

CONFEDERATION COLLEGE

# Student Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy

May 2015



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## INTRODUCTION

The Student Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy is the culmination of the efforts of the Confederation College Mental Health Working Group over the past two years. This strategy outlines a systemic approach to promoting mental health and well-being for all students of Confederation College. This is the realization of the first phase of development of a comprehensive mental health strategy that will enable all members of the College community to realize their potential for mental health and well-being in an environment conducive to learning, working, living and connecting with others.

Mental health promotion for employees is beyond the scope of this initial document. It is recognized that employees – faculty and staff, full and part-time, require support for their own mental health and well-being in order to fully support the mental health and well-being of students. It is hoped that the mental health and well-being of employees can be addressed strategically as part of the on going work of the Mental Health Working Group, in conjunction with partners like the Workplace Wellness Committee and Human Resources.

## KEY TERMS AND THEORY

### **MENTAL HEALTH CAN BE DEFINED AS:**

“the capacities 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 of mental health is aligned with Corey Keyes’ (2002) description of ‘flourishing’ (Canadian Association of College & University Student Services [CACUSS] and Canadian Mental Health Association [CMHA], 2012, p.6).

### **MENTAL WELL-BEING CAN BE DEFINED AS:**

“a dynamic process, in which a person’s external circumstances interact with their psychological resources to satisfy – to a greater or lesser extent – their psychological needs and to give rise to positive feelings of happiness and satisfaction” (New Economics Association, n.d.) (MacKean, 2011, p.11).

### **MENTAL ILLNESS OR DISORDER CAN BE DEFINED AS:**

“a mental or bodily condition marked primarily by sufficient disorganization of personality, mind, and emotions to seriously impair the normal psychological functioning of the individual” (Medline Plus Medical Dictionary, n.d.) (MacKean, 2011, p.12).

### **MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS CAN BE DEFINED AS**

“less than optimal mental health”, once again based on Corey Keyes’ model (MacKean 2011, p.12).

## CONFEDERATION COLLEGE MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT VISION, MISSION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

### VISION

To create a campus community that is deeply conducive to transformative learning and that enhances mental health and well-being.

### MISSION

To create a comprehensive mental health strategy for Confederation College that enables all members of the College community to realize their potential for mental health and well-being in an environment conducive to learning, working, living and connecting with others.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

#### *Respect*

We utilize a transparent process and take a compassionate approach to the topic of mental health and well-being. We support actions which are equitable for people with different beliefs, backgrounds, experiences and abilities.

#### *Collaboration*

We utilize collaborative relationships and processes. We support actions which involve collaboration by all stakeholders involved and recognize the rights of individuals to make informed choices.

#### *Evidence-based Approach*

We utilize research evidence, clinical knowledge and information from the College and extended community to determine actions which are evidence-based or promising practices.

#### *Realistic*

We are mindful of the efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of proposed actions. We begin with

evaluation of existing situations, policies, practices and resources to determine actions which will be beneficial and viable.

#### *Innovation*

We view the strategic development process as an opportunity for innovation and continuous improvement.

#### *Universality*

We support actions which enhance the healthiness and accessibility of the College for all school community members in combination with targeted actions to remove barriers for those who are adversely impacted by mental health problems.

#### *Capacity-building*

We support actions which build individual resilience, promote self-management and self-care, and build capacity within all systems and levels of the school to promote mental health and recognize and address mental health concerns.

## STRATEGY OVERVIEW

The Student Mental Health Strategy takes a comprehensive approach to student mental health. The strategy development process was guided by the Framework for Post-Secondary Student Mental Health developed by the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CACUSS) and the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA).

Recommendations are grouped by eight key priorities, in turn grouped by four strategic areas of focus: Policy, Environment, Mental Health Awareness and Literacy, and Direct Service.

These areas of focus align with the four sub-groups of the Mental Health Working Group. (Please note that the priorities are not listed in order of importance.) The Framework for Post-Secondary Student Mental Health includes seven key components for student mental health strategy development. The Confederation College Mental Health Working Group chose to combine the four components relating to students with concerns about coping and students with mental health concerns into the strategic focus area of Direct Services.

