

	Student Mental Health and Well-Being Policy #6.4	
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EFFECTIVE DATE: January 31, 2025	REVIEW DATE: July 1, 2025	
APPROVAL: Board of Governors		
SPONSOR: Dean of Students		
CONTACT: Dean of Students		
PREVIOUS VERSIONS: N/A		

RELATED POLICIES

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1. PREAMBLE & SCOPE

1.1 Commitment to Mental Health and Well-being

OCAD University is committed to fostering a healthy and supportive campus environment where the community of emerging artists and designers can thrive mentally, emotionally, academically, and creatively. Recognizing the unique role that creativity plays in mental well-being, OCAD U weaves art and design into the continuum of mental health and well-being prevention, education, crisis intervention, and ongoing supports available. This policy applies to all students and provides a comprehensive framework for supporting mental health through both traditional methods and creative approaches.

1.2 Whole-Campus Approach

This policy follows a whole-campus approach, emphasizing that mental health is the responsibility of all members of the OCAD U community, including students, staff, faculty, and administration. The policy promotes mental health and well-being through prevention, education, crisis intervention, and ongoing support, centering the unique and intersectional needs of emerging artists and designers.

1.3 Mental Health Continuum

OCAD U recognizes that promoting mental health is more than the treatment of mental illnesses. Objectives laid out in this policy outline a cohesive community approach to student mental health and are intended to promote positive mental health, prevent distress and/or the worsening of symptoms, and create social and structural conditions for all students to thrive. The policy also outlines the provision of a range of mental health services as well as response

to crises.

1.4 Statement of Intersectionality

The University recognizes that mental health, access to mental health services, and the willingness to seek support are disproportionately impacted for individuals at the intersection of multiple identities. These include but are not limited to, Indigenous, Black and People of Colour, those whose gender identity, expression, or sexual orientation diverge from traditional norms, people with disabilities, and members of historically marginalized communities, including international students, refugees, and immigrant members of our community.

1.5 Alignment with Provincial and National Standards

This policy aligns with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities' Student Mental Health Directive, the National Standard of Canada for Mental Health and Well-being for Post-Secondary Students, the Okanagan Charter, and Universities Canada Principles on Indigenous Education. The policy also upholds OCAD U's commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and their response to the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

1.6 Land Acknowledgement

This Policy applies to all OCAD U's community members, OCAD University acknowledges the ancestral territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabeg and the Huron-Wendat, who are the original owners and custodians of the land on which we work, stand, and create.

2. Provide Evidence-Based Supports & Streamline Mental Health Support

2.1 A Continuum of Mental Health Services

A continuum of services to meet a range of mental health needs are available at OCAD University to match the diversity of student needs and preferences at different times. This continuum includes trauma-informed, student-centred, and evidence-based counselling services, specialist services, peer support services, self-care tools and referrals that ensure accessibility across physical, cultural, linguistic, financial, and administrative dimensions.

2.1.1 Diverse Accessibility

Diverse accessibility is crucial at OCAD U due to the diverse student body, which includes international and underrepresented students, and unique experiences as emerging artists and designers. Support services may not be readily available to the majority of students outside the institution, so OCAD U will ensure on-campus and virtual support services are robust, and accessible and offer choices to encourage self-determination of engagement.

2.1.2 Promotion of Services and Referral Processes

Support services will be widely promoted across the university, and accessibility and referral processes will be communicated to ensure all students are aware of how to seek help and access services.

2.1.3 Students In Distress Protocol

The protocol identifies the roles, responsibilities and procedures for all OCAD U community members when there is a student in distress. Through clearly defined and communicated protocols, there can be effective and efficient response, as well as reduction of additional distress during critical moments. [OCAD U Students in Distress Protocol](#) strives to:

- Ensure that accessible mental health support, awareness, promotion, and prevention services are in place, and that information is widely available across campus.
- Provide clear pathways and processes for noticing, engaging and referring, to ensure the most appropriate measure is taken to support a student in distress
- Encourage interdisciplinary consultation and referrals, such as partnerships with community organizations and digital service providers to provide diverse service options.

