



Student Mental Health Strategy

Healthy Minds, Vibrant University

2025-2030

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Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that Western University is located on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapéewak, and Chonnonton Nations, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. This land continues to be home to diverse Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) whom we recognize as contemporary stewards of the land and vital contributors of our society.

We acknowledge and honour the enduring relationship Indigenous Peoples have to this beautiful land.

As we create and implement Western's Student Mental Health Strategy, we acknowledge past and current injustices and microaggressions Indigenous Peoples experience and the harmful impacts colonialism and prejudice can have on mental health.

In our commitment to Truth and Reconciliation, Western will continue to create safer spaces where trauma-informed and culturally sensitive mental health is prioritized, and Indigenous students can access the support they need to thrive—both individually and as a community.

Letter to the Western Community

Dear Western Community,

The brain and mind drive every action, thought, and emotion. When they are healthy and engaged, learning thrives—but stress, mental illness, and addiction can hinder performance. Cultivating positive student mental health is essential, directly enhancing cognitive function, motivation, and academic success. It is foundational for students to achieve their full potential.

Western's Student Mental Health Strategy (2025-2030) reflects our deep commitment to students' well-being and their evolving needs, ensuring they have the necessary support to meet the academic rigor and excellence that define Western University.

Through extensive consultations, campus representatives identified a need for a greater focus on prevention, communication skills, substance and device misuse, and external factors – geopolitical, environmental, familial, and economic – that impact student well-being. We extend our gratitude to everyone who contributed, from members of the committees to those who attended focus groups and responded to the surveys.

The development of the plan was a community effort, and the implementation will be as well. We invite campus partners to take an active role in implementing these strategies in ways that align with and enhance their work. Together, we can have a great impact, ensuring that every student has access to the support they need, right here on campus.

We are proud to build upon the work Western has already done to support student mental health. Since the 2018 plan, Western has achieved significant milestones: purpose-built Health & Wellness Services at Thames Hall; accessible education initiatives; an upgraded medical record system; and expanded counseling services, alongside robust partner programs at King's and Huron. All of this work has significantly enhanced student support.

And there is more for us to do.

Our plan is guided by core values – the centrality of mental health to learning, prevention, collaboration, compassion, excellence, social justice, and innovation. We also emphasize new campus-wide collaborations, willingness to experiment, and continuous learning to enrich student mental health support.

Next, we will establish an Implementation Action Team with student and campus partner representation. Student voices were instrumental in shaping the plan, and their continued involvement will be vital to its success.

Join us on this journey. Together, we can proactively support student mental health and contribute to a thriving community.

With gratitude,

John Doerksen, *Vice-Provost (Students)*

Chandlee Dickey, *Clinical Director, Mental Health Team*

Debbie Chiodo, *Mental Health Consultant*

Rachel Stack, *Director, Wellness & Well-being*

Sonya Malone, *Workplace Health Physician*

Message from President Alan Shepard

When our students thrive, they are unstoppable. We've seen that time and time again.

But when stress or other life events get in the way, it can be difficult to overcome those barriers.

That's why Western is embracing this new strategy to continue building a community with connection, belonging, collaboration, and compassion at its core.

A proactive approach that will ensure Western students have the very best environment to take care of themselves and their friends, to access exceptional care when they need it, and ultimately, to achieve their academic goals.

Students are at the very centre of our mission – their voices and experiences will continue to guide the evolution of mental health at Western.

It's up to all of us to embrace this plan, strengthen our community, and empower our students to be the best they can be.

Not only to help them succeed while they're here, but to support them in developing healthy strategies for their lives and careers to come.

Alan Shepard

President & Vice-Chancellor



Executive Summary

Western University strives to be a leading academic community, where all students belong, learn, and thrive. Mental health is a key component of this vision – as mental health and wellness are essential to achieving that goal.

The Student Mental Health Strategy (2025-2030) relies on all members of the Western community – students, staff, and faculty – to actively contribute to our vibrant culture. As well, Western’s structures, policies, and procedures must support student mental health and cultivate a healthy community. By organizing our plan around students and the broader campus community, each individual and program can understand their vital role in advancing our shared mission.

Our mission is to support student well-being by providing high-quality care and proactive preventative education and programs, and cultivating an inclusive and supportive community. Through collaboration, innovation, and student-centered initiatives, we aim to remove barriers, build resilience, and empower students to thrive cognitively, socially, and personally.