### POLICY

**Priority 1:** Policy which recognizes and supports mental health

### ENVIRONMENT

**Priority 2:** An inclusive, caring community

**Priority 3:** Promotion and support for healthy lifestyles

**Priority 4:** A physical environment conducive to positive physical and mental health

### MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS AND LITERACY

**Priority 5:** Increase awareness about mental health, mental health promotion and suicide prevention

**Priority 6:** Reduce stigma and discrimination

### DIRECT SERVICES

**Priority 7:** Early intervention for students at-risk or in distress

**Priority 8:** Increase strategic collaboration internally and externally

## POLICY

### PRIORITY 1: Policy which recognizes and supports mental health

Institutional policy has the potential to impact student mental health by reinforcing certain values, beliefs and behaviours, while discouraging others (CACUSS & CMHA, 2013). All policy that impacts social determinants of mental health has the potential to support and promote student mental health (Olding, 2014).

#### DONE TO DATE:

- Development of a lens for policy review
- Review of Student Accommodation Practices policy and Student Code of Conduct

#### RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

- Modify the Student Code of Conduct to provide clearer pathways for students to access mental health supports earlier in the disciplinary processes
- Modify the Student Accommodation Practices policy pending the release of the Condra's study (anticipated March 2015)
- Introduce Withdrawal and Return Policy for students with acute mental health issues in keeping with promising practices outlined in the report Policy Approaches to Post-Secondary Student Mental Health (Olding 2014)
- Incorporate the mental health lens into the College's existing/emerging process of ongoing policy review

## ENVIRONMENT

### PRIORITY 2: An inclusive, caring community

The College has the potential to be an environment where students build strong social connections with classmates, faculty, staff and members of the broader community – an evidence-based buffer against mental illness and proven method for promoting well-being (Aked, Marks, Cordon & Thompson, 2008). In focus groups, students highlighted the mix of social opportunities offered by the college as a strength (Confederation College, 2014a). This provides an opportunity to build on our success.

**DONE TO DATE:**

- LGBTQ Safer and Accepting Campuses Training (Part 1) conducted by Egale Canada Human Rights Trust through the MTCU's Mental Health Innovation Fund with 45 employees in June 2014.
- SUCCI and the College presently offer a wide range of social and educational opportunities for students
- Mental health and well-being competencies for faculty developed
- A representative appointed to the Accessibility Working Group to support Universal Design for Learning, an approach which supports inclusive and accessible learning experiences for all students (Jiminez, Graf & Rose, 2007)

**RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:**

- Continued LGBTQ Training (Part 2 of the Egale training available, online modules funded through the MTCU - Mental Health Innovation Fund to be available this fall)
- Introduce an LGBTQ Student Group with staff support as recommended by trainers from Egale
- Adopt mental health and well-being competencies for faculty and include in faculty training
- Introduce professional development focused on classroom management and promoting emotional and social safety in the classroom
- Continue to enrich programming through the APIWIN Centre for Aboriginal students
- Develop mechanism for allowing students to provide feedback and input into the improvement of the College community through the College website
- Implement Peer Mentoring or Peer Mental Health Championing with assistance from the Thunder Bay District Health Unit and Northern College (responsible for the peer mentoring pillar of the Bridging the Distance project)

### **PRIORITY 3: Promotion and support for healthy lifestyles**

Mental health is influenced by multiple social, psychological and biological factors. To promote mental health, it is necessary to provide an environment that allows students to adopt and maintain healthy lifestyles (World Health Organization [WHO], 2014).

**DONE TO DATE:**

- National College Health Assessment conducted in spring 2014

**RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:**

- Introduce a Health Promoter role with responsibilities to include collaborating with partners inside and outside the College, conducting and consulting research, generating evidence-based policies and programs, supporting curriculum integration, supporting health promotion through pedagogy, and providing education on mental and physical health
- Develop targeted interventions, including interventions which utilize Aboriginal cultural practices and teachings as recommended by student focus group participants, to address sexual health, substance use and other issues identified by the Confederation College Spring 2014 NCHA

**PRIORITY 4: A physical environment conducive to positive physical and mental health**

The physical environment of Confederation College includes a broad range of spaces at the locations which comprise the Thunder Bay campus and the eight regional campuses. The physical environment influences student mental health in a variety of ways including influencing student safety, social interactions, learning activities and the accessibility of services (CACUSS & CMHA, 2013).

**RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:**

- As recommended in the Situational Assessment Report, common mixed-use space should be reviewed to determine if there is adequate opportunity for both social and quiet/academic use (Confederation College, 2014a)
- As recommended in the Situational Assessment Report, modification of room numbering and mapping is recommended to reduce unnecessary stress and confusion caused by the current system (Confederation College, 2014a)
- Improve communication between departments regarding procedures, policies and practice, to ensure students and community members receive accurate information and are directed to the appropriate resources
- Integrate mental health/wellness programming relevant to Aboriginal students within the ongoing development of the Student Village (Confederation College, 2014c)
- Review the housing situation for international students, identified as a major concern of this group during the Situational Assessment (Confederation College, 2014a)

## MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS AND LITERACY

### PRIORITY 5: Increase awareness of mental health, mental health promotion and suicide prevention

The trend toward increased awareness of mental health, and particularly mental illness, indicates a positive change toward recognition of issues previously given little attention. It is important to recognize that mental health extends beyond mental illness, and is something all people possess and are affected by. A key aspect of mental health is the ability to manage problems, stress and conflict (Benight & Bandura, 2004). Improved mental health knowledge and literacy is required to promote resilience, healthy coping and effective responses to distress at the individual and community levels.

#### **DONE TO DATE:**

- 14 employees trained as safeTALK trainers
- safeTALK training for all first year students being introduced over the next two years
- Student Stress, Resilience and Well-being workshop at the Academic Showcase in May 2014 (14 attendees)
- Development of three online training modules for faculty and staff - Mental Health Basics, Recognizing and Responding to Students in Distress, and Student Stress and Resilience, released September 2014
- Video promoting the full range of services available to regional and distance education students through Bridging the Distance screened at regional orientations September 2014
- National College Health Assessment (NCHA) results and usage guide made available for faculty and staff September 2014

#### **RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:**

- Continue to publicize and promote use of NCHA results among faculty and staff
- Develop a mental health curriculum integration project to promote inclusion of College research in class lessons and student projects with the aim of raising awareness and influencing behavioural change. A study by Burggraf, Durbin and D'Ariano (2005), provides a basic example
- Introduce a new awareness campaign focused on promoting mental health and healthy coping rather than diagnosis/illness
- Update the College webpage to make it easier to learn more about College resources related to mental health, well-being and student success

- Seek new methods to increase student, faculty and staff understanding of effective stress management and the development of healthy coping skills
- Develop a scenario-based (interactive, narrative-style) online coping skills module for students
- Develop targeted interventions to increase awareness of mental health promotion and mental health services among international students whose different perspectives and needs were identified in the Situational Assessment (Confederation College 2014a)
- Develop professional development curriculum to support faculty in working collaboratively with student service providers (i.e. Aboriginal Counsellors, Academic Advisors/Navigators, Health Promoter, Peer Mentors, Spiritual Leaders) to facilitate academic success for Aboriginal students, including “trauma-informed” supportive practices and approaches (Confederation College, 2014b)

## PRIORITY 6: Reduce stigma and discrimination

Stigma and discrimination can create barriers to full participation, both inside and outside the classroom, for students affected by mental health problems. Stigma can reduce the willingness of people with mental health problems to seek help. Research suggests that the help-seeking behaviours of post-secondary students are adversely affected by self-stigma (Lally, O’Conghaile, Quigley, Bainbridge & McDonald, 2013). Despite increasing awareness of the prevalence of mental illness, student focus group participants expressed concern about stigma from classmates and faculty members, and sometimes inadvertently expressed stigma themselves (Confederation College 2014a).

### DONE TO DATE:

- SUCCI has spread awareness messages through poster campaigns and information booths (e.g. campaign raising awareness that one in five people will experience mental health problems, Yellow Umbrella Project)
- Mental Health First Aid training, which has a strong anti-stigma focus, was conducted for 134 College employees
- A section on stigma and people-first language was included in the Mental Health Basics online training module

### RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

- On going training on mental health, stigma and people-first language (in-person and online)

- Conduct follow-up survey for 2013-2014 recipients of Mental Health First Aid training
- Revisit the **respect.** initiative and update anti-stigma content
- Promote Aboriginal Learning Outcomes and the continued development and integration of Aboriginal history and Aboriginal perspectives within course curriculum

## DIRECT SERVICES

### PRIORITY 7: Early identification and intervention for students at-risk or in distress

The aim of early intervention is to prevent mental health problems and related issues from escalating in order to mitigate negative effects. Early intervention can improve the well-being of students and may increase the likelihood of positive academic outcomes. Early intervention can also reduce the individual, community and societal costs associated with a variety of different mental health problems (Knapp, 2012).

