CSU Mental Health Strategy

A student-driven initiative for the promotion of mental health and wellbeing at Capilano and beyond

Capilano Students' Union

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF LANDS

The Capilano Students' Union acknowledges with the utmost respect that the land on which this strategy was developed and will be implemented is the unceded land of the Coast Salish peoples including the land of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Səl íl-wəta (Tsleil-Waututh), Lil wat7ul (Lil'wat), and shíshálh (Sechelt) nations.

We recognize that we continue to live under a system of settler colonialism that perpetuates the discrimination of various communities. We recognize that we must actively work to break down these systems of oppression in every facet of what we do. If we are to pursue the creation of a culture of understanding, respect, and support, we must first begin by acknowledging the existence of these systems and our role in dismantling them.

The CSU mental health strategy (referred to in this document as "the strategy") is to serve as a document outlining the professional attitude and actions to be taken by the CSU now and in future years in regards to student mental health on campus.

The strategy is designed to function as a directional framework to proactively explore opportunities for the promotion of mental health, the implementation of action plans, and the provision of resources for students in order to comprehensively address mental health within our community. The goals established herein are intended to guide organizational decisions in our service delivery, advocacy objectives, and membership engagement strategies.

Mental health and wellbeing are essential pieces to ensuring that students are allowed the opportunity to achieve their personal and academic goals, and fully and meaningfully participate in student life.

As the voice for students at Capilano University and across the North Shore community, we are committed to ensuring that we are responsive to the needs and concerns of our members ,and that students are welcomed and supported in their university community.

BACKGROUND

> "
> *New reports continue to show an upward trend in the number of students being diagnosed with mental health conditions*

WHY THE NEED FOR A MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY?

This strategy was developed in response to the results of a survey conducted by the CSU that indicated that mental health promotion and awareness was the most widely supported advocacy objective of its membership.

This is consistent with trends across Canadian post-secondary institutions, with increasing numbers of students openly acknowledging the importance of discussing and addressing mental health concerns as well as calling upon their institutions to provide additional supports for those struggling with their mental health.

As a student-driven organization, the CSU is uniquely situated to promote a more inclusive and understanding culture around mental health through directly connecting with its membership and creating spaces, events, and services designed by students, for students in its pursuit of these objectives. The CSU has a critical role to play in ensuring that the needs of its membership are meaningfully addressed by the university and all relevant levels of government.

Students across Canada are raising their voices on the impacts of mental health challenges on their personal and academic pursuits and the barriers that they are facing in addressing them and seeking institutional and community support.

The majority of students at Capilano University are within the ages of 18 to 24, which is the primary age group in which one is most likely to experience mental illness (Centre for Addictions and Mental Health, 2018).

A 2013 study conducted by the American College Health Association surveying a Canadian post-secondary reference group found that 56.5% of students surveyed had felt overwhelming anxiety and 37.5% had felt so depressed it was difficult to function within the last twelve months (University of Victoria, 2014). In the same study, 9.5% reported having seriously considered attempting suicide. Suicide is the leading cause of death amongst 15 to 24 year-olds (Centre for Addictions and Mental Health, 2018).

New reports continue to show an upward trend in the number of students being diagnosed with mental health conditions and rates of accessing on-campus counselling and support services (Max and Waters, 2016).

The CSU has the capacity and

opportunity to create an environment where students feel supported by their peers, faculty, and university administration in seeking and accessing help and in their overall student experience.

Stigmatization and discrimination pose significant barriers to students seeking help for their mental health challenges or illness. Many students hesitate to disclose that they are suffering from a mental health problem due to fear of stigma, which may prevent students from seeking out needed mental health support services and accommodations (Max and Waters, 2016).

Within a larger Canadian context, a 2014 study showed that over half of Canadians believed that mental illness is used simply as an excuse for poor behaviour, and half of those surveyed who had a mental illness reported experiences of discrimination (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2014). Experiences of acute and long-term discrimination can have serious impacts on an individual's mental health and can lead to higher rates of mental illness and addiction (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2014).

Mental health struggles and illnesses can be the subject of discriminatory practices and behaviours, and discrimination based on this and other factors can lead to increased mental health problems (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2014).

Students from traditionally marginalized communities often face additional barriers to accessing professional mental health and counselling services and experience higher levels of emotional and academic distress (Centre for Collegiate Mental Health, 2010).