2.2 Implement Campus-Wide Mental Health Awareness, Literacy & Education Initiatives

2.2.1 Mental Health Campaigns

OCAD U will implement mental health campaigns to increase awareness and knowledge across the campus community. These initiatives will include stigma reduction campaigns, integrating visual arts and design to create engaging and impactful messages around mental health. Students will have opportunities to participate in creating campaign materials, such as public art installations, digital media, and design projects, that promote help-seeking behaviours and emphasize the importance of mental well-being alongside academic success.

3.2.2 Student Engagement and Training

Training programs will be designed and offered for students to develop positive coping skills, stress management, and resilience. These programs aim to reduce stress, anxiety, and other concerns while promoting overall well-being and building community resilience through creative expression. Through training, students then engage in the following activities:

- Co-design with the student community to create programming, promotion and initiatives to support mental health and well-being at OCAD University
- Provide mental health literacy training to managers, faculty, staff, and students.
- Regularly implement stigma reduction campaigns and messaging.
- Offer training on self-management competencies, resilience-building, and coping skills to students.
- Take a train-the-trainer approach to educate and train further students and continually build community resilience

2.3 Foster a Supportive & Inclusive Campus Environment

2.3.1 Physical and Cultural Environment

OCAD U works to ensure that its environment supports the flourishing of all students as they pursue their academic goals. This includes the creation of physical spaces designed through art and design principles that are welcoming, safe, and accessible, as well as a learning environment that promotes mental well-being.

OCAD U prioritizes the creation of non-academic physical spaces across campus that foster wellness, rest and connection. Strategically locating these spaces in multiple locations across campus buildings, designed for the unique and diverse student community.

OCAD U has additionally identified quiet space(s) on campus for purposes of academic accommodation(s) as well as non-academic student needs, providing space for mental and emotional rest with low light and low stimulation.

OCAD U offers dedicated cultural-specific spaces on campus, including a multifaith room. Exploration of additional dedicated spaces continues, to reflect the needs of OCAD U's diverse student population.

2.3.2 Accessibility for Mental Health Accommodations

OCAD U has a formal [accommodation policy](#) and processes available for students, staff and faculty with permanent or temporary mental health-related disabilities, as well as processes for non-disability-related accommodations and extenuating circumstances. OCAD U recognizes that during the course of studies, mental health concerns or extenuating circumstances can interfere with some students' abilities to meet academic requirements and not all of these students have a diagnosed mental health condition. Therefore, OCAD U strives to ensure processes recognize and reduce barriers for students who require mental health-related accommodations to ensure students receive the necessary support to thrive both academically and personally. Including,

- Develop processes that recognize barriers and facilitate mental health accommodations for students.
- Cultivate a culture that emphasizes the importance of mental health alongside academic goals.
- Implement universal design for learning (UDL) principles in the classroom and across campus where appropriate.

2.4 Promote Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

2.4.1 EDI and Mental Health

OCAD U will integrate EDI into its mental health services and strategies to ensure that students from marginalized and underrepresented backgrounds have equitable access to mental health

support. These students often face microaggressions, unconscious bias, and other barriers that disproportionately affect their mental health.

2.4.2 EDI Commitment

OCAD U is committed to creating a campus environment where individual differences are recognized, embraced, valued, and integrated into all aspects of OCAD U's mental health services and support. Including:

- Implement anti-racism, anti-oppression, and cultural humility training for all community members, especially mental health service providers.
- In collaboration with the Indigenous community integrate Indigenous wellness practices into health services and prioritize engagement with Indigenous communities.
- Prioritize recruitment of IBPOC and 2SLGBTQIA+ student support staff who are representative of the student population.
- Provide resources for students, staff, and faculty to address systemic barriers and report discrimination.