To achieve this mission, the plan introduces the following strategic priority areas, reflecting a proactive and holistic approach to student well-being:

- » Empower Students to Thrive
- » Broaden Outreach to Promote Preventative Practices
- » Cultivate a Mentally-Well Campus
- » Advance Western as a Leader in Student Mental Health

These strategic priorities underscore Western University’s commitment to creating a resilient, inclusive, and supportive campus where every student can thrive.



Advances toward a mentally healthy environment for all **campus community** members.

Outreach to the **broader student population** to promote preventable practices.

Individual students are empowered to thrive.

Western Student Mental Health Strategy

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to support student well-being by providing high-quality care and proactive preventative education and programs, and cultivating an inclusive and supportive community. Through collaboration, innovation, and student-centered initiatives, we aim to remove barriers, build resilience, and empower students to thrive cognitively, socially, and personally.

OUR VISION

A leading academic community where all students belong and thrive

OUR GUIDING VALUES

Centrality of Mental Health to Learning • Collaboration • Compassion • Excellence
Social Justice • Prevention • Innovation

STRATEGIC PRIORITY: Empower Students to Thrive

Good mental health is essential for effective learning. By nurturing their authentic selves, developing lifelong healthy habits, and connecting to care early, students can confidently manage academic and life stresses. Western is committed to providing compassionate and excellent care to support students in building resilience for their future.

GOAL: Support Western Students to Experience a Positive Sense of Self

Students will:

- » Discover their own best authentic self, understand their power, and experience joy.
- » Develop strategies, a sense of agency, and adaptability to confidently manage academic and life stresses as they arise in a dynamic world.
- » Develop lifelong healthy habits involving self-care, learning, exercise, mindfulness, and harm reduction.
- » Connect with care early to help prevent more significant issues.
- » Engage in early and ongoing learning about wellness such as mental health, mental illness, substance misuse, and sleep.
- » Consider impact of substance misuse, excessive device use, and other addictions on own mental health and on the community.

GOAL: Provide Excellent, Compassionate Care

Western will:

- » Provide timely access and choices to effective, state-of-the-art, and compassionate care that is culturally sensitive, and trauma and attachment informed.
- » Address specific issues as they emerge such as eco-distress (distress due to climate change), excessive phone use and gambling, and substance misuse.

- » Recognize the interplay of physical and mental health and their impact on academics.
- » Ensure health team members have professional development support to address student needs related to physical and mental health, and addictions.
- » Strengthen partnerships across the region to expand services and ease transitions for students.
- » Ensure that mental health services are anti-racist, anti-oppressive, decolonizing, and culturally focused, making them accessible to students with varying needs, identities, and abilities.
- » Develop specialized approaches for groups at higher risk for experiencing excessive stress, including PhD candidates, athletes, people with disabilities, international students, and students who identify as Indigenous, racialized, gender diverse, or other equity deserving groups.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY: Broaden Outreach to Promote Preventative Practices

Intentional prevention is crucial for fostering students' healthy development. By co-creating educational opportunities, enriching peer support, and educating faculty and staff, Western aims to proactively address mental health, substance misuse, and other wellness issues. This holistic approach ensures students receive the support they need to thrive academically and personally.

GOAL: Co-create Creative Educational Opportunities to Encourage Healthy Habits

Collectively, the Western Community will:

- » Develop early and ongoing learning opportunities about wellness.
- » Foster healthy habits around eating, sleeping, exercising, managing time, socializing, and reflecting.
- » Increase awareness of the impacts that poor mental health, excessive device usage, and substance misuse can have on academics, future prospects, and general health.

GOAL: Educate Interested Faculty and Staff on How to Connect Students to Services Early

Collectively, the Western Community will:

- » Advocate for the appreciation of the centrality of good mental health to students achieving their academic and life development goals.
- » Collaboratively care for one another, recognize warning signs, reach out when a student may be at risk, normalize seeking support, share information so that students are helped early, and work to build trust that our community will be there for our students when they need us.
- » Teach interested staff and faculty members on how to respond to a disclosure or identify a mental health or addiction challenge.
- » Consider early detection tools that identify students at risk and create a process to identify risky behaviours to help keep our community safer.

GOAL: Recognize Positive Mental Health as a Key Element to Student's Academic Success

Collectively, the Western Community will:

- » Prepare students for major transitions during postsecondary education.
- » Design pathways to help temporarily withdrawn students reintegrate.
- » Appreciate that experiencing failure is an opportunity to learn and grow.
- » Leverage the use of technology to ensure students of all abilities are included in educational endeavours to foster connection across campus.
- » Collaborate with campus and community partners to ensure that students' basic food and housing needs are met.

