responses and themes that emerged, are as follows:

Q1: What does “an inclusive campus culture on mental health” mean/look like to you?

- Reduced stigma around struggles with mental health and seeking support, with self-care considered essential rather than a luxury, situating concerns within a holistic understanding of health (including mental health)
- Collaboration, between campuses and among campus departments and groups, sharing and working together around what works well
- Administrative, academic and services staff leadership that shows a priority commitment to supporting mental health, including adequate resourcing for initiatives, and is approachable to and interactively engaged with students, modelling resilience
- A physical environment that provides spaces safe for all campus members and for community to gather in ways that are culturally inclusive
- Learning structures that respect and welcome various learning styles with appropriate opportunities and that respond to failure in a supportive, constructive manner that encourages people to move forward in ways that suit their capacity and potential
- Strong supports for staff, including training in mental health literacy and response with comprehensive referral resources, enabling employees to protect their own health and promote mental health collaboratively alongside colleagues in a shared integrated institutional investment rather than doing this work unassisted “off the side of the desk”

Q2: What are some of the things that work well on your campus to support mental health?

- Mental health campaigns from across campuses (e.g., Talk to Me, Thrive Week, Human Library, Travelling Journal, Bell Let’s Talk Day, Puppy Therapy, and Speed Friending) including initiatives that celebrate different cultures
- A variety of support services, especially on-campus counselling services, particularly when health services are working together and there are peer support and peer mentorship programs, and when services are augmented by campus committees dedicated to mental health, strong student associations and clubs and campus recreation initiatives.
- Equipping and support services for staff members (such as the Employee Family Assistance Program), including mental health training such as QPR and the CARE crisis support team

Q3: What are some of the challenges your campus faces in addressing mental health?

- Lack of funding for dedicated staff, events and initiatives, resources and services, with limited capacity to reduce waitlists and serve the overwhelming number of students seeking counselling, let alone reduce stigma around accessing mental health services and build student resilience
- Staff burnout, since working in mental health can be emotionally taxing, there are not enough dedicated staff and resources to meet the demand and those who are dedicated to

supporting mental health often perform this work in addition to other work demands/priorities

- Need for staff and faculty training to respond to student mental health, especially given low faculty engagement and investment in mental health initiatives and that faculty members are often the first contact for students needing help yet often unaware of how to respond to them appropriately and effectively, including where and how to refer them to different services
- Lack of collaboration in providing regular supports, with work being done in silos with insufficient engagement of students and participation of faculty

Q4: What are the most appropriate ways/steps/processes to build a more inclusive culture of mental health on your campus and how can we leverage connections made today to do so?

- Use inclusive language (in all forms of campus communication) that reframes how we talk about mental health, respecting different cultures and backgrounds and showing appreciation for care of self and others
- Provide crisis first aid training to staff and faculty to help personnel know how to respond and supply comprehensive referral resources to all departments to ensure awareness of different support services
- Continue collaborating among institutions and communicating within and across different campus bodies such as departments, faculty, student groups, relating to changing student populations with increased faculty student engagement
- Continue and increase support for initiatives, forming and strengthening peer support programs with appropriate boundaries and empowerment, and engaging campus members more interactively in mental health campaigns to increase intentionality

What Forum Participants Said

“Involving. With such a small group of people and the format of the day, made the day both interesting and informative. Contributing with ideas, suggestions, learning from others very valuable.”

“It was laid out in a palatable way, I enjoyed having various ways to receive information and add my own thoughts and experiences.”

“This event was well organized and well-paced. I appreciated the structure to allow a lot of time for conversation and dialogue among Vancouver Island colleagues rather than largely presentation-based.”

- 90% of respondents said they were likely or very likely to apply something new they learned at the forum to their campus
- 90% would recommend attending a regional forum to a colleague

Acknowledgements

Royal Roads University acknowledges that its campus is located on the traditional lands of the Xwsepsum (Esquimalt) and Lekwungen (Songhees) ancestors and families who have lived here for thousands of years. The land has been part of the fabric of the life of Indigenous communities long before Hatley Castle was built, and it will be long into the future. It is with gratitude that we now learn and work here, where the past, present, and future of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, faculty and staff come together. Hay'sxw'qa si'em!

Royal Roads University generously hosted the event. In particular, Kyla McLeod and Sarah Chettleburgh not only attended dutifully and warmly to participants and proceedings but also contributed most helpfully to arrangements and preparation. It was a pleasure to work with such gracious colleagues.

Lauren Oleksewich kindly responded to an invitation to help plan, organize and facilitate the event, all of which she did in a most collaborative, congenial and competent manner. Her earnest efforts (including the initial draft for this report) are much appreciated.

Our friendly engaged forum participants, largely from HM|HC-associated institutions on Vancouver Island (North Island College, Vancouver Island University, Camosun College, University of Victoria, and Royal Roads University) made the sessions beneficial, and we thank them for embodying the spirit of dialogue. As things turned out, this in-person forum took place one day before the ominous threat of COVID-19 would have prevented it from happening. We salute the participants for their service to campus mental health before and since the forum.

Healthy Minds | Healthy Campuses is a community of practice initiated by the BC Partners for Mental Health and Substance Use Information, a group of non-profit agencies providing good-quality information to help the people of British Columbia maintain or improve their mental well-being. The support team is provided by the Canadian Mental Health Association BC Division and the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research at the University of Victoria. The BC Partners are funded by the Provincial Health Services Authority. For more information, visit healthycampuses.ca.