2.4.3 First Nations, Inuit and Métis Student Wholistic Wellness

OCAD U recognizes the systemic barriers faced by First Nations, Inuit and Métis students and is committed to providing culturally specific, wholistic interventions that support Indigenous students' mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual wellness. Such as access to traditional healing supports and practices, community engagement initiatives and mentorship programs.

2.5 Reinforce Institutional Commitment and Promote a Shared Responsibility for Student Mental Health Across Campus

2.5.1 Institutional Commitment

OCAD U recognizes that mental health is a shared responsibility that requires the support and engagement of all members of the university community. Senior administration will ensure that processes, resources, and procedures are in place to meet the objectives laid out in this policy.

2.5.2 Student Engagement

Students will be viewed as ongoing and equal partners in addressing mental health challenges, and structures will be in place to encourage student participation in mental health initiatives and decision-making. Including.

- Assign a senior leader to oversee the implementation of this policy and ensure compliance.
- Communicate to the broader OCAD U community that mental health is a shared responsibility and call for action from all community members.

- Create structures for gathering feedback on how to improve student mental health at OCAD U.
 - Encourage participation from students of diverse backgrounds in decision-making processes across the institution.
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3. Roles & Responsibilities

All OCAD University community members play an active role in building an environment that promotes student mental health and well-being. Therefore, the following stakeholder groups have been identified as primary contributors in upholding this policy to ensure that students thrive during their time at OCAD U. During the inaugural year of this policy, all roles will be clarified, with clear expectations, responsibilities and commitments identified and updated in the policy accordingly.

- OCAD U Student Wellness Committee (“SW Committee”)
 - OCAD U Board of Governors
 - [OCAD U Indigenous Education Council](#)
 - Directors, Managers, and Supervisors
 - Faculty
 - Student Leadership: OCAD U Student Union & Other Student Leaders
 - Students
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4. CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY

4.1 General Confidentiality

All mental health disclosures and services accessed by students will be treated in accordance with **Ontario’s Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA)**.

Confidentiality will be maintained to protect the privacy of students seeking mental health support. Only authorized personnel involved in the provision of services or crisis management will have access to relevant information.

4.2 Limits to Confidentiality

Confidentiality will not be maintained in situations where there is a risk to the health and safety of the student or the university community, or where disclosure is required by law. Information may be shared with university personnel or external authorities if it is necessary to address an imminent risk of harm or comply with legal obligations.

4.3 Confidential Support Services

Students accessing mental health services at the **Student Wellness Centre (SWC)** can do so confidentially, all records are maintained in accordance with the **Ontario’s Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA)**. The SWC offers a range of services, including counseling, medical support, and academic accommodations, and can assist students without

disclosing the nature of their situation to faculty or other departments. To access academic accommodations, students are not required to disclose a diagnosis.

5. POLICY EVALUATION AND REPORTING

5.1 Annual Reporting

OCAD U will submit an annual report on the implementation and effectiveness of this policy to the **Board of Governors** and the **Minister** by **January 31** each year, starting in **2026**. This report will be made publicly available on the OCAD U website.

5.2 Policy Review

The **Student Wellness Committee** will review this policy annually by **July 1** to ensure it reflects current best practices and meets the evolving needs of the student body. Feedback from students, faculty, and staff will be incorporated into the review process.

5.3 Consultation with Stakeholders:

The **Student Wellness Committee** will regularly consult with students, faculty, staff, and other key stakeholders in the development, implementation, and review of the Student Mental Health Policy to ensure it reflects the needs of the OCAD U community.

5.4 Compliance with Ministry Directives

OCAD U will ensure full compliance with the Ministry's Student Mental Health Directive by meeting all reporting requirements and implementing recommended practices in mental health care and crisis management.