GOAL: Enrich Peer Support Opportunities as Sources of Hopeful Influence

Western will:

- » Ensure students are involved in the co-design of programming to support their diverse identities on campus.
- » Recognize students as experts and collaborators on their personal mental health and academic journeys.
- » Teach student leaders on mental health topics and how to encourage students to seek help.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY: Cultivate a Mentally-well Campus

Western prioritizes a campus-wide focus on mental health by fostering respectful conversations, connecting with the natural beauty of our surroundings, and diligently implementing this strategic plan. Through courageous conversations, advocating for well-being activities and spaces, and engaging the entire community, Western aims to create a supportive and mentally healthy environment for all members.

GOAL: Empower the Western Community to Engage in Courageous Conversations

Collectively, the Western Community will:

- » Encourage respectful and nuanced conversations to facilitate mutual understanding about a multitude of factors influencing the mental health continuum, addictions, and well-being.
- » Strengthen students, staff, and faculty members' conflict resolution skills to enable a psychologically safer environment, appreciating the distinction between uncomfortable and unsafe discussions.
- » Integrate the wisdom and guidance of partner Elders and Knowledge Keepers on campus.
- » Support faculty and staff involvement in expanding their cultural awareness and humility.
- » Acknowledge the potential impact that larger familial, socioeconomic, environmental, and geopolitical forces can have on students' well-being and how Western mitigates that impact.

GOAL: Advocate for Activities and Spaces that Foster Well-Being

Collectively, the Western Community will:

- » Reduce barriers to collaborative mental health initiatives across campus.
- » Collaborate with campus partners to co-create artistic, body movement, and nature-oriented programs to foster belonging and provide alternative spaces for conversations on mental health issues.
- » Promote quiet or sensory adaptable indoor and outdoor spaces, for students to practice mindfulness, spiritual reflection, and self-regulation.
- » Co-create neutral third places to allow for connection and community building.
- » Encourage students to connect with the natural beauty of our campus and surrounding outdoor environment.
- » Co-develop resources to support graduate students' sense of community

GOAL: Engage the Whole Western Community in Work to Advance Student Mental Health

Western will:

- » Establish a campus-wide Implementation Action Team with student membership charged with monitoring and enacting the plan.
- » Leverage the influence of senior leaders and community members who are inspirational champions and will advocate for the ongoing advancement of this plan.
- » Encourage the review of Western's structures, policies, and procedures through a well-being lens.
- » Create a continuous quality improvement mindset that supports Western as a learning organization with respect to mental health and addiction.
- » Drive communication and project management strategies to support plan implementation including service information and mental health education.
- » Embed a sustainability framework and measurement plan that will ensure accountability and identify indicators for success
- » Adapt elements of this plan to further support our staff and faculty as we all form an interconnected ecosystem of wellness.
- » View this plan in concert with other allied strategic plans across the University.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY: Advance Western as a Leader in Student Mental Health

As a leader in student experience, Western is committed to innovating and disseminating strategies that enhance student well-being. By continuously adapting to new best practices, collaborating with researchers and evaluators, and connecting with community partners, Western aims to advance mental health and addiction strategies locally, nationally, and internationally.

GOAL: Innovate and Disseminate Improvements in Student Mental Health Practices

Collectively, the Western Community will:

- » Innovate and spread new and creative strategies to enhance students' well-being.
- » Be open to adapting this framework as new best practices come to light.
- » Collaborate with campus researchers and program evaluators to identify innovations driven by this plan.
- » Connect with organizational partners from across London and surrounding community and colleagues nationally to disseminate and advance mental health and addiction strategies.

Appendix A: Background

Emerging Themes from Surveys, Discussions, and Focus Groups

Several prominent themes emerged from the consultations with students, staff, and faculty. The convergence of these themes across campus was illustrative. One consistent point was that approaches and efforts need to be co-designed with students to maximize effectiveness; the Implementation Action Team will honor that imperative.

The following themes were evident:

