

Mental Health and Well-being Strategy

2019/20 - 2023/24



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Executive Summary

NAIT'S commitment to supporting the mental health and well-being of students and staff is captured in our organizational promises to students, industry, Alberta, and staff and is consistent with our values of respect, collaboration, celebration, support, and accountability. The fulfillment of the responses within the strategy is also a fundamental element in supporting NAIT's vision to be one of the world's leading polytechnics.

The NAIT Mental Health and Well-being strategy is ambitious and aspirational. It identifies mental health and well-being as an institutional priority and lays the foundation for a cultural change on how mental health is perceived and how it is interconnected with overall well-being through education, stigma reduction, and direct support.

The Government of Canada has identified the availability of high-quality mental health services as a top priority in the new Health Accord¹ and in 2017, the Government of Alberta provided financial resources to post-secondary institutions throughout the province to improve mental health supports for their students.² In developing our mental health and well-being strategy, NAIT joins post-secondary institutes across Alberta and Canada in recognizing the interdependent relationship between mental health and academic success.

According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada:

- One in five people in Canada suffer from mental illness³
- The highest rate of mental health problems and illnesses is among young adults ages 20-29⁴
- For every dollar spent on providing psychotherapy, \$2 is saved⁵

A 2018 survey by the Academica Group discovered that during the 2017/18 academic year, 23% of respondents had seriously considered withdrawing from their educational institute. Forty percent (40%) of these students indicated that their reasons for considering withdrawal were "personal"; this included physical or mental health concerns that impacted their ability to continue their studies or a family crisis⁶.

There are eight dimensions that support mental wellness⁷: physical, social, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, occupational, financial, and environmental. NAIT's Mental Health and Well-being Strategy supports the dimensions of health through six initiatives:

- 1. Alignment of Institutional policy, procedures and processes
- 2. Awareness and well-being education
- 3. Resiliency and competency development
- 4. Early indication and response systems
- 5. Transition support, programming, and referrals
- 6. Supportive and inclusive campus environment

To inform the development of the Mental Health and Well-being Strategy, a working group, which included representatives from Student Advising, Aboriginal Liaison Services, Student Counselling, Health Services, International Programs and Services, Campus Recreation, and the Student Resolution office, was formed in fall 2017. The working group along, with the mental health coordinator, performed a review of current NAIT campus-based mental health and well-being activities, engaged with both internal and external stakeholders, and performed a gap analysis. Through this process, opportunities and responses were identified. A draft strategy was then reviewed by the NAIT Mental Health Strategy Advisory Group,

the Associate Vice President, Campus Life, and Campus Life Leadership. Next, the strategy was presented to NAIT's Academic Portfolio Leadership Committee. The Mental Health Advisory then reconvened to identify priorities within the strategy as high, medium, and less urgent and established an associated budget. Finally, the Mental Health and Well-being Strategy was presented to NAIT Executive for approval before being presented to the NAIT community.

The *Post-Secondary Student Mental Health: Guide to a Systemic Approach* framework developed by the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CACUSS) and the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) served as the foundation for the development of NAIT's Mental Health and Well-being Strategy.

NAIT's Mental Health and Well-being Strategy is meant to guide a proactive and holistic approach to supporting the mental health and well-being of NAIT students and staff in order to foster a sense of community, safety and pride, and to develop a culture where all members of the NAIT community are able to thrive.

Success will be realized when all members of the NAIT community have improved mental health literacy. Our students, staff, and graduates will be well-informed of the resources available within NAIT as well as in the community. They will have improved their resiliency and coping skills which will enable them to better face adversity and challenges. The community will be educated on mental health illnesses which will result in reduced stigma. NAIT prepares our students for rewarding careers. Educating our students and staff on mental health literacy, health promotion, and illness prevention will positively impact the province, country, and beyond.

Rationale/Purpose

To develop and implement a mental health and well-being strategy that is championed by all NAIT students and staff in support of a resilient, inclusive, and thriving community.

Mission

Within its strategic plan, NAIT 2021, NAIT has outlined promises to students, industry, Alberta, and staff. The mental health and well-being strategy will support NAIT in achieving its promises through education, awareness, and direct support. NAIT acknowledges that its student and staff community is diverse and that unique attributes of each group must be recognized in order to offer a comprehensive well-being program that supports all aspects of health.