6. KEY DATES AND DEADLINES

- **January 31, 2025:** Full implementation of the Student Mental Health Policy.
 - **January 31, 2026:** First annual report due to the Board of Governors and the Ministry.
 - **July 1 (annually):** Policy review and evaluation by the **Student Wellness Committee (SW Committee)**.
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7. DISTRIBUTION OF THE POLICY

OCAD U will widely publicize this policy using multiple channels, including email communications, the university website, and student orientation materials. Updates to the policy will be disseminated as necessary.

8. DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are derived from best practices related to student mental health and have been shaped through community consultations at OCAD University. These terms should be reviewed during a full policy evaluation and revised as needed.

Accessible Mental Health Services:

Mental health services designed to meet the diverse needs of OCAD U students, ensuring that barriers related to race, ethnicity, age, income, immigration status, ability, gender, sexuality, geographic location, or health status are minimized in the delivery of services.

OCAD U Community:

Refers to all students, staff, faculty, management, and volunteers who are part of the OCAD U campus, whether engaging remotely or in person.

Coping Skills:

Techniques, tools and/or strategies that individuals use to manage stressful situations. These skills help people address challenges, take action, and remain persistent and flexible in problem-solving.

Diverse Accessibility

Refers to the concept of ensuring that services, resources, and environments are accessible to people from various backgrounds, identities, and abilities, taking into account differences such as physical, cultural, linguistic, financial, and social factors. It acknowledges that traditional, one-size-fits-all approaches to accessibility may not meet the needs of a diverse population, and therefore, it aims to reduce barriers that prevent individuals from accessing services or spaces.

Dual Continuum of Mental Health and Wellbeing:

A model that promotes mental health for all students, regardless of the presence of mental illness symptoms. This model emphasizes building positive mental health and well-being, whether or not a student is experiencing mental health issues.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI):

Refers to initiatives and work that promote equity, diversity, and inclusion at OCAD U. EDI intersects with social justice work, such as anti-racism, decolonization, and reconciliation, and seeks to foster a sense of belonging across campus.

Flourishing:

A state where individuals experience high levels of subjective well-being, alongside optimal psychological and social functioning.

Harm Reduction:

An approach that seeks to reduce the negative consequences of risky behaviors rather than focusing solely on stopping the behaviors altogether.

IBPOC Students:

Students who identify as Indigenous, Black, and/or People of Colour.

Languishing:

A state where low levels of subjective well-being coincide with low levels of psychological and social functioning.

2SLGBTQIA+ Students:

Students who identify as having diverse sexual orientations and gender identities that are not strictly heterosexual or cisgender. 2SLGBTQIA+ stands for Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex and additional people who identify as part of sexual and gender diverse communities.

Mental Health:

A state of mental well-being in which students can effectively manage the stresses of life, achieve their potential, and contribute meaningfully to their community. Mental health is recognized as a basic human right and an essential part of personal, communal, and socio-economic well-being.

Mental Health Emergency:

Any situation where an individual is at risk of harming themselves or others, or where they are unable to care for themselves due to mental health-related issues.

Mental Health Literacy:

The knowledge and understanding that enables individuals to recognize psychological stress and mental health disorders, understand risk factors and causes, identify self-help strategies, and navigate professional mental health services and resources.

Positive Mental Health:

A focus on the positive aspects of mental health, emphasizing the growth potential of strengths, abilities, and qualities such as responsibility, courage, creativity, and resilience. A person with high positive mental health is thriving, whereas someone with lower levels of positive mental health may be languishing.

Resilience:

The ability to adapt successfully to challenging or stressful life experiences, demonstrating emotional and behavioral flexibility and persistence in the face of adversity.

Student Union (SU):

The OCAD University Student Union (OCADSU) is a non-profit, student-run organization representing students at the institutional, provincial, and national levels.

Stigma:

The negative attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes that contribute to feelings of shame or discrimination around mental health issues. Stigma can be influenced by societal norms and policies, as well as by individual behaviors and language.

Student Community:

All individuals who are pursuing full-time or part-time studies at OCAD U, including those between terms or enrolled in special programs.