#### DONE TO DATE:

- Creation of the Recognizing and Responding to Students in Distress resource for staff and faculty
- Development of in-person and online training for Recognizing and Responding to Students in Distress
- Suicide counselling protocol reviewed by counselling staff
- Consulted with Student Success staff to review the “Welcome to Confederation College Survey”
- Expanded Bridging the Distance dedicated spaces to all regional campuses to increase regional students’ ease of access to counselling and student services
- Established a Bridging the Distance dedicated space in Thunder Bay for use by all faculty and staff

#### RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

- Implement Threat Risk Assessment committee and online reporting tool
- Adopt counselling suicide protocol
- Develop student crisis protocol
- Research alternative “early warning” systems
- Continue in-person and online training on Recognizing and Responding to Students in Distress
- Develop a comprehensive strategy including high-school outreach, “Residential Summer Orientation” and an intensive first-semester Peer Mentoring program to facilitate more effective transition to college for Aboriginal students (Confederation College, 2014b; Ontario Native Education Counselling Association, 2011).

## **PRIORITY 8: Increase strategic collaboration internally and externally**

Direct services provided by the College play a critical role in addressing the needs of students with mental health problems. Given the volume and complexity of students' mental health needs and the broad range of influences that affect student mental health, mental health cannot be supported by the Counselling department alone. Effective collaboration between departments and teams within the College, and with community partners, is necessary to ensure an effective response to the needs of students.

### **DONE TO DATE:**

- Met with representatives from Lakehead Public Schools
- Met with representatives from the Thunder Bay District Health Unit (TBDHU)
- Met with a representative from the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)
- Reviewed counselling referrals to outside agencies

### **RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:**

- Implement a Transition Committee with representatives from Student Accessibility Services, Counselling/ Mental Health Services and local school boards
- Enhance transition programming between Confederation College and Northern Nishnawbe Education Counsel (NNEC), Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School and Pelican Falls High School (Confederation College, 2014b)
- Have a representative from Confederation College join the local Suicide Prevention Task Force
- Implement semi-annual meetings between the College (Student Success, Counselling, Nurse Practitioner, SUCCI) and Health Promotion Managers from the Thunder Bay District Health Unit
- Collaborate with the Counselling Centre, St. Joseph's Care Group and the Interagency Referral committee to improve referral processes
- Collaborate with the Centre for Policy in Aboriginal Learning (CPAL) to address issues related to providing culturally relevant, appropriate support for Aboriginal students and faculty working with Aboriginal student populations
- Collaborate with external partners to provide professional development related to the provision of culturally competent counselling and student services for international students