Guiding Principles

Mental health is interconnected with our sense of belonging⁸. Our guiding principles recognize that we are stronger and healthier when we have a sense of belonging to a greater community.

The success of the Mental Health and Well-being Strategy relies on the active participation by all members of the NAIT community. The responsibility for promoting and protecting overall well-being is shared by everyone at NAIT.

The guiding principles are directed by many of NAIT's values:

- Respect We treat each other with respect, including behaviours of honesty, integrity, transparency, trust, and an appreciation for diversity.
- Accountability We are accountable, individually and collectively, to each other and to NAIT for our actions and for achieving our promises.
- Collaboration We work together and with external partners to advance NAIT and its academic mission in fostering relationships and in building community.
- Support We support people through empowerment, providing a safe and caring workplace and providing opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Foundations

There are eight dimensions of wellness⁹ that support mental health. These are:

- 1) Emotional feeling good and managing the ups and downs of life in a positive way
- 2) <u>Environmental</u> living and traveling in safe and secure environments and being responsible for your impact on the world around you
- 3) Financial satisfaction with current and future financial situations
- 4) Intellectual recognizing creative abilities and finding ways to expand knowledge and skills
- 5) Occupational having something to do and somewhere to go that is personally satisfying and gives you a sense of contribution or giving back to society
- 6) <u>Physical</u> fitness, strength, flexibility, nutritious eating habits, adequate sleep, avoidance of harmful substances and seeking health care assistance when needed
- 7) <u>Social & Cultural</u> interacting with others in a way that improves your sense of support and belonging
- 8) Spiritual knowing yourself and what you believe in and making choices that support this

The fundamental difference between mental health and mental illness is that everyone has some level of mental health all of the time, just like physical health. Where it is not possible to be without mental health, it is possible to be without mental illness¹⁰.

<u>Health</u>, as defined by the World Health Organization, is "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". ¹¹

<u>Mental health</u>, as defined by the World Health Organization, is "a state of well-being where every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and is able to make a positive contribution to his or her community".¹²

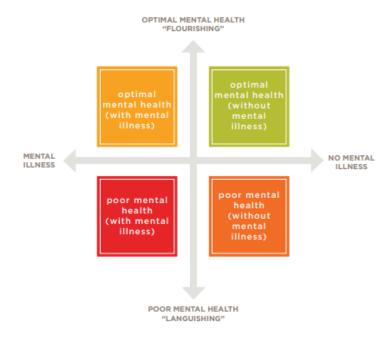
<u>Mental illness</u> is characterized by changes in mood, thinking, and behaviors that are associated with a particular level of distress and/or dysfunction. ¹³

Although the terms mental health and mental illness are often used interchangeably, it is important to understand the differences between the two concepts.

The mental health continuum model, developed by Corey Keyes, conceptualizes the components of mental health. Keyes' model reveals that mental health and mental illness occur on intersecting continuums which range from languishing (poor mental health) to flourishing (optimal mental health) and that those living with mental illness can flourish, while those without mental illness can languish.

Early identification and treatment of mental health concerns can prevent a person from languishing and assist them to return to or remain in a healthy state of being.

MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM



Dual continuum model of mental health. Adapted from the Post-Secondary Student Mental Health: Guide to a Systemic Approach; based on the conceptual work of Corey Keyes.

MENTAL HEALTH @ 🗑

Mental health impacts all of us. NAIT has committed to supporting the mental health and well-being of students, faculty and staff. While we've made great strides towards this commitment, there's still more we can do.

RESPONDENTS TO THE 2019 NCHA SURVEY REPORTED:



ACADEMIC IMPACTS DUE TO: STRESS: 35.8% SLEEP DIFFICULTIES: 30.6% ANYIETY: 28.4%



48% FOUND THEIR FINANCIAL SITUATION TRAUMATIC OR DIFFICULT TO HANDLE

STUDENT COUNSELLING APPOINTMENTS:









MARCH 2019 NAITSA SURVEY STUDENT RESPONDENTS:



