



COLLABORATIONS

FOR CHANGE

Collaborations for Change 2025 Conference Summary

APRIL 20, 2026

**BEST PRACTICES IN CANADIAN HIGHER EDUCATION NETWORK AND
THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING STRATEGY**

Collaborations for Change 2025 Conference Summary

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Executive Summary

The 2025 Collaborations for Change (C4C) Conference was hosted by the [Best Practices Network](#) and the [University of Calgary's Community Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy](#) with support from the [Canadian Association of College and University Student Services](#). The conference was delivered virtually on August 13–14, 2025, bringing together students, researchers, educators, practitioners, and mental health leaders from across Canada. As the first national conference focused exclusively on post-secondary student mental health within the Canadian campus context, C4C provides a unique forum to bridge research and practice while positioning students as active partners in systems-level change. Supported by lead funding from the [Rossey Foundation](#), and in part by the [Mental Health Commission of Canada and Health Canada](#), the 2025 conference featured keynote sessions, concurrent presentations, and rapid-fire talks organized across five thematic streams. The conference attracted 258 participants representing diverse institutions, sectors, and regions. Across sessions, three dominant themes emerged: student partnership as a driver of meaningful change; a shift from individual services toward integrated, systems-level approaches; and the central role of equity, diversity, and inclusion in post-secondary mental health practice and campus culture. Evaluation results demonstrated strong impact, with 90% overall satisfaction, high ratings across conference content and delivery, and widespread intent to recommend the conference to colleagues.

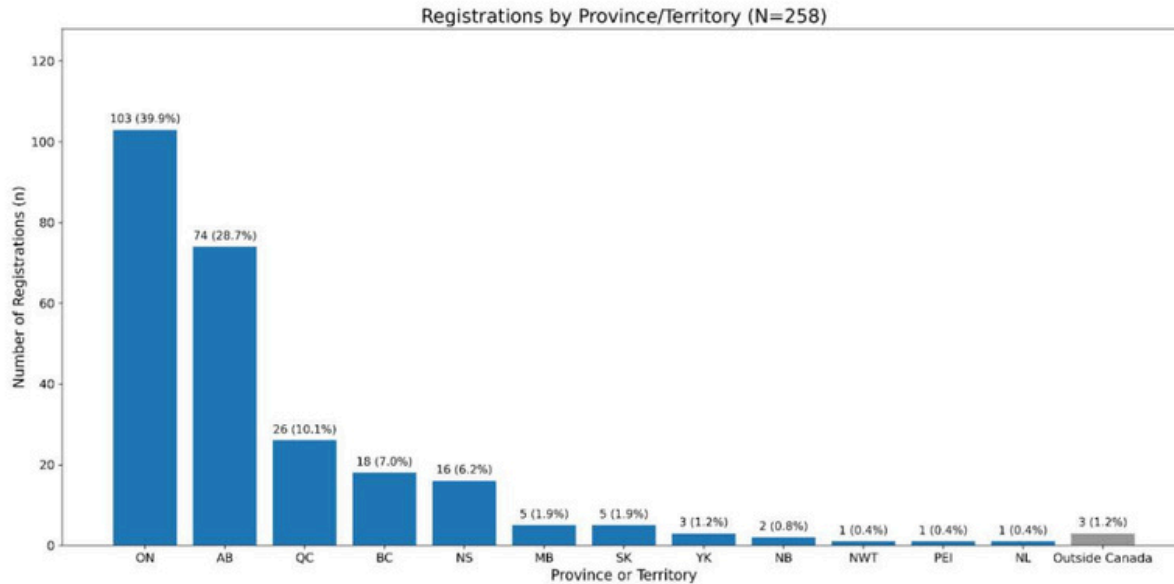
Conference Summary: Connecting Research and Practice in Post-Secondary Mental Health

Conference Format and Programming

The C4C 2025 Conference was delivered virtually over August 13th and 14th, 2025. The two-day program offered a diverse range of session formats designed to support learning, dialogue, and connection. Programming was organized across five thematic conference streams:

1. Transforming post-secondary culture through strategy and action (11 sessions)
2. Integrating well-being into teaching practices: promoting a healthy classroom environment (6 sessions)
3. Supporting students amidst global events (1 session)
4. Post-secondary student mental health research: engaging the next generation of student researchers (8 sessions)
5. Shifting to a health promotion approach to address post-secondary mental health and well-being (9 sessions)

The conference included two one-hour keynote sessions, *Understanding the Smartphone Generation's Mental Health* by Jean Twenge (San Diego State University) and *Inspiring Teachers*



As shown in the above table, the strongest participation in Canada came from Ontario and Alberta, followed by solid representation from Quebec, British Columbia, and Nova Scotia. Nunavut was not represented among registrants.