## SUMMARY

POLICY	
Done to Date/In Progress	Recommended Next Steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of a lens for policy review</li> <li>• Review of Student Accommodation Policy and Student Code of Conduct</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modify Student Code of Conduct</li> <li>• Modify Student Accommodation Policy</li> <li>• Introduce Withdrawal and Return Policy</li> <li>• Incorporate the mental health lens into the College's existing/emerging process of on going policy review</li> </ul>
ENVIRONMENT	
Done to Date/In Progress	Recommended Next Steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LGBTQ Safer and Accepting Campuses Training conducted</li> <li>• A wide range of social and educational opportunities provided through SUCCI and the College</li> <li>• Mental health and well-being competencies for faculty developed</li> <li>• NCHA Survey conducted</li> <li>• Planning and introduction of an LGBTQ Student Group with staff support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue LGBTQ Training (Part 2 of the Egale Canada training available, online modules, or other options)</li> <li>• Adopt mental health and well-being competencies for faculty and include in faculty training</li> <li>• Introduce professional development focused on classroom management, emotional and social safety in the classroom</li> <li>• Continue to enrich programming through the APIWIN Centre for Aboriginal students</li> <li>• Develop mechanism for allowing students to provide feedback/input online</li> <li>• Implement Peer Mentoring or Peer Mental Health Championing program</li> <li>• Introduce a Health Promoter role</li> <li>• Develop targeted interventions, including interventions which utilize Aboriginal cultural practices to address sexual health, substance use and other issues identified during situational assessment</li> <li>• Involve key stakeholders in review of common use space</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modify room numbering and mapping to improve navigation of the physical environment</li> <li>• Improve interdepartmental communication to better support system navigation</li> <li>• Integrate mental health/wellness programming relevant to Aboriginal students within the ongoing development of the Student Village</li> </ul>
<b>AWARENESS MENTAL HEALTH KNOWLEDGE AND LITERACY</b>	
<b>Done to Date/In Progress</b>	<b>Recommended Next Steps</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 14 employees trained as safeTALK trainers</li> <li>• safeTALK training for all first-year students being introduced over the next two years</li> <li>• Student Stress, Resilience and Well-being workshop at the Academic Showcase Development of three online training modules for faculty and staff (Mental Health Basics, Recognizing and Responding to Students in Distress, and Student Stress and Resilience)</li> <li>• Promotional video for Bridging the Distance</li> <li>• NCHA results and usage guide made available for faculty and staff</li> <li>• SUCCI awareness campaigns (prevalence of mental illness, Yellow Umbrella Project, promotion of Healthy Minds app)</li> <li>• Mental Health First Aid conducted for 134 employees</li> <li>• Section on stigma and people-first language included in the Mental Health Basics training module</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to promote NCHA results among faculty and staff</li> <li>• Develop a mental health curriculum integration project</li> <li>• Introduce an awareness campaign focused on mental health and healthy coping</li> <li>• Update College webpage to make it easier to learn more about College resources related to mental health and well-being</li> <li>• Seek new methods to increase student, faculty and staff understanding of effective stress management skills and develop healthy coping skills</li> <li>• Develop an online stress coping skills module for students</li> <li>• Develop targeted interventions to increase mental health awareness among international students</li> <li>• Develop curriculum to support collaboration between faculty and student service providers to facilitate academic success for Aboriginal students, including “trauma-informed” supportive practices and approaches (Confederation College, 2014b)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On going training for faculty on mental health, stigma and people-first language (in-person and online)</li> <li>• Conduct follow-up survey for recipients of Mental Health First Aid training</li> <li>• Revisit <b>respect.</b> initiative and update anti-stigma content</li> <li>• Promote Aboriginal Learning Outcomes and the continued development and integration of Aboriginal history and Aboriginal perspectives within course curriculum</li> </ul>
DIRECT SERVICES	
Done to Date/In Progress	Recommended Next Steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of the Recognizing and Responding to Students in Distress resource for staff and faculty</li> <li>• Development of in-person and online training for Recognizing and Responding to Students in Distress</li> <li>• Suicide counselling protocol reviewed by counselling staff</li> <li>• Consulted with Student Success staff to review the “Welcome to Confederation College” Survey</li> <li>• Expanded Bridging the Distance dedicated spaces to all regional campuses</li> <li>• Established Bridging the Distance dedicated space at Thunder Bay campus</li> <li>• Meetings with school board representatives re: transition for students with mental illness</li> <li>• Met with TBDHU to discuss current initiatives and opportunities for collaboration</li> <li>• Met with CMHA to discuss current initiatives and opportunities for collaboration</li> <li>• Reviewed counselling referrals to outside agencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement Threat Risk Assessment committee and online reporting tool</li> <li>• Adopt counselling suicide protocol</li> <li>• Develop student crisis protocol</li> <li>• Research alternative “early warning” systems</li> <li>• Develop a comprehensive strategy to facilitate effective transition to college for Aboriginal students (Confederation College, 2014b; Ontario Native Education Counselling Association, 2011)</li> <li>• Implement a transition committee with representatives from local school boards</li> <li>• Have representation on the Youth Suicide Prevention Task Force</li> <li>• Implement semi-annual meetings with Health Promotions Managers from TBDHU</li> <li>• Collaborate with community partners to improve referral processes</li> </ul>

- Collaborate with the Centre for Policy in Aboriginal Learning to address issues related to support for Aboriginal learners
- Collaborate with external partners to provide professional development focused on culturally relevant counselling and student service provision

## STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

Over the past two years, individuals from across the College have demonstrated their interest in supporting mental health and well-being within the College community. At this time, both enthusiasm and accountability are necessary for progress to continue. Support and involvement from all levels of the College will be the key to the successful implementation of this strategy.

The adoption of this strategy provides an opportunity to renew enthusiasm of Mental Health Working Group members. The four sub-groups will reconvene to move forward on recommended actions. There is an opportunity to refresh the organization of each group, to ensure that appropriate leadership is in place. Key stakeholders must be involved in a manner that ensures recommended actions can be approached in an efficient and effective way. Members will be asked to commit to a regular meeting schedule and to the execution of specific strategic actions.

It is beyond the scope of voluntary group members to execute all of the recommended actions included in this strategy. Where possible, recommendations pertaining to the professional work of an existing team or department should become the responsibility of that team or department. This will require strategic leadership. If teams or departments require additional support to move forward with recommended actions, members of the Mental Health Working Group may be able to offer their skills and abilities. Additional resourcing will require the consideration of the High Level Steering Committee.

As efforts to promote post-secondary student mental health continue to develop, it will be essential to integrate learning from this on going process. An annual review will allow for monitoring and modification of this strategy.

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