OVER 60% RATED THEIR STRESS LEVEL AS HIGH OR VERY HIGH





RATED THEIR ANXIETY LEVEL AS HIGH OR VERY HIGH

2017 INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS SURVEY STAFF RESPONDENTS:



84% FELT THAT HEALTH AND WELL-BEING IS VERY OR MODERATELY IMPORTANT



PERSONAL STRESS
WAS THE SECOND
HIGHEST CONCERN
FOR PEOPLE
CONTACTING NAIT'S
EMPLOYEE AND FAMILY
ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
FOR COUNSELLING
SERVICES



1/5 Canadians experiences a mental health problem or illness within a given year. ¹ Every week 500,000 Canadians are unable to work due to mental health problems or illnesses.²

Suicide is #2 leading cause of death among Canadians aged 15-24.3

- Smetanin, P., Stiff, D., Briante, C., Adair, C., Ahmad, S. & Khan, M. (2011). The life and economic impact of major mental illnesses in Canada: 2011 to 2014. RiskAnalytica, on behalf of the Mental Health Commission of Canada
- 2. https://www.mentaihealthcommission.ca/English/focus-areas/mentai-health-matters
- 3. Statistics Canada. Table 102-0561. Leading causes of death, total population, by age group and sex, Canada. CANSIM (database). Last updated 2015.

Initiatives, Gaps and Opportunities, Responses

An analysis of current programs offered and services available to NAIT students and staff confirmed that supporting the mental health and well-being of the NAIT community is an institutional priority and that great work has already taken place. It was also acknowledged that there are areas for improvement and that gaps in service exist.

Current initiatives provide a snapshot in time. Initiatives are constantly being evaluated for effectiveness and impact. While initiatives may change, the intent is to be proactive in our approach to mental health and well-being with supports available for members of the NAIT community.

In 2019, NAIT administered its first American College Health Association – National College Health Assessment (ACHA-NCHA) survey. Almost 850 students responded to the survey and the results from that survey were considered when identifying initiatives that are of the highest priority.

NAIT recognizes that the NAIT Students' Association is a fundamental partner in supporting the mental health and well-being of NAIT students. While specific activities may be led by either group, collaborating in support of the greatest possible impact and outcome will serve to have the most significant benefit.

Six overall initiatives have been outlined in support of building and maintaining a resilient, inclusive, and thriving community. Each initiative contains responses that will be measured for success through both qualitative and quantitative methods. Once approved, working groups will be formed for the responses within the strategy, outcomes will be mapped to the Mental Health strategy, key metrics will be developed and defined to track progress toward our mental health goals at NAIT.

While development and maintenance of programs and initiatives may live with specific stakeholders, incorporating the strategy into the culture of work and school life is the responsibility of the entire NAIT community.

Although the strategy supports both staff and students, the oversight for the strategy will be the responsibility of Polytechnic Education and Student Success. A central coordination point will oversee response actions, lead the strategy, champion unity of programs, and collect and analyze data on initiatives to ensure they continue to meet their objectives and the needs of the NAIT community. This central point of coordination will also assume responsibility for reporting on the strategy.

Initiative 1: Alignment of Institutional policy, procedures and processes

The policies, procedures, and processes of the institute contribute to an organization's culture and are reflective of its values. Ensuring alignment between policy, procedures and processes and strategic goals that support mental health contributes to the well-being and engagement of the campus community.

Current Initiatives and Supports	Student	Staff	Reflected
			Dimension(s)
NAIT Vision	✓	✓	All
Strategic Plan 2021	✓	✓	All
The NAIT Way: People Matter	✓	✓	All
Collective Agreements		✓	All
Performance Enhancement Process		✓	All
Policy Review and Revision	✓	✓	All
Internationalization Strategy		✓	All
Aboriginal Strategy		✓	All
Student Rights and Responsibilities	✓	✓	Environmental
		•	Social
Respectful Workplace		./	Environmental
		V	Social

Opportunities and Current Gaps	Response	Priority
Mental health programs on campus are increasing, but lack coordination,	Centralize coordination of mental health and well-being activities in order to align	High
consistency, and sustainability.	offerings, communication, and evaluation as well as to create efficiencies.	
While the NAIT community has made strides to foster an inclusive environment by recognizing and removing barriers, efforts have not been part of a broad, institutional strategy.	Develop a Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.	High
There is an opportunity to consider mental health in the regular review of policies, procedures, and processes.	A guide will be created to use when developing policy, procedure and processes that ensures mental health is considered in the development process.	Lower
The nature of educational delivery can negatively affect mental health.	Critically evaluate systemic factors in the delivery of education to determine factors that negatively impact mental health and well-being. Develop strategy to remove or lessen the impact of these factors.	Lower
Departments and schools strive to provide students with the tools and skills to be successful, but there exists the opportunity	Develop a Student Success Strategy.	Lower

to develop a collaborative and harmonized		
strategy between all schools and		
departments.		
Poor or lack of sleep is a top health concern	Investigate if current policies and	Lower
for students, impacting academic success	procedures or facilities enable students'	
and stress levels.	poor sleep habits.	