Conference Themes

To better understand how ideas and practices connected across the conference, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify key themes that emerged from presentation content. Themes that emerged were developed by coding keywords and ideas from the presentation titles and session abstracts, this analysis identified the following three themes that cut across all five streams:

1. Student partnerships as a driver of meaningful change
2. Shifting from individual services to integrated, system-level approaches
3. Centering equity deserving populations in post-secondary mental health.

Theme One: Student Partnership as a Driver of Meaningful Change

Across the conference, students were consistently positioned as active partners in mental health strategy, program design, teaching and learning, and research. Presentations emphasized co-creation, peer leadership, and student-led initiatives as important approaches for developing programming, services, and health promotion activities that are relevant and responsive to diverse student needs. Student partnership was presented not as a supplementary element, but as a foundational component of mental health initiatives across post-secondary institutions.

This theme was reflected in presentations describing the development and early implementation of student-led, peer-to-peer mental health initiatives focused on improving mental health literacy and creating opportunities for students to learn from one another's lived

by Angela Sterritt. The program also featured 28 peer-reviewed 45-minute sessions, with up to four sessions running concurrently, and 7 five-minute rapid-fire presentations designed to spotlight emerging research and practice.

Consistent with prior C4C conferences, the program incorporated opportunities for reflection, connection, and cultural grounding. These included live wellness breaks (yoga and meditation), after-hours Hot Topic discussion sessions, a trivia-based icebreaker, and opening and closing prayers led by Elder Alvin Kube. Full program details were made available through the conference platform and website (<https://collaborationsforchange.ca/>).

Registration and Demographics

C4C 2025 attracted a total of 258 registrants, representing 50 post-secondary institutions across 10 provinces and 2 territories. Reflecting the conference's intended audience, C4C 2025 was promoted to individuals across diverse roles within post-secondary institutions, including students, faculty, researchers, student affairs and mental health professionals, and institutional leaders.

A smaller group of registrants also represented a wide range of other external sector partners (7.4%), including community organizations and hospitals (2.3%), government departments and agencies (1.9%), student organizations (1.2%), and mental health networks (0.7%), as well as other affiliated organizations (1.2%).

The conference demonstrated growing national reach, with registrations recorded from all regions of Canada. A small number of international registrations (1.2%) were also recorded from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Ireland.

experiences. For example, Butler et al. (2025) shared the process of initiating multiple peer-to-peer initiatives at the University of Alberta, including student-led workshops, classroom presentations, and the formation of a student advocacy group focused on disability justice, with particular attention to equity-deserving student communities.

Student partnership was also evident in student-developed health promotion initiatives designed to engage peers through accessible and relevant formats. Ranta et al. (2025) described *Well-being & YU*, a student-led podcast that explores wellness topics relevant to student life while connecting listeners to campus supports and resources. The presentation emphasized inclusive design, accessibility, and the prioritization of topics relevant to equity-deserving groups. In addition, student-driven research initiatives highlighted opportunities for students to lead, participate in, and share mental health research. In another presentation, Zhang et al. (2025) described an annual student-led engagement event designed to support learning, dialogue, and knowledge mobilization related to student mental health research and policy.

This theme was also reflected in the *Student Researcher Panel – Growing Pains and Gains: Graduate Student Voices in Mental Health Research*, which centered graduate students' perspectives on conducting mental health research within post-secondary contexts. This panel is a core feature of the conference each year. In 2025, Panelists shared how lived experience, personal motivation, and academic training intersect in shaping their research trajectories, while also reflecting on the challenges of navigating graduate studies alongside their own mental health and well-being. The discussion highlighted the importance of supportive supervisory relationships, peer and institutional support, and inclusive research environments. By positioning graduate students not only as trainees but as knowledge producers and partners in shaping the future of the field, the panel reinforced student partnership as a critical driver of meaningful and sustainable change in post-secondary mental health research and practice.

Collectively, these presentations illustrate a shift towards recognizing students' lived experience as an important source of knowledge that informs both research and practice.

