Advisory Panel on Post-Secondary Mental Health

Final Recommendations Report

March 10, 2017

Letter from Co-Chairs

In early October 2016, we were asked by the Ministry of Advanced Education to Co-Chair the Advisory Panel on Post-Secondary Mental Health. We could not have been more thrilled and humbled to play a part in this incredibly important work.

The Panel began its work with a strong foundation of knowledge and resources, thanks to the pioneering, often grassroots, efforts of Alberta students and post-secondary institutions in recent years. These efforts were truly remarkable in their creativity and impact, disrupting established institutional norms and structures to transform learning environments from the student perspective. There is no doubt these effort have made Alberta's adult education system vastly more inclusive, accessible, and supportive for Albertans with mental health concerns.

At the same time, we recognized that many students have not yet benefited from these exciting and crucial breakthroughs, or from mental health service enhancements that were put in place at some campuses through a series of government grants launched in 2013. We were also mindful of the role post-secondary education plays as a determinant of health – particularly given the ambitious and courageous efforts now underway to transform Alberta's addiction and mental health system through *Valuing Mental Health*. The need and opportunity to put in place a dramatically more effective approach to supporting the mental health of all post-secondary students are significant.

In this context, it is an honor and a privilege to formally submit the Advisory Panel on Post-Secondary Mental Health's report and recommendations to the Deputy Minister of Advanced Education, the Minister of Advanced Education, and Cabinet. These recommendations reflect our best thinking and advice to government regarding actions needed to make our post-secondary education system more accessible and inclusive for Albertans with mental health concerns, and to foster the life-long wellbeing of all students.

We thank you for this opportunity. We would also like to thank all Advisory Panel members for their time and dedication to this process, as well as post-secondary institutions across Alberta that hosted Advisory Panel meetings.

Sincerely,

Erin Gregg

Co-Chair

Kevin Friese

Co-Chair

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1. The Value of Investing in Post-Secondary Mental Health

Post-Secondary Mental Health: A Top Provincial Priority

Ensuring post-secondary environments promote health and support students with addiction and mental health concerns is a key focus of the Government of Alberta's ongoing work to transform the province's addiction and mental health system. Many individuals enter post-secondary education at an age when mental illnesses are most likely to first manifest, and all students face the potential stressors of the post-secondary setting. Suicide is one of the principal causes of student death; more students then ever are seeking help and taking medication for mental health problems; and students themselves identify mental health issues as having a significant impact on their academic performance.

As recognized by *Valuing Mental Health: Report of the Alberta Mental Health Review Committee*, education – as well as, relatedly, employment and income – is a determinant of health. Moreover, educational settings create critical opportunities for mental health promotion, illness prevention, early intervention, and support. Building on these important premises, research shows student mental health is a vital area for strategic public investment for the following three reasons.

- **The need for post-secondary mental health and addiction support is increasing.** More students with pre-existing and/or complex mental health needs are attending post-secondary institutions.[i] Post-secondary students are more likely to report mental illness symptoms than non- students.[ii] An unprecedented number of students are aware of and seeking help for mental health and illness concerns, and they need support to be there when they do. Also, post-secondary education can be a time when substance use problems have the potential to emerge.
- **Post-secondary education is the right time and place to make a difference**. Most post-secondary students fall into the highest risk age group for mental illnesses and substance dependencies. They face a common set of exacerbating factors, including high academic expectations, peer pressure, competing work commitments, and changes in routines and/or support networks. At the same time, they are a discrete population, often in a fixed setting, and potentially more receptive to early interventions that will have lifelong impact.[iii]
- **Promoting and supporting student mental health is an investment in the future.** Mental health and addiction problems are also learning problems, and academic success is predicated on overall physical, psychological, emotional, intellectual, social, and spiritual well-being. Mental health is a significant predictor of grade point average and retention,[iv] and post-secondary education attainment is a significant predictor of employment and income.

> Resources invested in post-secondary students' mental health are a long-term investment in student success, population health, and economic prosperity. In short, "education and health are interdependent and reciprocal."[v]

Consequently, recommendation 7 of the *Valuing Mental Health* report calls on government to "create healthy and supportive post-secondary campus environments through health promotion, addiction and mental health campus services, and community partnerships."

Past Post-Secondary Mental Health Grants

To date, Alberta is one of only three Canadian provinces that has invested significant public dollars in post-secondary mental health. The 2011 *Action Plan for Creating Connections: Alberta's Addiction and Mental Health Strategy* contained specific recommendations related to enhancement of campus mental health supports. In response to this need, between 2013 and 2017 the Government of Alberta awarded Alberta Students' Executive Council (ASEC) a total of $2.6 million to implement the Alberta Campus Mental Health Innovation fund (ACMHI), and awarded five universities a total of $13 million to address student mental health needs on their campuses. Current funding commitments will expire in 2017.

Through this funding, access to post-secondary mental health supports was increased, and a series of models and resources were developed to support the learning, adaptation and implementation of campus approaches to mental health supports and services across all Alberta post-secondary institutions. Healthy Campus Alberta, a provincial community of practice focused on post-secondary mental health, was established in concert with these collective efforts – although it is notable that funding for Healthy Campus Alberta was not provided through provincial grants, and its establishment and activities have been largely grassroots.

The Advisory Panel on Post-Secondary Mental Health

As the Government of Alberta moves forward with recommended actions under *Valuing Mental Health*, and current post-secondary mental health grants near their close, a long-term, provincial approach to post-secondary mental health is needed.

In October 2016, the Minister of Advanced Education established the Advisory Panel on Post-Secondary Mental Health to review the current system and make evidence-based recommendations regarding a long-term, province-wide system of mental health and addiction supports for post-secondary students.

The Advisory Panel co-chairs and members were nominated through an open call to the post-secondary system and stakeholders, and selected to represent various backgrounds related to campus mental health initiatives. Membership was comprised of students and employees from varying post-secondary institutes across Alberta, as well as personnel from Alberta Health Services and the Canadian Mental Health Association.

Members of the panel included the following.