Initiative 2: Awareness and well-being education

Mental health awareness and well-being programs endeavor to improve mental well-being through increased knowledge and understanding of the factors that contribute to well-being. Programming also strives to educate the community on the nature, impact, prevention, and management of mental health concerns. This deepened understanding is a proponent in reducing stigma, normalizing mental health conversations, and encouraging early help-seeking.

Promoting overall well-being through initiatives that reflect the eight dimensions of mental health encourages self-care and healthy behaviours.

Current Initiatives and Supports	Student	Staff	Reflected
			Dimension(s)
Student Counselling Centre	✓		Emotional
Health Services	✓	✓	Physical
Recreation and Fitness Programming	✓	✓	Physical
Registered Dietician	✓	✓	Physical
			Emotional
Employee Family Assistance Plan (Morneau Shepell)		√	Financial
Employee Family Assistance Fian (Morneau Shepell)		•	Occupational
			Physical
PAWS with Flynn	✓	✓	Emotional
Chaplaincy Services	✓	✓	Spiritual
			Environmental
Safe Spaces and pride week activities	✓	\checkmark	Social
			Spiritual
			Emotional
Tough Enough to Talk About it	✓		Intellectual
			Occupational
Mental Health First Aid	✓	\checkmark	Emotional
			Intellectual
The Inquiring Mind	✓		Emotional
Bell Let's Talk Day	✓	\checkmark	Emotional
			Intellectual
		,	Emotional
Make Some Noise for Mental Health	✓	\checkmark	Intellectual
			Social
Birds Chirds Days	✓	✓	Environmental
Pink Shirt Day	'	v	Social
Well being Day		√	Spiritual All
Well-being Day		v	Environmental
Orango Shirt Day	✓	✓	Social
Orange Shirt Day		V	
			Spiritual Emotional
Movember	✓	✓	Physical
ivioveilibei		•	Social
			Social

Opportunities and Current Gaps	Response	Priority
Mental health programs on campus are	Centralize management of mental health	High
increasing but lack coordination and	and well-being activities under one	
consistency, and sustainability.	coordinator in order to align offerings,	
	communication and evaluation.	
Poor mental health literacy and the stigma	Implement education programming to	Medium
associated with mental health illness	reduce stigma, increase mental health	
prevent those in need from seeking help.	literacy and promote awareness of the	
	importance of supporting mental health.	
A sense of isolation and a lack of belonging	Purposefully engage affected populations in	Medium
result in populations in the NAIT community	relevant and meaningful ways.	
not engaging in or not having access to well-		
being supports.		
Some students and staff are unaware of	Develop a centralized website which lists all	Lower
many of the services, resources and	external and internal campus mental health	
supports related to mental health and well-	and well-being initiatives and programs,	
being available on and off campus.	regardless of owner, in one location.	
	Implement a robust awareness campaign.	

Initiative 3: Resiliency and competency development

Mental health is not static – it lies along a continuum and changes depending on the challenges we face. The ability to achieve a state of well-being is dependent on one's capacity to cope with external demand factors and to create an internal sense of well-being through learned and developed skills such as resiliency and coping abilities. It also contributes to one's ability to find meaning and purpose in life.