Theme Two: Shifting from Individual Services to Integrated, Systems-Level Approaches

A dominant theme across conference programming was the movement away from isolated or reactive mental health services toward coordinated, institution-wide approaches to student mental health and well-being. Rather than focusing solely on individual programs or interventions, many presentations emphasized alignment across institutional policies, practices, data systems, and strategic planning processes.

Several sessions focused on the implementation of national and institutional frameworks to support whole-campus approaches. Ferguson et al. (2025) explored how post-secondary institutions across Canada are using the National Standard for Mental Health and Well-Being for Post-Secondary Students to inform evolving strategies, address challenges, and foster campus-wide cultures of wellness. The session highlighted the use of tools such as the Campus Mental Health Action Tracker, alongside existing data sources, to support coordinated and sustained implementation efforts.

Systems-level thinking was also reflected in presentations focused on population-level measurement and data-informed decision-making. Faulkner and Wu (2025) provided an update on the implementation of the Canadian Campus Wellbeing Survey (CCWS), emphasizing its role in understanding mental health and health behaviours across campus communities and supporting intervention prioritization, evaluation, and program refinement. Complementing this work, Rawana et al. (2025) shared lessons learned from developing a pan-university well-being strategy informed by community engagement, data analysis, and alignment with other institutional priorities such as equity, decolonization, and sustainability.

Together, these presentations framed student mental health as a shared institutional responsibility embedded within governance, planning, and accountability processes, rather than the sole domain of health and wellness departments.

Theme Three: Centering Equity-Deserving Populations in Post-Secondary Mental Health

A substantial portion of conference programming focused explicitly on equity-deserving student populations and the structural conditions shaping their mental health and well-being. Across sessions, presenters emphasized the importance of moving toward inclusive, culturally responsive, and identity-affirming practices that reflect the diverse experiences of students within post-secondary environments.

Several presentations highlighted institution-level efforts to integrate equity considerations into mental health systems and planning. Blake et al. (2025) described how John Abbott College used institutional data to identify disparities in mental health distress among gender and ethnic minority students and to inform action priorities related to diversifying and decolonizing mental health practices. These efforts emphasized cross-departmental collaboration, partnerships with Indigenous education leaders, and a focus on belonging, cultural safety, and relationships.

Equity-focused programming also addressed the experiences of specific student populations. Haukenfrers (2025) explored factors shaping the experiences of autistic and neurodivergent students, highlighting the role of language, identity affirmation, and universal design approaches in creating inclusive academic and social environments. Gendered and sexuality-based experiences were also a clear focus. Fabiano (2025) presented on a peer-supported exercise intervention designed to support mental well-being among undergraduate women, while Amestoy (2025) and Wong (2025) shared research examining the mental health experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ and transgender and gender-diverse students, including the roles of campus social climate, identity affirmation, and access to supportive resources.

Collectively, these presentations exemplify that equity was not treated as a standalone topic of the conference, but integrated research, teaching, peer support, service design, and systems-level initiatives. Together, they reflect a shared recognition that advancing post-secondary student mental health requires intentional, equity-informed approaches that address structural barriers and support diverse student identities and experiences.

Conference Evaluation

A post-conference evaluation survey was distributed to all registered participants following the conclusion of the 2025 Collaborations for Change (C4C) Conference. A total of 51 surveys were analyzed, representing approximately 20% of registered attendees.

Overall Satisfaction and Perceived Value

Overall satisfaction with the 2025 conference was high, with 90% of respondents reporting being satisfied or very satisfied with the conference overall. Strong ratings across core components of the event were evident, including conference content, scheduling, virtual format, and technology (ranging from 86% to 92% satisfaction). Respondents consistently indicated that the conference supported learning, reflection, and engagement with current issues in post-secondary student mental health.

Keynote sessions were particularly well received as they were both rated between 95% and 97% for satisfaction rate, highlighting both the relevance of the topics and the effectiveness of the speakers. Attendance data further reinforced this finding, with 78% of respondents attending the keynote by Dr. Jean Twenge and 73% attending the keynote by Angela Sterritt. Satisfaction ratings ranged from 72% for interactive discussion rooms to 97% for the Angela Sterritt keynote, demonstrating strong engagement across diverse session formats.

Respondents emphasized the relevance of the conference to their professional and academic roles. Many cited the opportunity to learn about emerging research, promising practices, and system-level approaches to post-secondary mental health as primary motivations for attending. Importantly, 41% of respondents reported having attended a previous C4C conference, suggesting sustained interest and ongoing sector engagement. Looking ahead, 63% indicated an intention to attend the 2027 conference, and 90% stated they would recommend the conference to colleagues, reinforcing the perceived value and credibility of the event.