Erin Gregg (Co-Chair)	Advanced Education
Kevin Friese (Co-Chair)	University of Alberta
Dr. Betty Jean Bastien	Red Crow Community College
Fatima Dhooma	Student member
Francesca Ghossein	Student member
Kiran Grant	Student member
David Grauwiler	Canadian Mental Health Association
Ann Harding	Alberta Health Services
Dr. Glenda MacQueen	University of Calgary
Kandi McElary	Mount Royal University
Dr. Nicholas Mitchell	Alberta Health Services
Tracy Orr	Student Member
Dr. Mark Slomp	University of Lethbridge
Debbie Thompson	Olds College
Jessica Turowski	Student Member

A number of Government of Alberta policy experts worked closely with the Panel as non-voting members, including personnel from Advanced Education and Alberta Health. Shana Dion also joined the panel as a non-voting member mid-way through the deliberation process to provide additional perspectives from Indigenous student services on a large urban university campus.

This Document

This Report presents the Panel's recommendations to government in fulfillment of the above mandate. It is based on the panel members' diverse experience and expertise,

research carried out on the Panel's behalf, and panel members' engagement with a wide range of stakeholders through their professional networks.

The Panel has sought to anticipate and align its recommendations with emerging directions for Alberta's addiction and mental health system under *Valuing Mental Health*, and Alberta's *Adult Learning System Vision and Principles*.

Two limitations should be noted with respect to this document and its content. First, while it is envisioned all post-secondary students will benefit from the Advisory Panel's recommendations, the focus of the recommendations is largely on student wellness, coping, and resilience, as opposed to actions needed to create a better system for students with complex needs and/or diagnosed mental illness. More work is needed in the future to consider what is needed to better serve and support these students.

Second, while significant research and data analysis was undertaken and considered by the Advisory Panel in clarifying needs and options, there is significant need for better evidence to inform policy development in the future. Due in part to the relative newness of post-secondary mental health as an area of interest for policy makers, evidence regarding the effectiveness of campus-level initiatives and policy options is scarce. Consequently, recommendations emphasize the subject matter expertise and experience of panel members rather than proven solutions. A robust approach to research and impact measurement is proposed to build evaluative and continuous improvement capacity going forward.

A description of the process used by the Panel to develop this report can be found in Appendix A.

2. Panel Assumptions

The Post-Secondary Mental Health review was carried out in the context of rapidly changing norms, understandings, models, and public policy regarding mental health. For example, there is a diversity of definitions and knowledge systems regarding mental health, a wide range of perspectives regarding what counts as a mental health support and/or service, and a spectrum of policy approaches that directly and indirectly impact mental health – from approaches that address the determinants of health, to those focused on clinical interventions.

In addition, the Panel endeavored to leverage emerging and innovative concepts and approaches, many of which were pioneered through past government grants, while recognizing these approaches challenge and "disrupt" institutional structures, norms, and assumptions.

Lastly, the Panel was mindful of, and made assumptions about, emerging policy directions and "windows of opportunity." These assumptions influenced the focus and content of recommendations.

Given this complexity, this section, Panel Assumptions, clarifies the core assumptions made by the Panel in developing its recommendations.

How the Advisory Panel Defined Mental Health and Addiction

As the emphasis of the mental health systems shifts from treatment to recovery, and mental illness becomes less stigmatized, language and definitions regarding mental health and mental illness are evolving. In its work, the Advisory Panel endorsed the Cory Keyes model of mental health and mental illness, depicted below, which presents mental health and illness as dual continuums such that one could be in good or poor mental health, independently of whether one does or does not have a mental illness.[vi] In this context, mental health is "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community."[vii]

Effective post-secondary mental health approaches create inclusive environments in which all students have the opportunity to perform academically during their post-secondary tenure, and establish life-long resilience and coping skills that contribute to fulfilling careers and lives long after students conclude their post-secondary education. Consequently, the Advisory Panel's recommendations emphasize types of actions that will foster mental health for all students through a strong health promotion foundation, and supports that optimize recovery.

Source: *Canadian Association of College & University Student Services and Canadian Mental Health Association. (2013). Post-Secondary Student Mental Health: Guide to a Systemic Approach. Vancouver, BC: Author*

In addition, the Advisory Panel considered the scope of mental health to be broad, encompassing addiction. The Panel understood addiction as the full spectrum of substance use disorders or process addiction (like gambling).

Why the Advisory Panel Emphasized Needs of Indigenous Students

The Advisory Panel developed several recommendations specific to Indigenous students, while acknowledging the need for culturally safe and appropriate mental health supports for all students. The Panel shares the Government of Alberta's commitment to implementing the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and endorsed in Premier Rachel Notley's July 2015 mandate letter to Cabinet. It is notable that the TRC issued ninety-four calls to action to advance the reconciliation process, including a call to reducing the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous health outcomes in areas including addiction, suicide and mental health.[viii]

While the disparity in health outcomes remains a serious concern – such as suicide rates for First Nations youth, which are between five and seven times higher than for non-Indigenous youth[ix] - the interconnectedness of social and economic determinants of health, including educational attainment, is vital to acknowledge. For example, only 9.8 per cent of Indigenous people in Canada have a university degree, compared to 26.5 per cent of non-Indigenous people.[x]

In many Indigenous knowledge systems it is not possible to segment the mental health of individuals from the overall health and wellbeing of the community, and health is defined holistically – including physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental elements. Connections to the land, and to traditional culture, must be acknowledged as contributors to health and wellbeing. And, the legacy of colonial institutional structures in the advanced education and health system creates barriers to health and wellbeing for all students that may not be evident to non-Indigenous persons. The effects of this legacy can be felt even more deeply by Indigenous students when combined with historical intergenerational trauma caused by the residential school system. A holistic approach that recognizes the relationships among broad systemic factors is called for.

Why The Advisory Panel Saw the Need for a Systemic Approach

The Advisory Panel's recommendations envision a "systemic approach" to post-secondary mental health. These approaches are student-centred – recognizing the potential of all aspects of the post-secondary environment to positively or adversely affect student mental health, and seeking to configure the environment in the most inclusive and supportive ways from the student perspective.

Promoting mental health through a systemic approach includes "individual-level interventions (such as promoting coping strategies, mental health awareness, treatment, training, and skill-building), but also entails more structural interventions to affect determinants of mental wellbeing such as institutional structure, campus environment, organizational structure, policies and practices."