Current Initiatives and Supports	Student	Staff	Reflected Dimension(s)
Student Counselling Centre	✓		Emotional
Chaplaincy Services	✓	✓	Spiritual
Recreation and Fitness Programming	✓	✓	Physical
Employee Family Assistance Plan (Morneau Shepell)		√	Emotional Financial Occupational Physical
Personal and professional development opportunities offered through Organizational Development Services		√	Intellectual Occupational Social
Life After NAIT	✓		Occupational
Resume review and mock interviews	✓		Occupational
International Peer Mentor workshops and programming	✓		Intellectual Social
Newcomer booster: Preparing students for academic success	✓		Occupational Social
Learning Services	✓		Intellectual
Essential Career Skills	✓		Intellectual

Opportunities and Current Gaps	Response	Priority
A structured, cohesive, and centralized	Investigate, create and implement	High
resiliency program for students and staff is	resiliency programming for students and	
not in place.	staff.	
Times of transition can strain coping	Identify opportunities to enhance support	High
strategies and diminish mental health.	during times of transition to build personal	
	coping and management skills.	
There is an opportunity to customize	Collect and analyze data on current	High
mental health and well-being programs	participation rates in mental health and	
based on institutional needs.	well-being activities to purposefully offer	
	programming that is of the greatest interest	
	and benefit to the NAIT community.	
After academics, finances are the second	Develop financial literacy programming for	High
biggest stressor that students classify as	students and staff.	
traumatic or difficult to handle.		

Initiative 4: Early indication and response systems

Educating students and staff on how to identify and respond to early signs of distress is essential as those who interact with others in the community on a daily basis are in the best position to notice early indications of concern. To effectively identify and respond to distress, adequate and appropriate response systems must be in place and the NAIT community must be educated on how to access them.

Current Initiatives and Supports	Student	Staff	Reflected
			Dimension(s)
Student Counselling Centre	✓		Emotional
Health Services	✓	✓	Physical
Learning Services	✓		Intellectual
Hub and Spoke Advising Framework, Academic Advising	√		Intellectual
	•		Occupational
International Student Advisors	✓		Intellectual
	v		Occupational
Employee Family Assistance Plan (Morneau Shepell)			Emotional
		✓	Financial
		•	Occupational
			Physical
Behaviour Intervention and Support Team	✓		Environmental
Mental Health First Aid	√	✓	Emotional
		<u>, </u>	Intellectual
The Inquiring Mind	✓		Emotional
Settlement and Transition Tool - International			Environmental
	✓		Financial
			Social
Outreach and Well-being Leaders			Emotional
			Environmental
	✓		Occupational
			Physical
			Social
International Peer Mentors			Emotional
			Environmental
	✓		Occupational
			Physical
			Social
Aboriginal Peer Mentors			Emotional
			Environmental
	✓		Occupational
			Physical
			Social

Opportunities and Current Gaps	Response	
Self-screening options are not readily	Promote web-based self-screening	High
available on campus to support self-	programs for students and staff.	

awareness of contributors to poor mental		
health.		
Staff may be unaware of learning	Create a process to ensure that staff have	High
accommodations that students have in	access to relevant student information as it	
place.	affects their education.	
Students and staff may lack knowledge of	Develop a resource and/or provide training	High
how and where to refer colleagues when a	that offers guidelines on how to make a	
mental health concern is identified.	proper referral and identifies the breadth of	
	resources available as well as when each	
	resource would be an appropriate referral.	
Students and staff may lack knowledge of	Increase awareness of educational	Medium
how to identify early signs of mental health	programming to enable students and staff	
concerns.	to identify signs of mental distress in both	
	self and others.	
	Ensure programming and on-line resources	
	are easily accessible to families.	
The opportunity exists to create an early	Support the phased implementation of an	Medium
indication system for identifying mental	early alert program to proactively identify	
health, academic, or other concerns.	those who are at risk of not thriving.	

Initiative 5: Transition support, programming, and referrals

Accessible mental health and well-being services are a critical part of a systemic approach to supporting mental health. Services and programming must be uniquely placed in order to support students and staff on many levels and at different stages of the student and staff life cycle.

Members of the NAIT community that require services beyond the scope of NAIT resources will be referred to the full range of supports and programs available externally. Support, flexibility, and collaboration through periods of change will assist with smooth transitions.