Areas for Improvement

Respondents identified areas for improvement consistent with feedback from previous C4C conferences. Feedback included challenges related to virtual networking, limited opportunities for informal connection, and occasional technical or interface-related constraints. Presenters expressed a desire for enhanced visibility into participant engagement during sessions, such as greater access to attendee cameras, chat functions, and live Q&A features. These insights will inform refinements to session design and platform use in future conferences.

Conclusion

The 2025 Collaborations for Change Conference demonstrated the continued relevance and impact of a national forum dedicated to advancing post-secondary student mental health in Canada. Strong participation, high satisfaction ratings, and rich thematic content emphasize the conference's role in bridging research and practice, centering student partnership, and promoting systems-level, equity-informed approaches. Together, the conference findings point to a sector that is increasingly aligned around shared responsibility for student mental health and committed to collaborative, evidence-informed action. Building on this momentum, future

C4C conferences will continue to strengthen opportunities for connection, learning, and collective leadership to support meaningful and sustainable change across post-secondary environments.

Acknowledgements

The 2024–2025 C4C Conference was made possible through the collective efforts and shared wisdom of a broad community dedicated to post-secondary student mental health.

Cultural Leadership

We express our deep gratitude to **Elder Alvin Kube** for leading us in the opening and closing prayers. His guidance provided the foundational spirit for our gathering, grounding our work in reflection, tradition, and community. [SY1]

Our Partners and Funders

This gathering was a collaborative effort hosted by the **Best Practices Network** and the **University of Calgary**, with support from **the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services**. We are sincerely grateful to the **Rossy Foundation** and **the Mental Health Commission of Canada** for their generous support, which made this national knowledge-exchange possible.

Partners & Planning Committee

Finally, we thank the volunteers, facilitators, and the C4C Planning Committee. Your commitment to student partnership is the primary driver of the meaningful change we seek to achieve.

Presentations

The success of C4C rests on the contributions of the individuals listed below. While several are cited within the thematic summary of this report, we wish to formally acknowledge the presenters for sharing their research, practice, or lived experience.

Stream 1: Collaborations and Partnerships

Focus: Initiatives bridging the gap between research, practice, and administration.

Alostaz, Z. (2026). *Inter-institutional research collaborations: Lessons from C4C* [Conference presentation].

BPN Representative. (2026). *Scaling up: A national network approach to best practices* [Conference presentation].

Brennenstuhl, S., & Yuen, S. (2026). *The power of partnership: Building a multi-institutional wellness framework* [Conference presentation]. University of Toronto.

Hayman, J. (2026). *A collaborative pilot initiative to improve mental health in post-secondary institutions* [Conference presentation]. Greenspace Health.

Hews-Girard, J. (2026). *Community-led crisis support: Co-designing with non-profits* [Conference presentation]. University of Calgary.

McDougall, G. (2026). *Integrating clinical and academic wellness supports* [Conference presentation].

Ward, M. (2026). *Cross-sectoral alliances for student success* [Conference presentation].

Stream 2: Impact on Health and Well-being

Focus: Measuring outcomes, coping mechanisms, and the efficacy of mental health services.

Docci, M. (2026). *Stress management interventions in high-intensity academic environments* [Conference presentation].

Egelson, P., & Fuga, C. (2026). *Longitudinal outcomes of early intervention programs* [Conference presentation].

Mah, L., & Schroeder, M. (2026). *Measuring wellbeing: The relationship between coping, self-efficacy, and stress* [Conference presentation]. University of Calgary.

Nagler, B. (2026). *Impact of virtual counseling on remote student populations* [Conference presentation].

Purser, R. (2026). *Sleep, diet, and mental health: A holistic student perspective* [Conference presentation].

Ravi, H. (2026). *Quantitative insights into peer support efficacy* [Conference presentation].

Yuen, S. (2026). *Evaluation of perception of mental health among students using campus-based services* [Conference presentation]. University of Toronto.

Stream 3: Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Accessibility (EDIA)

Focus: Removing barriers and creating inclusive environments for marginalized groups.

CASUHS Representative. (2026). *LGBTQ2S+ mental health: Creating safe spaces on campus* [Conference presentation].

Cooke, K. (2026). *Neurodiversity and wellness: Tailoring campus supports* [Conference presentation].

Health Canada Representative. (2026). *International student well-being: A cultural adaptation approach* [Conference presentation].