- World Health Organization

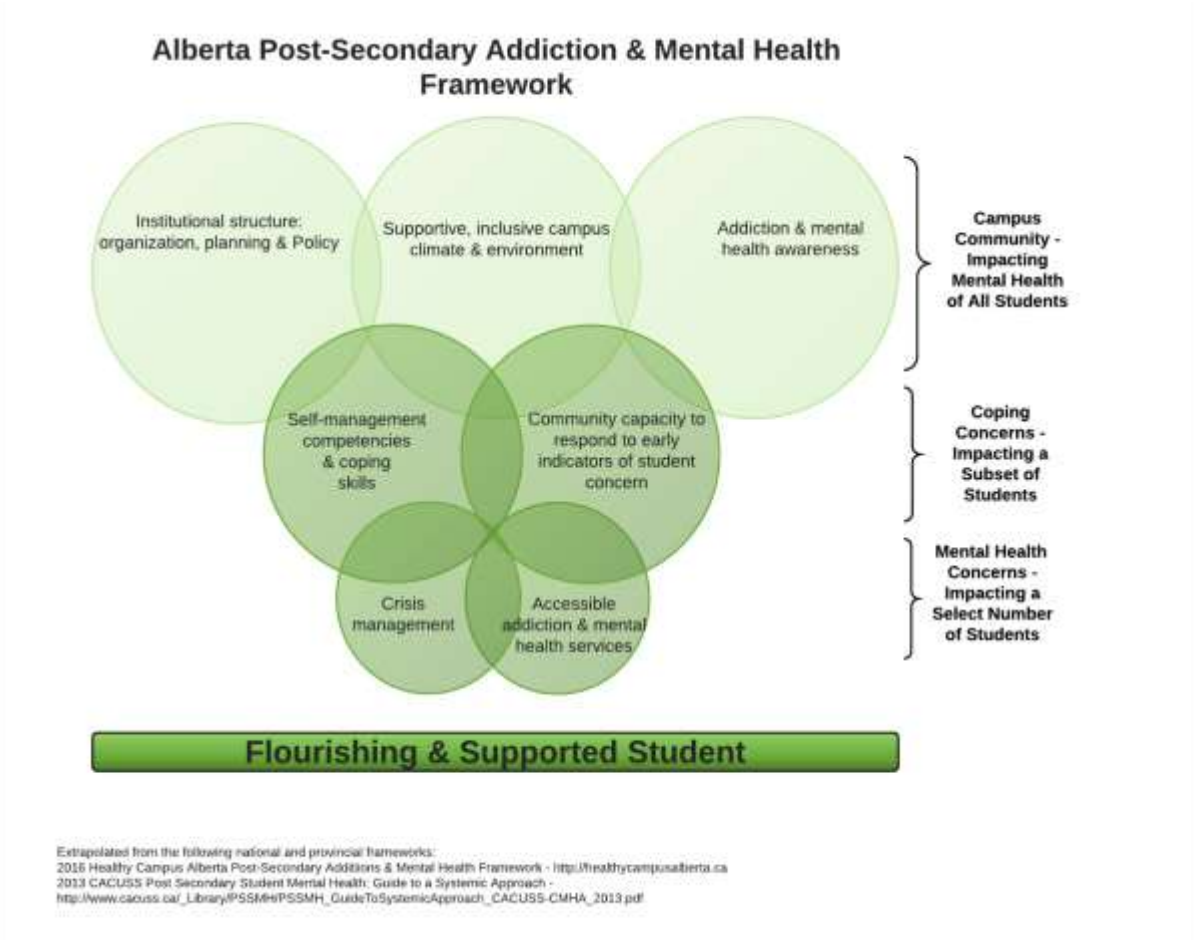
"Health promoting universities and colleges infuse health into everyday operations, business practices and academic mandates. By doing so, health promoting universities and colleges enhance the success of our institutions; create campus cultures of compassion, well-being, equity and social justice; improve the health of the people who live, learn, work, play and love on our campuses; and strengthen the ecological, social and economic sustainability of our communities and wider society."

- The Okanagan Charter

An effective systemic approach anticipates and creates pathways to mental health for all students. Given the unique needs of each student body, systemic approaches in use across Alberta, and in other jurisdictions, are diverse and wide-ranging. For example, the Alberta Students' Executive Council (ASEC) developed a student journey map. This tool helps to clarify the types of experiences students encounter throughout their post-secondary careers, and enables informed development of policy and approaches that support all students throughout this journey. Many student mental health approaches based on the Indigenous concept of

the medicine wheel are also systemic, although the medicine wheel itself pre-dates by far the current terminology regarding a "systemic approach."

The model shown in the diagram that follows was used to guide the development of a systemic approach to post-secondary mental health at several Alberta universities through past provincial grants, adapted from the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CACUSS). This model differentiates among types of strategies that benefit all students in the campus community (such as those that address institutional structure, campus climate and environment, and mental health awareness), those that are targeted to students with concerns about coping (such as those that build community capacity and self-management competencies) and those targeted to supporting students with mental health concerns (such as strategies that increase accessibility of services, bolster crisis management, accommodate the needs of students with mental illness, and facilitate recovery).



Why the Advisory Panel Focused on Systems and the Determinants of Health

Health – physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual – is the cumulative result of a wide range of influences. But, as has been acknowledged through recent mental heath strategies, and *Valuing Mental Health*, there is an over-emphasis on the role of medical care relative to social and economic determinants of health – even while recognizing limited access to treatment for mental illness is a major concern.

Non-medical supports need to be acknowledged as major contributors to health, and be well-integrated and coordinated with each other and with the medical system. For example, career counseling and chaplaincy can contribute to mental health by helping students clarify personal meaning and purpose.[xi] Medical services, such as primary care, urgent care, and other treatment-based services, also need to be better integrated with each other.

The Advisory Panel's vision and recommendations are underpinned by recognition of the need for comprehensive systems of social, economic, cultural, and medical supports that address the determinants of health and promote flourishing, inclusive communities.

3. Envisioning the Future Approach

The Advisory Panel envisions student-centred, inclusive, mentally healthy post-secondary environments as the overarching goal of its recommendations. In such environments, not everyone will be in good mental health all of the time, but all students will have the opportunity to flourish, develop, and become more resilient. Students with diverse degrees of mental health and mental illness, and from all backgrounds and circumstances, will be welcomed, treated with compassion, and receive access to a range of services and supports they need to fulfill their potential.