This strategy offers a coherent framework for the CSU to address the impacts of stigmatization and discrimination as students at Capilano University experience them through our advocacy, organizational practices, and delivery of services.

The normalization of seeking out mental health support and accommodations is a critical step in ensuring that students feel welcomed and supported within their university community. When students are able to access sufficient and effective supports they are significantly more likely to be successful academically and continue on to complete their studies (Max and Waters, 2016).

This cultural shift must come from all levels of the university community, beginning with us as a student organization and our commitment to the wellbeing of our members.

Stigmatization and discrimination pose significant barriers to students

DEFINITIONS

Mental health/wellbeing
"Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community (World Health Organization, 2001)."

Health
"Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (World Health Organization, 2001)."

Mental illness
"Mental illness is a recognized, medically diagnosable illness that results in the significant impairment of an individual's cognitive, affective or relational abilities. Mental disorders result from biological, developmental and/or psychosocial factors and can be managed using approaches comparable to those applied to physical disease (i.e., prevention, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation) (Epp, 1988)."

Invisible disability
"(A) disability that is not immediately noticeable. They can include brain injuries, chronic pain, mental illness, gastrointestinal disorders, and much more. Because they're not obvious to spot, invisible disabilities may be overlooked and misunderstood (Rick Hansen Foundation, 2015)."

Stigma
"Stigma is a negative stereotype. Stigma is a reality for many people with a mental illness, and they report that how others judge them is one of their greatest barriers to a complete and satisfying life. (Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario, 2018)"

DEFINITIONS

Discrimination

"Discrimination is unfair treatment due to a person's identity, which includes race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, family status or disability, including mental disorder. Acts of discrimination can be overt or take the form of systemic (covert) discrimination…Stigma is the negative stereotype and discrimination is the behaviour that results from this negative stereotype (Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario, 2018)."

Intersectionality

A conceptual framework for understanding the resulting unique and complex experiences of discrimination and oppression that an individual may face based on the various identities which they hold and the power structures they are subject to (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2001, see also Kimberle Crenshaw, 1989).

Inclusion

Inclusion seeks to ensure that the voices of all members of a community are upheld with dignity and respect, and that steps are taken to ensure that all members have access to and involvement in the spaces, activities and decision-making processes by which they are affected.

VISION

Capilano University is a place where students feel welcome to openly discuss their individual experiences with mental health and feel supported by their peers, instructors, and the university community.

Students do not face fear of being discriminated against based on prejudices and stigma around mental health challenges and illness.

Students are aware of the support services available to them by the CSU, the university, and the extended community.

All students are able to access support services, which are sensitive to the unique challenges and intersecting identities that they experience, and feel supported when accessing these resources.

The CSU is a recognized advocate for student mental health support and is responsive to the needs of its membership in the development of its asks and policy positions.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1 **All Capilano community members have an impact and role to play in supporting mental health.** For this reason, the CSU shall continue to foster a collaborative relationship with the university faculty, staff, and administration in its mental health advocacy, outreach, and service delivery in a manner which plays to each group's strengths.

2 **Students' mental health is affected by many factors including physical, emotional, socio-cultural, and spiritual ones.** The interplay of these factors must be considered within a holistic and intersectional framework when conducting outreach and developing supports in order to meaningfully and effectively address students' mental health challenges.

3 **Building strong relationships, communities, and support services fosters meaningful connection, respect, and a culture of belonging.** These factors have a significant role in promoting students' mental health and wellbeing and can be promoted by providing inclusive events, safer spaces, and community-building opportunities.

4 **Students can better achieve their academic and personal goals as well as maintain their well-being throughout their university experience through accessible events, services, and support systems.** Offering accessible programming is a necessary part of creating a culture of understanding where students are exposed to a welcoming and supportive environment.

5 **The coping strategies used by students may vary and there are many ways in which students may access support.** Therefore, a varied approach to addressing student mental health that considers the diversity of students' experiences and needs is necessary.
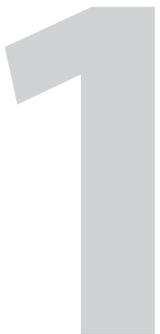
STRATEGIC FOCUS

Establish a culture of understanding around mental health throughout the student and university community.

1.1 Ensure that student leaders are trained in mental health literacy, inclusion, and crisis, as well as disclosure response. All CSU board members shall receive mental health awareness and preparedness training prior to the beginning of the academic year.

