

Revise Policy with a Mental Health Lens

A USC Well-being Collective Toolkit



November 2020

USC Well-being Collective

The USC Well-being Collective harnesses the power of Collective Impact for a variety of distinct and often siloed academic departments, administrative units, recognized student organizations and local non-profits to come together and work with the whole student community towards our common agenda: **strengthening a campus culture driven by student wellbeing.**

This goal is supported by four interrelated strategic goals:

Equity and Inclusion – enhancing the culture of equity and inclusion

Resilience and Thriving – creating a culture where individuals and communities thrive

Alcohol and Other Substance Use – disrupting the culture of at-risk substance use

Consent and Healthy Relationships — fostering a culture of consent and healthy relationships

Introduction

Today, mental health professionals have access to various levels of treatment that can effectively help people with a variety of mental health concerns. Many colleges are going beyond simply providing treatment services by expanding efforts to prevent mental health problems from arising and promote the mental well-being of all students. In other words, they are adopting a public health approach to address the social and environmental risk factors that influence student mental health (Davidson & Locke, 2010; SPRC, 2004). Factors affecting student mental health and ability to thrive can be shaped by individual attitudes and beliefs about mental illness, interpersonal group norms, institutional environments, community access to mental health resources and public policies.

Furthermore, students with diverse backgrounds and experiences enter into institutions of higher education expecting the ability to equitably pursue their academic goals and to be welcomed into a supportive student community. Nonetheless, the student experience is not the same for each individual, and not every student is treated equitably or accommodated in the classroom or on campus. In addressing disparities students may face while attending institutions of higher education, campus leaders can enhance the culture of equity and inclusion by implementing fair treatment, equality of opportunity, and open access to information, resources and physical spaces. Inclusive practices build a culture of belonging by actively inviting and fostering participation from all students. Such practices consider a person's voice, add value to the university and the student experience, and create balance in the face of power differences.

The built environment has a strong influence over how people think, feel, and behave in a space. Academic buildings are an important space to consider, as students conduct most of their academic activities within these settings. Research has shown the classroom environment affects academic performance, attention, and goal achievement. Interestingly, students' perception of the physical environment is a stronger predictor of achieving learning outcomes than past academic achievement. With this research in mind, campus planners and university administrators can make a commitment to creating or altering classroom spaces to enhance student wellbeing

Revise Policy with a Mental Health Lens

Toolkit Description:

Revise campus policies with consideration of their influence on mental health and mental hygiene

Strategic Goals:

Equity + Inclusion

Thrive + Mental Health

At-Risk Substance Abuse

Consent + Healthy Relationships

Action Areas:

Building healthy public policy

Creating supportive environments

Strengthening community action

Developing personal skills

Re-orienting all sectors towards prevention

A Toolkit For:

Faculty

Staff

Student

Parent/Guardian

Administrator

Goal

The goal of this strategy is to enable administrators and key community stakeholders the perspective of equity in mental health in designing campus policies.

Intended Outcomes

Key Performance Indicators:

- Increase positive mental health

Evidence of Effectiveness

Many mental health research collaboratives recommend policy review by all university stakeholders. Unfortunately, most do not include research or evidence regarding which policies are most beneficial for student mental health.

Expert Opinion - Strategies with this rating are recommended by credible, impartial experts but have limited research documenting effects; further research, often with stronger designs, is needed to confirm effects.

Implementation Ideas

Stakeholders can utilize a trauma-informed approach in policy writing. A trauma informed approach will recognize the intersection of trauma with other health and social issues. Stakeholders can aim to sensitively address trauma in planning systems and pipelines for people seeking services and treatment.

Students

Registered Student Organizations and student leaders can write vision, mission and strategic goals that reflect the importance of mental health as a foundation of their organizations and/or clubs.

RSOs can have clearly written bylaws with built-in accountability for executive leaders to support membership mental health.

RSOs can create a reward system for members that reinforce organizational goals and mission to enhance member mental health, recovery, and well-being.

RSOs may incorporate policies and practices that operationalize legislation related to the accommodation of members with mental health issues (altered meeting times or schedules to accommodate therapy appointments; space accommodations related to noise/sound level or odor sensitivities; alterations to membership requirements, as applicable).

RSOs can write policy to normalize help-seeking behavior through the integration of mental health resources and initiatives into organization structure.

RSOs can revise adjudication or bylaw violation policies to incorporate restorative practices.

Social clubs and community-based organizations can adopt anti-hazing policies.