As the Advisory panel considered its recommendations in light of this goal, a key question that informed its work was, "how will the system be different or better if we make these changes?" The following statements articulate the Advisory Panel's expectations of how the system will improve if their recommendations are implemented. These desired outcomes represent the envisioned impact of the recommendations included in Section 5, and formed the basis of the draft logic model included in Section 6.

What will be different for all students?

Campus policies, procedures and behaviors will contribute to positive mental health and wellness for students. Institutional policies and procedures will reduce the risk factors associated with mental health, support the mental health of students and offer flexibility and accommodations that result in students reaching their full potential. Students, faculty and employees will be equipped with the knowledge and resources necessary to support the implementation of these policies and procedures, including appropriate cultural sensitivity.

Post-secondary institutions will be welcoming, respectful, caring, and safe environments. This is achieved when there are changes in behaviours and attitudes toward acceptance, respect, and equitable treatment of people with mental health concerns and mental illnesses; and the built and social environments create a sense of belonging for all students, regardless of background or potential barriers to participation. The creation of inclusive environments will take into consideration diverse experiences related to gender, sexual orientation, culture, and ethnicity.

Students, faculty and employees will have mental health literacy. Mental health literacy is achieved when students, faculty and employees understand how to foster and maintain good mental health, and apply the skills necessary to assist in the recognition, management or prevention of mental health problems.

What is Mental Health Literacy?

"Mental health literacy is defined as:

1. Understanding how to foster and maintain good mental health
2. Understanding mental disorders and their treatments
3. Decreasing Stigma
4. Understanding how to seek help effectively"

- Teen Mental Health

(http://teenmentalhealth.org/care/educators/)

A systemic approach to mental health will recognize the need and create space for reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. A commitment to reconciliation is a pre-condition for meeting the social, emotional, physical, spiritual, and mental needs of Indigenous students in post-secondary environments. A systemic approach will recognize racism and discrimination toward Indigenous peoples are widespread and entrenched in institutional structures. Acknowledging the right to self-determination, Indigenous peoples will be full partners in the design and implementation of a systemic approach to mental health and addiction that meets the needs of the whole community.

Post-secondary institutions will have a comprehensive mental health approach. A comprehensive approach to mental health includes taking action to ensure policies support mentally healthy campus environments, communities are designed and built to support social interaction and a sense of belonging among students, mental health promotion and prevention strategies are in place, and quality mental health services are available when needed.

What will be different for students who may be at risk and/or have concerns about coping?

Students will be resilient members of resilient communities; and have the coping skills necessary to manage the normal stresses of life, study productively and fruitfully, report a sense of belonging and contribute to their own community. Resilience, coping skills and sense of belonging result in increases in help seeking behaviours and reductions in crises. Students will report that coping behaviours and resilience skills are increased as a result of the personal development and engagement opportunities and social supports available.

Post-secondary institutions will engage in proactive intervention that is appropriately tailored to their student populations. Providing effective means of access to students in need is important, but so is proactively identifying those who may be at risk, or who may not realize they are in declining mental health. The tools employed may vary, but will be

well-integrated with academic policies and interventions, and will include an active outreach and follow-up component. Research and data will be essential for ensuring an evidence-based approach to identifying those at risk. Incoming students, as well as other groups and cohorts within the student body, will be educated on what warning signs to look for in their peers, and will be encouraged to be aware of and responsible for the mental health of everyone in the student community.

Students will have access to mental health and addiction care in their learning environments. Learning environments are diverse, and may include settings such as post-secondary campuses and residences, the community at large, Indigenous communities, or personal residences (such as in the case of distance learners). Post-secondary mental health and addiction services will anticipate and be embedded within the place of learning. For students whose learning environment is a post-secondary campus, in-person, on-campus service centers that promote wellness, offer resources, and provide non-clinical support will be emphasized, while virtual tools – such as online counseling and referral services – will provide support in the place of learning for distance learners and students in remote communities.

Coordinated systems of social, economic, cultural, spiritual, and medical supports enable and co-create pathways to mental health. Recognizing the diverse, and often complex, needs of individuals, strong integration among a holistic set of supports – including social, economic, cultural, and clinical – will ensure timely access to appropriate supports that meet and support people where they are. As supports currently operating in isolation increasingly function as a holistic system, students will be empowered to understand and navigate the system with greater ease for the benefit of their own mental health. This will require strong relationships, role clarity, and proactive integration between post-secondary institutions and supports available in the community. It will also require strong relationships and even formal integration among services within post-secondary institutions. At the same time, enhanced integration may not always be sufficient to establish pathways to mental health, especially for students that are not well-served by mainstream supports: there may be gaps in supports that need to be identified and addressed.

What will be different for students with mental health concerns?

Students will have the support they need to transition between and among care systems. Risks to mental health that arise due to a lack of service coordination during key transition points will be anticipated and proactively mitigated, with particular focus on the following transitions: from the K-12 education system to the advanced education system, from children and youth services to adult services, and between community-based and campus-based support systems. Students and their natural supports, such as

family members and mentors, will be equipped with the resources they need to navigate key transition periods. Strong service integration and information sharing among service providers, and respectful intake procedures designed to optimize the patient experience, will prevent students from falling through the cracks. Trauma-informed practices will ensure students with a history of trauma are not re-victimized through the process of seeking supports.

Students will have direct and timely access to a live "first point of contact" when they are in need of mental health support. This point of contact will be readily available and will actively assist students to connect with needed supports and navigate the system. This role may be fulfilled in different ways at different institutions (trained peers, elders, coaches, videoconferencing, or intake professionals), but it is critical that it be more than just a passive referral system: it must be supportive, fluid, and connected. Students in need are too often discouraged because they don't know where to turn, the system appears too complex, or they are constantly required to repeat their story.

Post-secondary mental health and addiction supports across Alberta will be excellent. While service mix and level is expected to vary widely across post-secondary institutions depending on needs and availability of resources, all post-secondary addiction and mental health approaches will be person-centered, based on best available evidence, integrated, inclusive, and accessible.

Post-secondary mental health and addiction supports will regularly undergo continuous quality improvement. As student needs change over time, continuous quality improvement (CQI) will be undertaken to adapt and enhance supports – both at the institutional and system levels. In addition to local-level CQI, it is anticipated that system-level CQI will foster leading practice and innovation across Alberta, and contribute to efficiencies through collaboration among post-secondary institutions that will in turn enable increased system capacity for all students.

