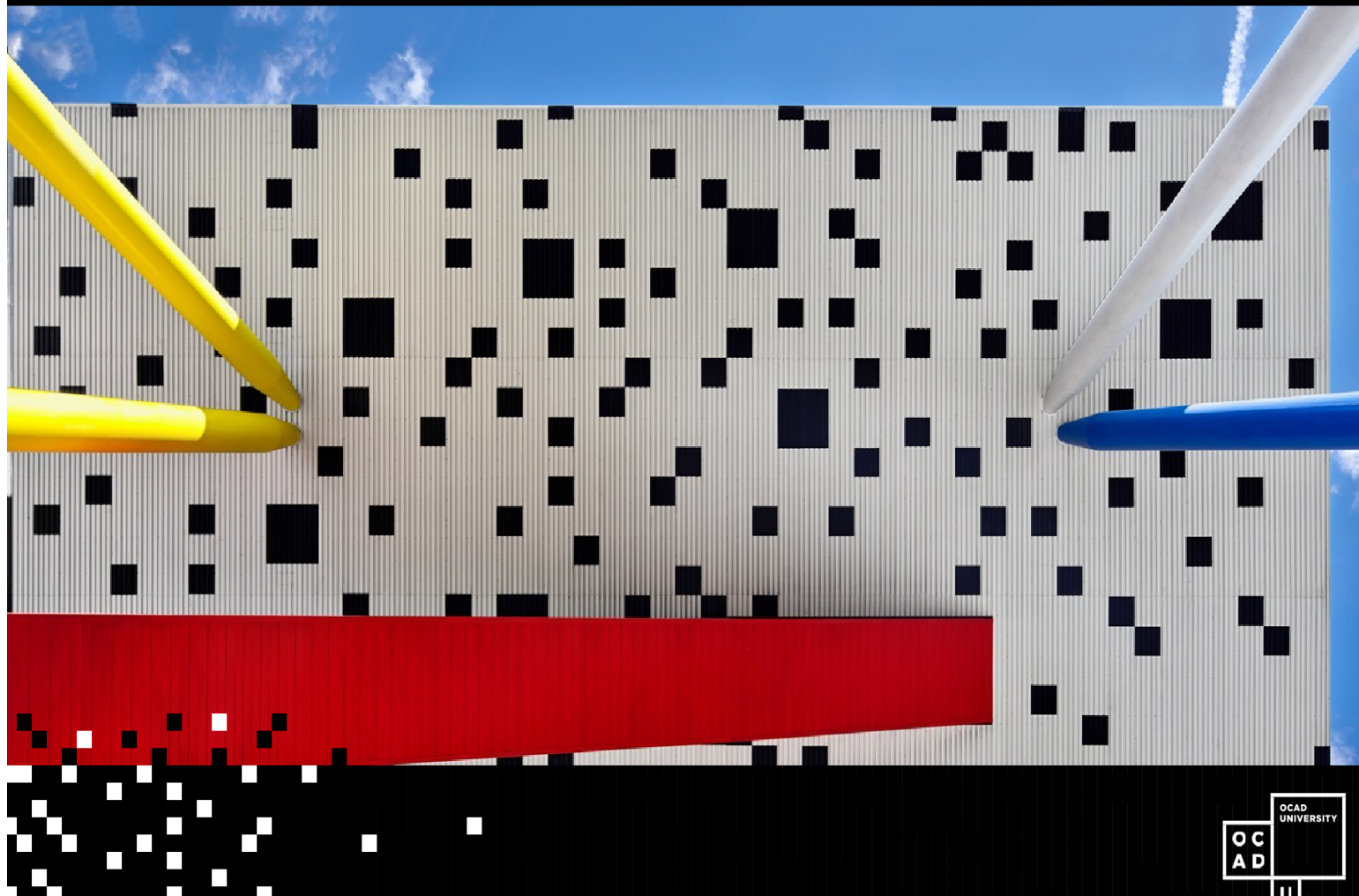


OCAD University Student Mental Health

Annual Report 2025

Student Mental Health and Well-Being Policy Implementation



Executive Summary

In September 2024, OCAD University received a directive on Student Mental Health from the Minister of Colleges, Universities and Research Security (MCURES). In response to the *Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024*, the University's *Student Mental Health and Well-Being Policy* was approved by the Board of Governors, outlining the programs, services, and supports available to promote student mental health and well-being.