Current Initiatives and Supports	Student	Staff	Reflected
			Dimension(s)
Student Counselling Centre	✓		Emotional
International Student Centre counsellor (dedicated)	✓		Emotional
Health Services	✓	✓	Physical
Employee Family Assistance Plan (Morneau Shepell)			Emotional
		✓	Financial
		•	Occupational
			Physical
International Student Advisors	✓		Occupational
Behaviour Intervention and Support Team	✓	✓	Environmental
Chaplaincy Program	✓	✓	Spiritual
Athletics			Occupational
	✓		Physical
			Social
Respectful Workplace		✓	Environmental
		•	Social
Women in Non-traditional programs			Environmental
	✓	\checkmark	Occupational
			Social
Kickstart		✓	Financial
		•	Occupational
Student Awards and Financial Aid	✓		Financial
Hub and Spoke Advising Framework, Academic Advising	1		Intellectual
			Occupational
Career Services	✓		Occupational

Opportunities and Current Gaps	Response	Priority
The scope of on-campus mental health	Work with external partner organizations	High
supports is limited.	within Edmonton and surrounding areas to	
	expand support and to increase access to	
	mental health resources through alternate	
	service models and at alternate locations.	

Transition between services may lead to	Develop stronger coordination between on-	High
interruption in service or a strain on the	campus and off-campus services to support	
individual's coping mechanisms.	community needs being met without	
	interruption.	
Students may be uncomfortable discussing	Equip staff to initiate safe financial	Medium
financial difficulties.	conversations with students.	
The NAIT community is diverse. Intersecting	Engage an intersectional approach when	Lower
identity factors and lived experience	considering mental health supports and	
profoundly affect an individual's response	well-being initiatives to ensure they take	
to policies, programs and initiatives.	into consideration individual needs.	

Initiative 6: Supportive and inclusive campus environment

A supportive and collaborative campus enhances engagement, creates a sense of community¹⁴, and may also positively impact academic success and improve staff performance and job satisfaction.

Generating conditions for meaningful participation in the campus community and intentionally creating physical spaces that are gathering places may promote positive interactions, minimize stress, and encourage well-being.

Current Initiatives and Supports	Student	Staff	Reflected
			Dimension(s)
Centre for applied Technology Gold LEED certified	✓	✓	Environmental
International Student Centre and programming			Emotional
			Environmental
	✓	\checkmark	Financial
			Occupational
			Social
Nîsôhkamâtotân Centre and programming			Emotional
	✓	✓	Environmental
	·		Occupational
			Social
Long Service Awards		✓	Social
Staff Well-being and PD Days		✓	All
Safe Spaces and pride week activities			Emotional
	✓	\checkmark	Environmental
			Social
Mosaic Festival	✓	✓	Social
Reflection Rooms	✓	✓	Spiritual
Women in Non-traditional programs			Environmental
	✓	\checkmark	Occupational
			Social
Well-being lounge	✓		Physical
Recreation and Fitness facilities and programming	✓	✓	Physical
	,	<u>, </u>	Social
New Student Orientation	✓		Financial
	,		Social
Welcome Week	✓		Social
New Staff Celebration		✓	Social

Opportunities and Current Gaps	Response	Priority
There are opportunities to collaborate with	Review current student and staff surveys to	Medium
students and staff to evaluate campus	identify additional opportunities to	
mental health and well-being initiatives.	measure effectiveness of programming as	
	well as overall well-being of the NAIT	
	community.	

Opportunities to improve physical spaces to	Create design standards that consider space	Lower
facilitate and support mental health.	impacts on mental health to be used when	
	creating informal and formal learning and	
	working spaces.	
Poor or lack of sleep is a top health concern	Provide a quiet space on campus for	Lower
for students, impacting academic success	students to rest.	
and stress levels.	Educate students on the importance of	
	sleep and the impacts of lack of sleep on	
	well-being and academics.	
	Investigate possibility of instructors not	
	setting project deadlines of midnight.	

Next Steps

The NAIT Mental Health and Well-being Strategy is a holistic guide that serves to document the current state of mental health and well-being at NAIT, to identify gaps and opportunities and to elucidate our desired future state. It also provides a dynamic roadmap that enables the flourishing and thriving mental health of the NAIT community.

As new information and emerging needs are identified through Advanced Education, surveys of post-secondary students, publication of the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety of Post-Secondary Students and other means, the strategy will undergo revisions to guarantee it remains relevant, connected, and topical.

Execution of the strategy will begin with working groups being formed and tasked with defining performance indicators, outlining assessment tools, and implementing effective responses. A robust communication plan will be developed to ensure the engagement of the entire campus community and promote our partnerships with external organizations.

Initiatives identified within the strategy will be implemented and experience success through accountability, support and collaboration among stakeholders, including the Mental Health and Wellbeing Advisory Group.

Acknowledgements (Resources)

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