Post-secondary institutions will offer students the means of accessing a full range of clinical resources and associated supports when needed. Given the wide variation in institutional circumstances, locations and resources, the direct provision of services may not always be feasible or appropriate. However, students at all institutions will have access to navigation and coaching, Indigenized and Indigenous supports, language supports, and online tools that will enable them to connect with the supports and services they need, regardless of the particular circumstances or barriers to access they may face.

Intake, referral and transition procedures will optimize mental health. Students will be treated with dignity and respect when seeking assistance, including being taken seriously when identifying a need for help, and not being required to tell their story repeatedly to various care providers during intake and triage.

4. What is needed to achieve the envisioned approach?

The Advisory Panel identified three major areas where change is needed to achieve the envisioned future described above. These "strategic directions" guided the Panel as they developed their recommendations.

A systemic approach that promotes mental health for all students is needed

While many post-secondary institutions and student associations have begun to design and implement a systemic approach to promoting mental health, including several funded under past provincial grants, these approaches are not yet in place across the entire advanced education system, and they do not yet inform the approach to policy development in the broader advanced education and health care systems.

Implementing a systemic approach to promoting mental health entails putting in place comprehensive strategies to support all students in coping with the normal stresses of life, studying productively and fruitfully, contributing to their community, and in preparing to transition to life beyond their post-secondary experiences.[xii] Building on the description of a systemic approach above, this involves:

- **Facilitating cultural shifts to create more inclusive environments**, such as proactively fostering acceptance, respect, and equitable treatment of people with mental health concerns, increasing mental health literacy among students, faculty, administration and employees, eliminating stigma and discrimination, and advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples;
- **Anticipating and supporting the journeys of students with diverse lived experiences,** such as the experiences of those living away from home for the first time, those affected by historical and/or recent experiences of trauma, international students, those from various cultural backgrounds, those encountering drugs and alcohol for the first time, those pursuing diverse pathways to educational attainment – such as distance learning or mid-career training; those living off-campus and those living on-campus, trade students, and those with varying levels of mental health and mental illness; and
- **Addressing the social determinants of mental, physical, spiritual and emotional health** (such as culture, income, housing, employment, and social networks), and known risk factors for mental illness – often through collective action of many partners.

Continuity of services and systems that collectively contribute to student mental health is needed

Current post-secondary mental health services and supports are fragmented at the institutional, inter-institutional, and provincial levels. Services and supports are often not connected with each other, with the broader addiction and mental health system

(including primary care networks, community-based supports, and services provided by Alberta Health Services), and with social, economic, and cultural supports.

This situation creates barriers to well-coordinated transitions between service providers, systems, and levels of care for individuals. It also creates barriers to equitable resource distribution for the benefit of all students, and impedes system efficiency.

Lastly, while efforts to improve and enhance addiction and mental health approaches at post-secondary institutions are already taking place in many instances, the current absence of system coordination at the local and provincial levels limits the scope and scale of improvements that are possible.

Access to treatment, intervention and crisis supports needs to be timely and appropriate

Often, the first symptoms of mental illness emerge in early adulthood. Furthermore, many post-secondary students experience decreased mental health at some point during their post-secondary education, due to episodes of high stress related to academics, relationships, competition, finances, and an uncertain future. A student's post-secondary tenure is also a frequent period of experimentation that may lead to problematic patterns of substance use. With resilience and coping skills still in a formative state, students with or without a diagnosed mental illness or addiction can quickly reach a crisis state.

A strong foundation of health promotion is needed. It is well-established that for serious physical illnesses, like cancer, early intervention is preferred – ideally at the stage when symptoms are first evident. The same thinking should be applied to mental illness: positive, supportive communities; strong health promotion; and early detection is needed to ensure students with concerns about coping get timely support before mental health is seriously compromised;[xiii]

Additionally, while supports and services for individuals are just one aspect of a systemic approach to campus mental health, in many cases post-secondary institutions require increased capacity to respond to and effectively support students with mental illness, whose mental health is declining, and/or who are in crises.

This may involve direct provision of services – such as universal access to support and information – or facilitating more timely and effective access to a coordinated network of supports. It may also involve enhancing crisis intervention, especially for underserved groups, through a systemic approach. In many cases, those in the best position to identify and provide support to a student at risk of crisis may include peers, residence staff, coaches, faculty, or other individuals that interact regularly with students. This is especially the case for students that are not well served by mainstream services, such as Indigenous and some international students, who may be less likely to seek help from

institutionalized service providers; that are attending smaller post-secondary institutions, which may have fewer traditional supports available; and for students without stable networks of support.

5. Recommendations

Recommendation Development

The 12 recommendations outlined in this section represent the Advisory Panel's advice to the Government of Alberta on the most important actions needed to advance the desired outcomes and strategic directions outlined in the previous two sections. In addition to considering desired outcomes, the Advisory Panel was guided by the following practical criteria in developing these recommendations.

- Recommendations should advance the policy directions articulated in *Valuing Mental Health* and the *Adult Learning System Vision and Principles.*
- Actions need to be practical and purposeful, create sustainable value, and be informed by evidence.
- Actions should build on the lessons learned through past phases of funded work, and create space for continued innovation in the development of systems of support that meet the needs of students.
- Actions should be at a sufficient level of detail to inform decisions about next steps without substantial additional consultation.

The remainder of this section describes the Advisory Panel's recommendations to the Minister of Advanced Education regarding the development of a long-term approach to post-secondary mental health. An outline of additional options considered by the Advisory Panel can be found in Appendix E, including a description of why these options were not recommended.

Ensuring provincial policies promote health, prevent illness, and support recovery

Recommendation 1: *It is recommended the Government of Alberta adopt a common definition of mental health and mental illness, that includes addiction, across all ministries, and ensure provincial policy is developed through this lens.*

The Government of Alberta holds unique policy and structural levers relative to the advanced education system, the health care system, the K-12 education system, and in other social and economic areas. A common definition of mental health and mental illness to guide policy development across government is needed to ensure system continuity, shift culture, and drive continuous improvement of public policy.