OCAD University's current *Student Mental Health and Well-Being Policy* builds on more than a decade of institutional commitment to student mental health. In 2013, the University implemented a campus-wide mental health strategy that established foundational initiatives across prevention, services, education, and campus culture. Many of these initiatives have continued to evolve over time and remain embedded within OCAD University's approach to student support.

In accordance with provincial legislation, OCAD University is required to present an annual report to the Board of Governors on the implementation and effectiveness of the *Student Mental Health and Well-Being Policy*. This Annual Report fulfills that requirement and summarizes campus-wide mental health and well-being initiatives active during the 2025 reporting period (January 1, 2025 – December 31, 2025), including initiatives launched in prior years that continued or evolved during this time. The report highlights system-level implementation across prevention, early intervention, peer support, clinical services, accessibility, and coordinated non-clinical supports.

To support early implementation, the University established an initial advisory structure composed of campus stakeholders with direct responsibility for student mental health and well-being. This structure supported timely coordination and will evolve over time to enable broader engagement, oversight, and continuous improvement as implementation progresses.

Land Acknowledgement

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 live, work and create.

Key Areas of Focus

OCAD University's Student Mental Health and Well-Being Policy is organized around four key areas of focus that guide implementation and reporting. Together, these areas reflect a whole-campus approach to student mental health and well-being and provide a framework for coordinating services, supports, education, and continuous improvement across the institution.

1. Continuum of Mental Health Supports and Crisis Response

OCAD University is committed to providing a continuum of mental health supports that respond to the diverse and evolving needs of students. This includes prevention and early intervention, access to counselling and health services, peer support, referral pathways, and coordinated responses to students in distress. The continuum approach recognizes that mental health exists on a spectrum and that timely, appropriate supports are essential to reducing distress, promoting recovery, and supporting students' ability to engage in their academic and creative studies.

2. Mental Health Promotion, Literacy, and Education

The University prioritizes mental health promotion and literacy as foundational components of student well-being. This includes campus-wide awareness initiatives, training and education for students, staff, and faculty, and the integration of creative and participatory approaches that reflect OCAD University's art and design context. These efforts are intended to reduce stigma, increase help-seeking behaviours, build resilience, and strengthen the community's capacity to recognize and respond to mental health concerns.

3. Supportive, Accessible, and Inclusive Campus Environment

OCAD University recognizes that mental health is shaped by the physical, cultural, and academic environments in which students learn and create. The University works to foster campus environments that support well-being through inclusive and accessible spaces, flexible accommodation processes, and practices that reduce barriers to participation. This includes attention to non-academic spaces for rest and connection, academic accommodations related to mental health, and the application of universal design principles where appropriate.

4. Equity, Diversity, and Indigenous Wholistic Wellness

Equity, diversity, and inclusion are central to OCAD University's approach to student mental health and well-being. The University acknowledges that mental health outcomes and access to supports are shaped by intersecting identities and systemic barriers. This area of focus includes commitments to culturally responsive services, anti-racism and anti-oppression practices, and dedicated approaches to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis student wholistic wellness. These efforts are informed by ongoing engagement with Indigenous communities and align with the University's broader commitments to reconciliation and inclusive excellence.



Message from the Dean of Students

Over the past year, OCAD University has seen increasing complexity in the mental health and well-being needs of its students. Academic and creative demands, financial pressures, social isolation, substance use concerns, and broader societal and global stressors have contributed to sustained growth in demand for mental health and well-being supports across campus.

In response, the University moved from policy development to system-level implementation of the *Student Mental Health and Well-Being Policy*, in alignment with Bill 166 and the Minister's Student Mental Health Directive. This reporting period marked a year of significant implementation, including the rollout of a redesigned Student Wellness Centre service model, the establishment of low-barrier peer-led supports through the Student Living Room, and the expansion of the Dean of Students Office to strengthen early intervention, care coordination, and trauma-informed support for students experiencing distress or complex challenges.