MHCC Representative. (2026). *Supporting inclusive student engagement in campus mental health* [Conference presentation].

Oriuwa, C. S. (2026). *Addressing racial trauma in post-secondary settings* [Conference presentation]. University of Toronto.

Perez-Roberson, S. (2026). *Bridging the gap: Accessibility in digital mental health tools* [Conference presentation].

Tadlock, J. (2026). *First-generation student challenges and support strategies* [Conference presentation].

Stream 4: Decolonization and Indigenization

Focus: Integrating Indigenous ways of knowing and honoring traditional leadership.

Carr-Braint, B., & Price, R. (2026). *Centering Indigenous voices: A panel on cultural safety* [Panel presentation].

Faculty Representative. (2026). *Decolonizing the curriculum: Impact on student mental health* [Conference presentation]. University of Calgary.

Graduate Student Lead. (2026). *Community-based research in Indigenous student wellness* [Conference presentation].

Indigenous Student Liaison. (2026). *Land-based learning as a mental health strategy* [Conference presentation].

Kube, A. (2026). *Ceremonial foundations of wellness* [Conference presentation].

Saulteau First Nation Representative. (2026). *Integrating traditional healing practices into student services* [Conference presentation].

Wasegijig, J., & Bickley, M. (2026). *Indigenous counsellor panel: Navigating Two-Eyed Seeing* [Panel presentation].

Stream 5: Systemic Approaches

Focus: Policy-level changes, suicide prevention frameworks, and institutional strategies.

Administrative Lead. (2026). *Systemic barriers to mental health service delivery* [Conference presentation].

C4C Signatory Representative. (2026). *Financial flows and tracking: Accountability in wellness funding* [Conference presentation]. Charter 4 Change.

Communications Specialist. (2026). *Advocacy and communication: Scaling systemic change* [Conference presentation].

Dimitropoulos, G. (2026). *Co-creating peer support interventions for crisis and suicide* [Conference presentation]. University of Calgary.

Lindsay, B. (2026). *Sharing our experiences of collaborative co-creation: Suicide stigma reduction* [Conference presentation]. University of Calgary.

Rossy Foundation Policy Analyst. (2026). *The national standard for post-secondary mental health: One year later* [Conference presentation].

UCalgary Mental Health Strategy Team. (2026). *Developing a campus-wide suicide awareness and prevention framework* [Conference presentation]. University of Calgary.

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- Amestoy, M. (2025). *Exploring the impact of outness and collective self-esteem: An investigation into their effects on the relationship between a positive school environment and mental health outcomes among 2SLGBTQ+ post-secondary students*. Collaborations for Change Conference.
- Blake, M., Martin, K. T., & Beaulieu, D. (2025). *Using the national standard, student data (CCWS), and campus collaborations to diversify and decolonize mental health and well-being services*. Collaborations for Change Conference.
- Butler, C., Cabildo, C., & Jiruwala, Z. (2025). *Student voices in action: Learnings from three peer education and advocacy initiatives*. Collaborations for Change Conference.
- Fabiano, M. (2025). *The SHINE (Supporting Her in Navigating Exercise) program: Examining peer support as a mental health promotion tool among undergraduate women*. Collaborations for Change Conference.
- Faulkner, G., & Wu, C. (2025). *Implementing a coordinated Canadian post-secondary measurement system: An update on the Canadian Campus Wellbeing Survey (CCWS)*. Collaborations for Change Conference.
- Ferguson, S., Hosan, N., & Spicer, J. (2025). *From framework to action: Advancing mental health strategies through the national standard and beyond*. Collaborations for Change Conference.
- Haukenfrers, J. (2025). *From understanding to action: Bridging gaps in understanding the autistic student experience*. Collaborations for Change Conference.
- Rawana, J., Pirooz, H., & Ranta, T. (2025). *Launching a pan-university well-being strategy: Lessons learned from community engagement to strategy implementation*. Collaborations for Change Conference.
- Ranta, T., Luthra, P., & Beheiry, S. (2025). *Well-being & YU: A health promotion podcast by students for students*. Collaborations for Change Conference.
- Wong, C. (2025). *Exploring motivations surrounding gender-affirming gear in transgender and gender-diverse post-secondary students*. Collaborations for Change Conference.
- Zhang, C., Buckley, R., & Sethi, A. (2025). *Inlight student engagement day: Student-driven empowerment in post-secondary student mental health research*. Collaborations for Change Conference.