The definition of mental health should be inclusive of Indigenous perspectives on health. It should also acknowledge the dual continuums of health and illness described in Section 2 of this document to embed a culture that promotes optimal health for all,

including for those recovering from mental illness, across the addiction and mental health system.

Cross-ministry work underway through *Valuing Mental Health* provides a clear and timely opportunity to clarify how the Government of Alberta will define mental health and mental illness going forward, and to infuse this definition and lens into all government systems that contribute to population mental health, whether directly or indirectly.

In addition, the Comprehensive Institutional Planning and Annual Reporting processes should be fully leveraged, along with funding criteria for mental health grants, to guide adoption of these definitions across the advanced education system. For example, Advanced Education may include the development of a comprehensive mental health and wellness strategy based on system definitions as a requirement of the Comprehensive Institutional Plan. The Performance Measurement Framework included in Appendix C was shaped through the Advisory Panel's definition of mental health and mental illness, and offers a starting point for further development.

Recommendation 2: *It is recommended Advanced Education review student financial assistance policy to ensure students who become unwell and leave school are financially able to return and are not burdened by additional debt payments as they continue on their recovery journey.*

As the provincial government increasingly seeks to support the recovery journey of those with mental illness or decreased mental health, changes are needed to policies and systems that create unintended barriers to the recovery process. While post-secondary students who require time away from their studies due to mental health concerns require flexibility and understanding from post-secondary institutions and faculty, they also depend on provincial programs and systems to anticipate and accommodate the recovery journey. In particular, student financial assistance policy can create barriers to recovery by requiring re-payment of loans before students have had sufficient time and opportunity to rebuild mental health. Students that wish to resume their studies may be especially affected by the requirement to make loan re-payments, and may be unable to return to their studies as a consequence.

Recommendation 3: *It is recommended that Advanced Education clarify health information policies, such as requirements and waivers under the Health Information Act, to facilitate enhanced information sharing among campus service providers, and between campus and community service providers, that play roles in supporting students recovering from crisis and mental illness.*

There is a lack of understanding, and in some cases confusion, regarding what information sharing is permitted among mental health service providers that support post-secondary students. This situation limits information sharing, and makes it difficult for service providers and personnel at post-secondary institutions to play a meaningful role in supporting students that are transitioning between campus and community supports, or between clinical and other supports. Intentional cooperation and appropriate information sharing between services provided on campus and in the community is needed to ensure student-centred health service planning, guide efficient funding, and equip service providers with the information needed to coordinate care.

Current provincial policy, such as the *Health Information Act*, delineates the legal and ethical requirements to guide appropriate sharing of health information. There are also tools, such as waivers, available to allow individuals to play a role in determining what level of information sharing among service providers they consent to.

Clear communication of current policy and tools to post-secondary service providers, and students, to facilitate appropriate information sharing is needed. This may be achieved through the development of guides, webinars, or other communication products. While it is recommended Advanced Education take the lead on this recommendation, it is anticipated that Alberta Health – as the ministry responsible for the *Health Information Act* – and Healthy Campus Alberta – as a post-secondary mental health resource hub – could play meaningful roles in the development and dissemination of communication products.

Building Mental Health Literacy

Recommendation 4: *Recognizing the vital importance of building mental health literacy and resilience from the earliest possible age, it is recommended that provincial strategies to foster mental health literacy – from early childhood to the advanced education system – clarify and reflect the perspectives of both Alberta Education and Alberta Advanced Education.*

Post-secondary students report high levels of anxiety, perceived depression and an inability to cope**.** According to survey data from the National College Health Assessment, nearly two-thirds of Alberta post-secondary students felt overwhelming anxiety at least once in the past 12 months, while 42 per cent felt so depressed it was difficult to function, and 13 per cent seriously considered suicide.[xiv]

Building mental health literacy from the earliest possible age through to adulthood is vital to ensure post-secondary students have the resilience and coping skills needed to weather challenges faced while attaining their post-secondary education goals – and later in life[xv]. Mental health literacy also contributes to effective early intervention through ensuring students know when and where to seek help, and ensuring instructors, peers, and other service providers can effectively provide support and identify early warning signs.

Recommendation 5: *Building on work underway through Valuing Mental Health to create comprehensive, up-to-date inventories of existing addiction and mental health services for all Albertans, it is recommended Advanced Education help make this information available in an appropriate and relevant format for post-secondary students transitioning from high school to the advanced education system, and/or re-locating to a new community for post-secondary education.*

Students' ability to autonomously identify and access needed supports is an important component of developing mental health literacy, and honours the recovery journey for students with mental health concerns. For those living away from home, possibly for the first time, navigating the health care system and social supports may be an entirely new experience.

Currently, information regarding supports available on campus or in the community may be fragmented, hard to find, or focused primarily on clinical and intervention services rather than a holistic set of supports.

Work is underway through *Valuing Mental Health* to create inventories of existing addiction and mental health services for all Albertans. This work, as well as resources such as 211 and inventories maintained by the Canadian Mental Health Association, should be leveraged to develop community-specific navigation guides expressly targeting post-secondary students - including content tailored to students from diverse gender and/or cultural backgrounds.

Advanced Education needs to play a role in making sure inventories developed through *Valuing Mental Health* are shared with Healthy Campus Alberta and post-secondary institutions to support the development, distribution, and maintenance of communication tools that support post-secondary students in system navigation.

It is anticipated post-secondary institutions will play a role in developing locally relevant inventories and navigational tools for students in their catchment areas. It is also anticipated that Healthy Campus Alberta could play a role in distributing these products, and that links could be made available on websites such as Help 4 Me and Learning Clicks.

De-colonizing the Adult Education System to Promote Mental Health for all Students

Recommendation 6: *It is recommended that work being undertaken to develop an Indigenous Adult Learner Policy be directed and authorized to advance, and be held accountable for, de-colonization of the adult education system to better support Indigenous learner health and wellbeing.*

There is a relationship between the historical, inter-generational trauma experienced by Indigenous Albertans and the mental health of Indigenous learners. So, while an urgent need exists for action to better to support Indigenous students, there is need to take time for learning, relationship building, and respectful partnership in determining how to create authentic reconciliation and healing.