Collectively, these initiatives reflect a deliberate shift toward a more integrated, accessible, and sustainable approach to student mental health and well-being at OCAD University. The work outlined in this report demonstrates coordinated, institution-wide action to support students in meaningful and measurable ways, grounded in collaboration, equity, and student-centered practice.

I would like to thank the many individuals and teams across the University whose work made this progress possible. Through continued collaboration, reflection, and improvement, OCAD University remains committed to supporting student mental health and well-being in ways that reflect the realities of our community and the evolving needs of our students.

Take care,

Jennifer Robinson

Dr. Jennifer Robinson, Ph.D., C.Psych.

Dean of Students | Clinical Psychologist



Advancing Student Mental Health at OCAD University

During the reporting period, OCAD University moved from policy development to system-level implementation of its *Student Mental Health and Well-Being Policy* in response to the requirements of Bill 166 and the Minister's Student Mental Health Directive. This phase focused on structural changes to how student mental health supports are organized, accessed, and delivered across the institution. Through these changes, existing services were strengthened and better coordinated, while targeted new initiatives were introduced to address previously identified gaps in access, early intervention, and student-centred engagement. Together, these actions reflect a deliberate shift from fragmented supports toward a more integrated, responsive, and sustainable system of care.

Implementation of a Redesigned Student Wellness Centre Service Model

In 2024 OCAD University completed a Student Wellness Centre Service Design Review examining student experience across the Student Wellness Centre, Student Accessibility Services, and related non-clinical support pathways, including those now delivered through the Dean of Students function. The review engaged students and staff to identify barriers to access, fragmentation in service delivery, and points of friction in the student support journey.

During the current reporting period, the Dean of Students portfolio implemented key components of this redesigned service model to improve coordination, clarity, and early intervention across student mental health and well-being supports. Implementation actions included streamlining intake and follow-up processes, clarifying service pathways, and strengthening coordination across clinical, peer-based, and non-clinical supports.

As part of the broader implementation of the redesigned service model, Student Accessibility Services expanded its physical infrastructure with the opening of a new Test and Exam Centre.

The Centre provides dedicated quiet work and exam spaces designed to support students with disabilities, strengthening access to academic accommodations and reducing environmental barriers that can exacerbate mental health and cognitive stress.

As a result of these changes, longstanding access barriers were significantly reduced. The counselling waitlist, which previously extended to approximately one year, was reduced to an average of one to two months during the reporting period. Students experienced clearer entry points to care, fewer administrative steps, and more timely access to appropriate levels of support.

This work strengthened OCAD University's existing stepped-care, multidisciplinary model by enhancing integration across services and reinforcing a student-centered continuum of mental health supports, with an increased emphasis on early identification and timely low barrier interventions.



Third Space: Creation of a Low-Barrier, Peer-Led Mental Health Ecosystem

A central component of the redesigned system was the creation and expansion of the Student Living Room and the Peer-led Mental Health Program. Opened in Spring 2024 in direct response to student feedback, the Student Living Room functions as a consistent, non-clinical “third space” where students can rest, connect, and access support without appointments or formal thresholds.

Supported by funding from the McCall MacBain Foundation, the Peer-led Mental Health Program engages students as trained Peer Health Promoters to co-design wellness programming, provide one-to-one peer support, and deliver service navigation and referrals. During the reporting period, Peer Health Promoters were present Monday to Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., establishing a predictable, low-barrier point of access for students.

Approximately 5,000 student visits to the Student Living Room were recorded during the period, demonstrating sustained demand for early, stigma-free supports. This peer-led model strengthened prevention and early intervention, reduced pressure on clinical services, and expanded access for students who may be less likely to engage with formal care pathways.

Systemically, this work shifted mental health support at OCAD University away from counselling as the sole or primary entry point, toward a layered model that integrates peer support, community connection, and clinical care.

“The peer-led drop-in programs in the Student Living Room have become a vital part of daily student life, offering comfort and a sense of belonging.”