1.2 Conduct at least one awareness campaign each year that educates students on mental health literacy and also tackles myths and misconceptions about mental illness and mental health challenges.

1.3 Develop and implement a safer spaces policy to promote the creation of supportive and accommodating students spaces.

1.4 Seek out opportunities to bring in community and university partners and guest speakers to increase students' awareness of mental health-related issues and increase visibility of those living with mental illness.

1

Create an environment where self-care and accessing support is normalized and encouraged.

2.1 Actively promote support services via social media, events, and direct interactions (classroom talks or tabling, for example).

2.2 Regularly hold events that promote self-care and educate students on the benefits of regularly practicing self-care, addressing physical, mental, and emotional wellness.

2.3 Continue to conduct de-stress-related events around end-of-term exam periods and offer opportunities to engage in self-care practices and spread awareness of the importance of healthy work-life balances.

2.4 Hold and promote workshops throughout each major semester that aim to teach students healthy study habits, stress-management strategies, and other skills which promote a healthy lifestyle.

2.5 Ensure that its board members, volunteers, and club leaders are aware of the support services available to them and actively encourage members of these groups to access them.

2

STRATEGIC FOCUS

Eliminate barriers that may prevent students from achieving their personal and/or academic goals through advocacy efforts and the development of a robust mental health support network.

3.1 Continue to develop and expand programs and services that promote mental and physical wellness based on feedback from CSU membership.

3.2 Work to further collaborative a relationship with Capilano University in the promotion, development, and delivery of student support services and programs.

3.3 Strategically engage with university faculty, staff, and administration to encourage the promotion of learning environments that are accepting of mental health challenges and are accommodating to those facing mental, emotional, and physical barriers. Ensure all students may participate fully in the university community and have access to opportunities to achieve personal and academic success.

3.4 Actively work with members and representatives of CSU collectives to develop and deliver services and programming that support mental wellbeing and are inclusive of students from diverse backgrounds.

3.5 Outline support services available to students and the greater community that are suited to their needs and individual experiences through the CSU and the university.

3

STRATEGIC FOCUS

Develop mental health-related advocacy objectives and policies that are responsive to the needs and interests of our membership at the university, provincial, and federal levels.

4.1 Provide easily accessible avenues for students to inform CSU leaders on what mental health-related challenges they are facing and how these may be addressed.

4.2 Ensure collective representatives and leaders actively engage their collectives in discussions regarding their mental health experiences and sense of belonging on campus in order to guide and inform the policy objectives of the CSU.

4.3 Conduct research and pursue the development of issues-based policies related to mental health as new areas of concern are identified.

4.4 Ensure that CSU representatives to external lobbying organizations are informed and aware of the interests and needs of the membership, and that these are strongly communicated when participating in the development of policy and lobbying asks at these groups.

4

REVIEW PROCESS

The CSU's vice-president of equity & sustainability, with continuous direction from and collaboration with the accessibility justice collective and accessibility justice coordinator, shall be responsible for overseeing the implementation of this strategy and the success of the goals outlined within.

The strategy will undergo annual review under the direction of the vice-president of equity & sustainability with guidance and consultation from the CSU's elected liaisons and coordinators.

The review process will consist of an in-depth assessment of the annual progress made towards each of the goals detailed in the strategy and proposed amendments based on student feedback, current research, and professional expertise acquired.

The CSU board of directors as a whole will be responsible for supporting policies and decisions which further the goals of the strategy and promote the mental health and wellbeing of the membership.

ON-CAMPUS RESOURCES

Capilano University Counselling Services
capilanou.ca/student-life/support--wellness/health--counselling-services/counselling-services/

North Vancouver campus
Birch 267
604.984.1744

kálax-ay | the Sunshine Coast campus
Call 604.885.9310 to book appointment

Capilano University Accessibility Services
capilanou.ca/accessibility
Birch 284
604.983.7526
access-serv@capilanou.ca

Capilano University Academic Support
capilanou.ca/student-life/academic-support/

CSU Accessibility Justice Collective
csu.bc.ca/collectives/access/

Disclosure and Support Services
Capilano University Community Wellness Strategist
Jody Armstrong (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training qualified)
Library 116
604.986.1911 ext. 3584
jodyarmstrong@capilanou.ca

Student Success Facilitator
Remy Marlatt (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training qualified)
Library 116
604.983.7563 ext. 7563
remymarlatt@capilanou.ca

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