A whole-system approach that recognizes invisible barriers is needed. The mental health effects of the legacy of the Residential School system, and racism that continues to the present day, is perpetuated by colonial institutional structures at all levels of the advanced education and health care systems. These barriers are not always evident to those from Western knowledge systems. This approach must be grounded in recognition of Indigenous-settler history; current health disparities; and social, economic and cultural determinants of health. It must also recognize Indigenous communities know how to heal their people, but require support and collaboration from government partners.

Partnering with Indigenous elders, community members, instructors, adult learning institutions (such as First Nations Colleges), and students in identifying what needs to change, and developing plans to bring about change, will help foster shared understanding, healing, and reconciliation through the decolonization process. This should take place through the development of the Indigenous Adult Learner Policy to ensure the results of this work are grounded in a shared vision for de-colonization.

Providing Universal Access to Information and Support

Recommendation 7: *It is recommended Advanced Education facilitate access to a province-wide crisis and referral hotline tailored to meet the needs of post-secondary students, in partnership with similar services that currently exist (such as the Distress Line);*

and

Recommendation 8: *It is recommended that Advanced Education, in partnership with Alberta Health Services, expand the mandate of the Help 4 Me website to provide access to online information and screening tools for post-secondary students, using branding and web design appropriate for this audience.*

Demand for mental health support is rapidly increasing among post-secondary students as early diagnosis and treatment improve – enabling increasing numbers of individuals with mental illness to enrol in post-secondary education – and help-seeking behaviour becomes less stigmatized. Demand is expected to increase even further as progress continues to be made in the areas of early diagnosis, treatment, and de-stigmatization.

The Distress Line: Provided through the Canadian Mental Health Association, the Distress Line is a 24-7 hotline for individuals with mental health concerns.

211: 211 is a resource directory, helping individuals identify what services and supports are available in their community. General service listings, as well as needs and population-specific service listings, are available.

Help4Me.ca: This website offers information about youth mental health, and provides the phone numbers of distress lines for those needing immediate assistance.

LearningClicks.alberta.ca: This website offers planning support to high-school students considering advanced education.

Moreover, emerging adulthood is a time of life when individuals are becoming increasingly aware of their own wellbeing, and may experience signs and symptoms of mental health problems. Mood disorders, schizophrenia, and substance abuse issues generally first emerge during this time of life.

There is an opportunity to improve timely access to appropriate support through enhancing universal services that provide crisis intervention and referral services. Ensuring students understand when and where to seek help, and can access needed supports when they do, are critical opportunities to prevent mental health problems from reaching a crisis state, improve long term outcomes, and equip individuals with life-long system navigation and self-management skills.

A crisis and referral hotline and online portal designed specifically to engage and provide support to post-secondary students are efficient means of ensuring all post-secondary students have access to crisis support, referrals and information about how to access services. These tools could serve as valuable communication methods for service inventories described under Recommendation 5.

Furthermore, existing services and information infrastructure – such as the Distress Line, 211, the Help 4 Me website, and Learning Clicks – provide well-developed, existing platforms that can easily be expanded to fill gaps in the current system, offering 24/7 support for all post-secondary students. It should be noted that, while it is currently

limited to select counties and major urban areas, preliminary planning is underway to expand 211 across Alberta.

If an existing service platform is leveraged, particularly for a crisis and referral line, personnel should be trained appropriately to provide culturally safe support to students from diverse backgrounds, and to ensure they are aware of the student journey and particular stressors faced by students. Additional analysis is needed to identify what existing crisis and referral hotlines currently exist, and to identify specific changes needed to cater to a post-secondary audience.

These tools may be of particular value to students in rural and remote locations, distance learners, and students attending private career colleges. It is suggested that students accessing a distance or online learning program, and/or that are located in remote areas, should be a high priority for roll-out and piloting of this tool.

Expand System Capacity to Support All Students

Recommendation 9: *It is recommended that Advanced Education provide funding to Healthy Campus Alberta to carry out identified functions as a province-wide post-secondary mental health community of practice.*

Grant funding should be provided to Healthy Campus Alberta, a province-wide community of practice on post-secondary mental health, to strengthen, enhance and expand its current work in the areas of evaluation and continuous improvement of post-secondary mental health approaches, knowledge transfer among post-secondary mental health stakeholders in Alberta, and dissemination of evidence-based practices.

More specifically, it is envisioned that Healthy Campus Alberta would be well-positioned to expand, develop capacity, and play an increased role in the following areas that will be central to the success of province-wide systems of student mental health supports.

- **Evaluation and continuous improvement:** supporting province-wide application of impact measurement and evaluation tools (such the National College Health

Healthy Campus Alberta is an Alberta-based community of practice for post-secondary mental health. Formed in 2015 following a series of annual wellness summits, HCA has a provincial membership of over 200 people and is led by a design team featuring the Alberta Students' Executive Council, the Canadian Mental Health Association, Council of Alberta University Students, Alberta Health Services, and several post-secondary institutions. A grassroots organization, HCA provides a platform for information sharing, knowledge transfer, and collective problem solving; and catalyzes the involvement of students in co-creating mental health strategies. (www.healthycampusalberta.ca).

Assessment Survey), provincial-level reporting on outcomes, and continuous improvement of post-secondary mental health approaches;

- **Development and dissemination of information and resources:** building on its existing network and strengths in communication, develop and disseminate resources such as implementation guidelines for health information sharing, contemplated under recommendation 3 above, and service inventories contemplated under recommendation 5; and
- **Training and capacity building:** developing and facilitating training programs for students, service providers, post-secondary faculty and staff, such as a training program to build capacity in Distress Centre and 211 staff to anticipate and be responsive to the needs of post-secondary students, as described under recommendation 7.

Recommendation 10: *It is recommended that the Government of Alberta provide long-term stable funding for student-centred, systemic approaches to post-secondary mental health.*

It is envisioned that all post-secondary students in Alberta will benefit from public investment in post-secondary mental health in the future. This represents a significant shift from the past, in which the majority of post-secondary mental health funding was concentrated at five large post-secondary institutions.

The approach going forward will sustain the value created through past investments while building capacity and supports at the remaining 26 post-secondary institutions in the province, including First Nations Colleges.

As a first step, this will require stimulating the development of mental health supports at all post-secondary institutions in the province by expanding the reach of mental health grants. A long-term funding formula will be needed to ensure a clear and predictable approach to fund allocation, taking into consideration the following principles.