Administrators

Students can choose to participate in one-to-one mentoring programs with youth to help foster positive mental health, increase self-esteem, build interpersonal communication skills and character development. Examples of these include:

Administrators and campus community stakeholders can create new and revise older university policies with a mental health lens. Examples of such campus policies include:

Accommodation Policy

This policy sets out guidelines for reasonable academic accommodation of students with mental health issues to provide more equitable ways for students with disabilities to meet program requirements without compromising academic requirements. Some colleges and universities provide interim accommodations to students while mental health assessments are conducted.

Support at Pre-Entry and Admission Policy

This policy includes encouragement of disclosure during the application process in order to make an assessment about support options early on; creating non-discriminatory admissions practices; providing information about fitness-to-practice requirements for professional degrees, and ensuring that institutional materials are sent out to enrollees for available supports.

Supportive Mental Health Care Access Policy

These policies include increasing direct care services for student access. Ideas include initiatives for immediate, confidential, free access to 24/7 counselors via text or phone call for emotional support such as managing relationships and adjusting to living away from home. The policy for counselors can establish crisis support partnerships with existing campus mental health services. Policy for help-seeking can include ability to provide both immediate and booked counseling options. The policy might also enable students to request an appointment with a counsellor who speaks a specific language or, for example, identifies with a specific gender, religion or other identity.

Crisis Management Policy

Policies should include procedures for responding to emergency and non-emergency situations where a student is in emotional distress or crisis.

Researchers Olding and Yip (2014) encourage a “mainstreaming” approach to mental health in all college policies. When reviewing each campus policy, university stakeholders should hold the following considerations:

- How does/would this policy impact: sense of agency, mastery, autonomy, or self-efficacy at the individual or campus-wide level?
- How does/would this policy impact individual resilience, and also social relationships and engagement more broadly?
- How does/would this policy facilitate or inhibit students’ abilities to connect with others, feel valued and useful?

These questions allow policymakers to move beyond reactive university policy and into a space of progressive modeling that considers the social determinants of mental health.

Implementation Resources

The Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health (2015) has developed guidelines and examples of policy intervention areas. Their approach considers the whole spectrum of mental health, from universal prevention policies to policies geared toward students in distress.

Creating New Policy

Launching the policy

A high profile launch will raise awareness of the institution's supportive mental health resources while increasing recognition of administration’s dedication to addressing campus-wide mental hygiene on a systemic level. The campaign needs to be maintained by wide circulation of the policy document and regular events or bulletins (via institution newsletter/website) to remind staff and students of its existence.

Monitoring the policy

Once a policy has been formally accepted by the institution, that acceptance gives a baseline for any training, updating and monitoring needed for compliance. The monitoring process will include regular review of the policy through statutory institutional procedures, e.g. appropriate committees. Regular evaluation is essential to determine if there is widespread awareness of the policy and to what extent the policy is being upheld/put into practice.

Revising older policy

The Canadian Mental Health Association (2019) recommends administrators examine the systemic factors which impact students' mental health so that mental health is made integral to institutions' vision, mission and strategic goals. Administrators should implement the following:

- A process that reviews campus policies and procedures with a mental health lens and is informed by established principles such as accessibility, student autonomy, flexibility, and equity
- Established processes for program evaluation and continuous improvement of offices, departments, services and resources that include criteria related to fostering employee and student well-being
- Built-in accountabilities for departments, staff and faculty to support student mental health
- A reward system for educators that reinforces curriculum and pedagogy that enhance student mental health, recovery, and well-being

For further policy guidance and resource information, visit the [Healthy Minds, Healthy Campuses website](#).

References

Coordinating Committee of Vice Presidents, Students (2015). White Paper on Postsecondary Student Mental Health.

<https://occcco.files.wordpress.com/2015/05/ccvps-white-paper-on-postsecondary-student-mental-health-april-2015.pdf>

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). (2003). Safe and sound: An educational leader's guide to evidence based social and emotional learning (SEL) programs. Chicago, IL: CASEL

Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health. (2015). Environmental Scan of Promising Practices and Indicators Relevant to Campus Mental Health.