Strengthening Early Intervention, Care Coordination, and Trauma-Informed Support through the Dean of Students Office

During the reporting period, OCAD University implemented and expanded the Dean of Students Office (DSO) as a core component of the University’s student mental health and well-being system. Supported through ancillary fee funding, the DSO transitioned from a single-role function to a dedicated office with expanded staffing, including a Manager and two Student Support and Behaviour Intervention roles. This investment significantly increased the University’s capacity for early intervention, coordinated care, and timely response to students experiencing distress or complex, intersecting challenges, complementing the clinical services of the Student Wellness Centre.

A physical DSO presence was established on campus at 230 Richmond Street West, co-located adjacent to the Student Living Room. The introduction of consistent weekday availability (Monday–Friday, 9:00 a.m.–7:00 p.m.) for scheduled and drop-in appointments, alongside a dedicated crisis support line, strengthened students’ access to timely, trauma-informed, non-clinical support at earlier stages of concern. This predictable, visible presence reduced barriers to help-seeking and improved continuity for students navigating complex academic, behavioural, and personal circumstances.



In parallel, the University conducted a community-informed review of the Students in Distress Protocol to support a more comprehensive, coordinated response to student distress. The revised approach expands beyond crisis response to incorporate behavioural intervention, accessibility considerations, and clearer roles across clinical and non-clinical services. A phased rollout with training is planned for the upcoming academic period, reinforcing shared understanding, consistency, and early intervention across the campus community.

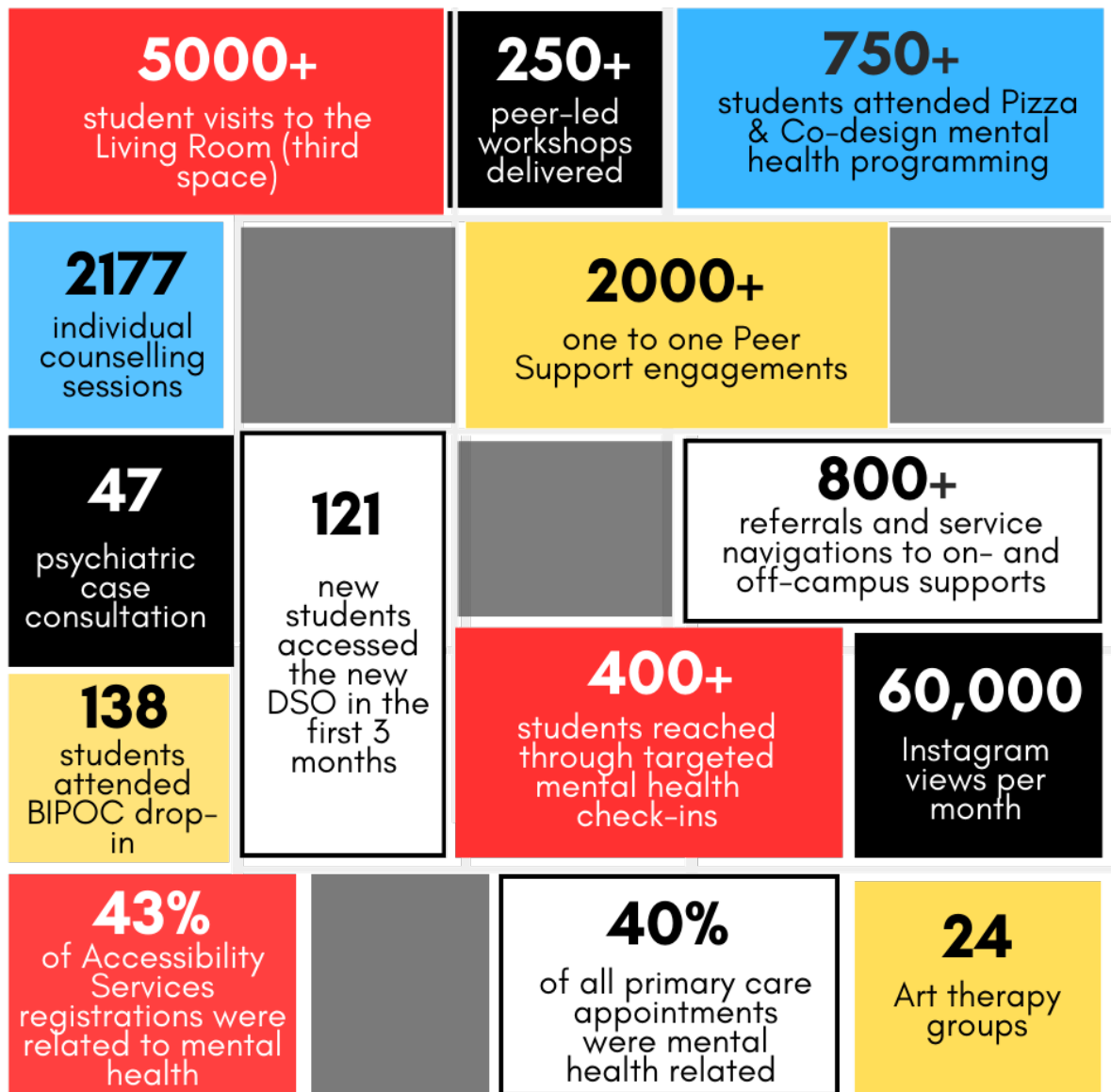
The implementation of the DSO strengthened alignment across student support services, clarified pathways between clinical and non-clinical care, and improved continuity for students requiring sustained or multi-service support. Together, these changes enhanced the University's ability to respond proactively, reduce fragmentation, and support student mental health and well-being in line with the Student Mental Health and Well-Being Policy's emphasis on coordinated, accessible, and preventative care.