- » **Learning About Mental Health Supports and How to Provide Support:** There is a general lack of awareness of the mental health supports available on campus, hindering students from receiving support. Community members also expressed needing more skills to help distressed students. By leveraging multiple communication and teaching methods, this gap can be narrowed.
- » **Enhanced Skills in Navigating Respectful and Courageous Conversations:** All community members indicated that students are not equipped with the necessary conflict resolution skills or communication skills. Students are struggling to successfully have crucial conversations with individuals such as peers and faculty members, which can negatively impact their mental health. Strong communication skills enrich the larger community's conversations.
- » **Attention to Addiction Issues:** Addictions are troubling for students, which is common in the postsecondary sector. Specifically, substance misuse, device addiction, and gambling were identified by some respondents as problematic. Through education, campus discussions, and treatment, we can reduce harm and support healthier choices.
- » **Larger Forces Impacting Students' Well-being:** Climate change, geopolitical forces, socioeconomic factors, and familial life stories are influencing students' sense of self and safety. While addressing these systemic issues may be beyond this plan's scope, its strategies can help students navigate these impacts and strengthen their resilience.
- » **Specialized Approaches for Some Student Groups:** It was identified that select student groups may need tailored approaches. These include PhD candidates, athletes, people with disabilities, international students, and those who identify as Indigenous, racialized, gender diverse, or other equity-deserving groups.
- » **The Importance of Belonging:** One of Western's core values is a deep sense of belonging. For some students, developing friendships is challenging and they struggle to find belonging at Western. By creating safer, inclusive spaces for students to gather and share experiences, we can foster a supportive community. We can also explore new ways to interweave reflection practices, encourage campus exploration, and build new traditions.
- » **Feeling Good About Oneself:** A fundamental aspect of student mental health is experiencing a positive sense of self. Consultations illustrated that during postsecondary education, students are facing challenges as they stretch to grasp new concepts, complete tasks, negotiate relationships, and develop an authentic self. This plan's holistic approach aims to provide a foundation for positive and safe growth.

Student Mental Health Strategy Committee and Consultation Process

Western University established a Student Mental Health Strategy Committee in 2024 to develop a comprehensive strategy on mental health that built on the 2018 plan. In February 2024, a Core Strategy Team was tasked with developing and carrying out a consultation plan that would capture the experiences, thoughts, and ideas of the University's students, faculty and staff related to mental health and wellness. This team reviewed the former plan, consulted the campus community, analyzed survey and focus group data, and assessed existing university mental health policies. The group also reviewed available literature on provincial, national, and international policies, services, and processes related to promoting mental health and wellness on university campuses.

Two additional groups (an Advisory Team and an Action Team) composed of senior leadership, faculty, staff, and students met four times to review progress, provide feedback and perspectives, and challenge assumptions, shaping the final plan.

Between April 2024 to December 2024, over 2,400 students and 950 staff and faculty participated in surveys, while 90 students responded to a targeted survey on device use. Additionally, 28 campus groups engaged in focus groups, and individual consultations conversations took place with highly-invested individuals. All consultations highlighted concerns, opportunities, and hopes for improving mental health and wellness at Western.

Appendix B: Student Mental Health Strategy Advisory and Action Team Member List (2024)

Advisory Team

Emily Carrothers

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Heidi Braaksma

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Appendix C: Campus Groups that were Invited to Mental Health and Wellness Consultations to Inform Plan Development*

- » Faculty, Staff and Librarians
- » Graduate Studies, Policy and Planning
- » Housing and Ancillary Services
- » Leadership & Learning, Student Experience
- » McIntosh Gallery
- » Office of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion
- » Office of Indigenous Initiatives
- » Office of Sustainability
- » Office of the Provost
- » Office of the Registrar
- » Researchers involved with COVID-19, eco-distress, substance use, and trauma (separate discussions)
- » School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
- » Sophs (Faculty)
- » Sports & Recreation, Student Experience
- » Student Emergency Response Team (SERT)
- » Student Health Clinic, Physician Team
- » Student Health Clinic, Nursing Team
- » Student Mental Health Care Team
- » Student Support & Case Management Team
- » Undergraduate Academic Programs Office
- » Undergraduate Student Services
- » Wellness Equity & Education Team
- » Western International
- » Western Legal Counsel
- » Western student club presidents of equity deserving groups
- » Western Special Constable Service (WSCS)

**NOTE: Not all invitees participated in full.*

Appendix D: Additional Resources

1. **THE NATIONAL STANDARD OF CANADA CSA Z2003:20**, Mental health and well-being for post-secondary students, Standards Council of Canada, Mental Health Commission of Canada. [Website](#).
2. **Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health (CICMH)**: Comprehensive resource finder including guides, toolkits, and research reports on university student mental health. [Website](#).
3. **Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO)**: “Supporting Student Mental Health in Ontario: Exploring Best Practices and Identifying Gaps.” [Publication](#).
4. **Journal of Further and Higher Education**: “Look After the Staff and they Would Look After the Students’ Cultures of Wellbeing and Mental Health in the University Setting” 2022 <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2021.1986473>
5. **Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety**: “Measures for Promoting Mental Health in the Workplace.” [Website](#).

Development of this strategy was supported in part by a grant from the Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security.