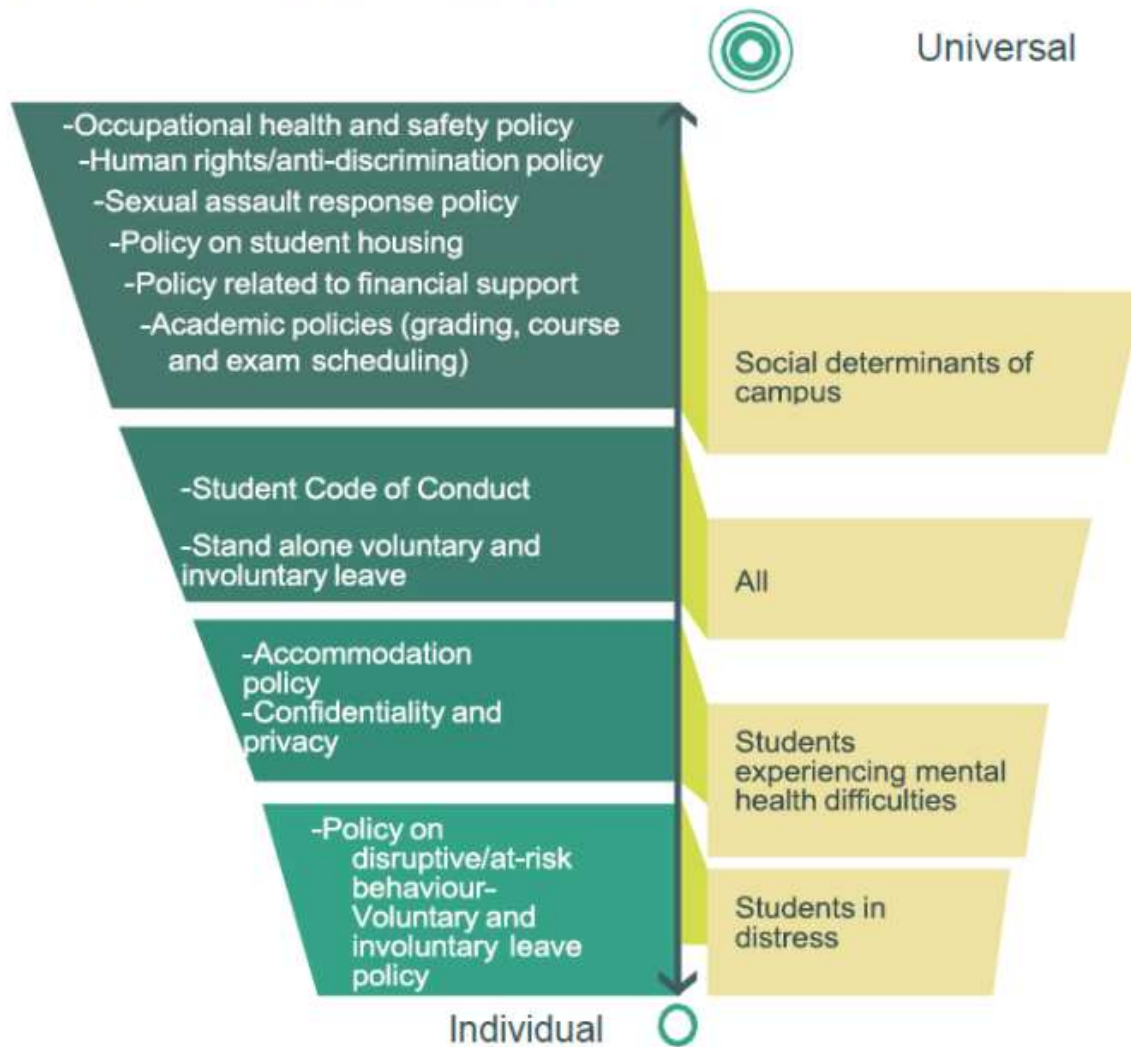
Canadian Mental Health Association, BC Division. (2019). 2019 Healthy Campuses Initiative.

Darney D, Reinke WM, Herman KC, Stormont M, Ialongo NS. Children with co-occurring academic and behavior problems in first grade: distal outcomes in twelfth grade. *J Sch Psychol.* 2013;51(1):117-128. doi:10.1016/j.jsp.2012.09.005

-
Olding, M. & Yip, A. (2014). Policy Approaches to Post-Secondary Student Mental Health. OCAD University & Ryerson University Campus Mental Health Partnership Project. Toronto, ON. http://campusmentalhealth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Policy-Approaches-to-PS-student-MH.FINAL_April15-2014.pdf

Produced Examples

Figure 2: Spectrum of Campus Mental Health Policies¹⁹



USC Student Health

Office for Health Promotion Strategy

Backbone for the USC Well-being Collective

The Office for Health Promotion Strategy, backbone for the USC Well-being Collective, is embedded in USC Student Health and serves as the administrative core to support campus partners in aligning their strategic objectives with student wellbeing. The Office for Health Promotion Strategy works with participating partners, the Steering Committee, and most importantly, students to activate change at USC.

For additional questions, please contact: USC Student Health, Office for Health Promotion Strategy, Backbone for USC Well-being Collective at wellbeingcollective@usc.edu

USC Well-being Collective

uscbwellbeingcollective.usc.edu