Taken together, these three implementation areas represent a coordinated transformation in how student mental health supports are delivered at OCAD University. Rather than expanding services in isolation, the University implemented structural changes that clarified access, strengthened early intervention, reduced barriers, and aligned service delivery with the intent of Bill 166 and the *Student Mental Health and Well-Being Policy*. During the reporting period, elements of this work were also shared beyond the institution. OCAD University's service co-design approach was featured at a national post-secondary conference, and the Peer-led Mental Health Program and Student Living Room were highlighted in a sector publication focused on innovative, low-barrier "third space" models. This external engagement reflects the University's commitment to continuous improvement, knowledge sharing, and the ongoing development of responsive, student-centred mental health systems.



Numbers At a Glance

During the reporting period, OCAD University advanced system-level implementation of its Student Mental Health and Well-Being Policy in response to Bill 166 and the Minister's Student Mental Health Directive. The figures below reflect activity across prevention, early intervention, peer support, clinical care, service navigation, and crisis response delivered through the Student Wellness Centre, the Student Living Room and Peer-Led Mental Health Program, and the Dean of Students Office.



** Figures reflect aggregated service encounters across the Student Wellness Centre, Student Living Room, Peer-Led Mental Health Program, and Dean of Students Office during the 2025 reporting period.*

Student Mental Health at OCAD University: Year Two Priorities

As OCAD University enters Year Two of system-level implementation of its *Student Mental Health and Well-Being Policy*, the University will focus on consolidating recent structural changes, strengthening evaluation and accountability, and advancing prevention- and equity-oriented approaches in alignment with Bill 166 and the Minister's Student Mental Health Directive.

OCAD University will participate in the Canadian Campus Wellbeing Survey (CCWS) to strengthen institutional understanding of student mental health needs, campus climate, and barriers to access. Survey findings will inform service planning, health promotion, and policy implementation, and support benchmarking and shared learning across the postsecondary sector.

The University will continue to engage students, staff, faculty, and community stakeholders through co-design and consultation. Building on the interim advisory structure, OCAD University will establish a broader, more representative advisory model, including strengthened engagement with Indigenous student services and partners, to support wholistic, culturally grounded approaches to student well-being.

With support from the Province, the University will advance an Integrated Harm Reduction and Mental Health Capacity Building initiative in 2026, expanding institutional capacity at the intersection of mental health, substance use, and student safety through trauma-informed training, low-barrier outreach, and peer-led navigation supports. These efforts are designed to complement existing mental health services, reduce stigma, support early intervention, and strengthen students' access to appropriate care and resources.





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