- **The funding amount and approach should sustain the value of past investments while growing the system's capacity to support all students.** Post-secondary institutions that received funding in the past create significant value for the entire advanced education system by demonstrating successful approaches and processes for developing effective models, and serving as hubs for robust program evaluation. This value should be reflected and sustained in the model of funding going forward.

  Moreover, the level of funding going forward should not represent a significant decrease in the level of support for student mental health, or a major disruption in services at post-secondary institutions that received funding previously. It does not make sense to expand the system from five post-secondary institutions to 31 post-secondary institutions with a marginal funding increase.

- **The funding formula must consider diverse needs.** An equal approach - such as one based solely on headcount - is not fair to post-secondary students at institutions or in regions with higher needs, such as those with higher costs of service delivery in Northern Alberta, or with high rates of youth suicide. At least a portion of funding must be tied to meeting needs and achieving better health and student outcomes.
- **The approach for transition will be different from the long-term approach.** Before a long-term approach for post-secondary mental health funding takes effect, transition funding is needed to carry out needs assessments, planning and capacity building in regions and/or post-secondary institutions that did not receive funds in the past.

In concert with the development of mental health supports at all post-secondary institutions, integrating mechanisms must be also be developed and put in place to ensure the end result of new investment is effective, efficient, student-centred systems of care, rather than fragmented services lacking clear connections to each other and the community. These mechanisms will address known challenges related to a current lack of system continuity and efficiency - listed on the following page; and ensure dollars invested in post-secondary mental health have the maximum possible benefit for all students. A draft terms of reference to guide the development of integrating mechanisms in a future phase of work is included in Appendix B.

Recommendation 10 is expected to be implemented in two phases, including one dedicated to building implementation readiness, and one dedicated to putting in place a long-term approach. Phase 1, anticipated to occur over a timeline of one-to-two years, will consist of the following:

- Planning and capacity development at post-secondary institutions that did not receive funding for mental health previously;
- Confirmation of the long-term funding approach; and
- Development of an integrating mechanism.

During Phase 1, post-secondary institutions that received funding through past grants will work closely with those receiving funds for the first time, sharing lessons learned and acting as a resource. They will also play a leadership role in designing effective integrating mechanisms.

Phase 2, expected to begin following the conclusion of Phase 1, will consist of implementing plans and approaches developed during Phase 1, putting the funding approach in place, developing and delivering of supports and services for all post-secondary students, and ensuring system continuity and efficiency.

Current Challenges Related to System Continuity

Transition points create and increase vulnerability.

Of particular concern, fragmentation among services and systems creates and increases risks and vulnerability for post-secondary students experiencing transitions – such as those transitioning from child and youth services to adult services, from community to campus supports and back again, between on-reserve and off-reserve, or between levels of care.

These students can be put at risk of falling through the cracks when transitions are not well-planned and managed. Underserved populations – such as LGBTQ, Indigenous, refugee, international students, trade students, and students in rural or remote locations – and their loved ones are especially affected, notwithstanding that the system continuity needs for all students are compounded by common life transitions that take place during the student journey.

Students returning to campus following a leave of absence from their studies, and those in apprenticeships or other work-integrated learning opportunities, may also be particularly vulnerable to the effects of fragmentation between community and campus-based services to resume studies.

Non-clinical supports have a significant impact on mental health but are often overlooked.

While continuity of treatment services is a major concern, social, economic, spiritual, and cultural supports also have a significant bearing on mental health, and need to be proactively included in comprehensive systems of support. This is particularly important for students from diverse knowledge systems, such as Indigenous and international students, who seek culturally safe supports that may not necessarily fall within the medical model.

Supports that foster social connections, healthy relationships, individual resilience and independence are also important - promoting mental health while preventing more serious crises from developing. This includes capacity building supports targeted to individual students, as well as resources for family and community members that play key roles in supporting students through their post-secondary journeys and in creating environments that promote health and wellness.

There is opportunity to achieve better results through a coordinated systems approach.

The scope of continuous improvement efforts can also be limited by system fragmentation. Platforms are needed to facilitate knowledge transfer between post-secondary institutions, the health care system, and community-based organizations; identification of system-level gaps and deficiencies – especially from the perspective of students who are currently under-served; and collective action to meet identified needs.

Fragmentation promotes duplication, and perpetuates inefficiency.

Fragmentation among service providers – particularly but not exclusive to those offering treatment services – and post-secondary institutions creates incentives for parallel systems to emerge. When on-campus service delivery is expanded in response, there is risk of potentially duplicating services that are available in the community or through the health care system broadly. This further undermines integration within professional, data and information, and referral networks. As systems grow and expand to meet unmet demand, it will be important to also optimize system performance through effective coordination.

Recommendation 11: *It is recommended that students attending First Nations Colleges be eligible to receive the same benefits as all other post-secondary students in Alberta in relation to the recommendations of this Panel.*

Due the legacy of colonial system structures, described above under Recommendation 6, it is not clear whether or how Indigenous higher learning institutions, such as First Nations Colleges or the Rupertsland Institute, will play a role in implementation of the Advisory Panel's recommendations. These institutions do not fall under the same policy and governance framework as publicly funded post-secondary institutions, and First Nations Colleges are frequently located on reserves.

However, it is the intention of this Panel that Indigenous learners at these institutions will be eligible to receive the same benefits as other post-secondary students in relation to these recommendations.

Respectful relationship building is needed to determine the methods through which students attending First Nations Colleges will benefit from these recommendations. The development of the Indigenous Adult Learner Policy provides a possible vehicle through which needed relationship building and decision-making in this regard could take place.

Recommendation 12: *It is recommended that Advanced Education provide a pool of dedicated funding to develop culturally appropriate approaches to promoting mental health and wellness for Alberta's Indigenous learners.*

It is expected that implementation of Recommendations 6 and 11 will require time for respectful relationship building and shared learning before decisions regarding major changes in the advanced education system to support Indigenous learners are made.

While this process unfolds, the availability of culturally appropriate mental health supports for Indigenous post-secondary students can be enhanced, such as bringing Elders and traditional healers to campuses, or other supports as identified by Indigenous learners and communities. A pool of dedicated funding to develop these supports is needed, potentially made available through project grants under Healthy Campus Alberta.

6. Impact Measurement and Accountability

Impact Measurement Tools

Performance measurement and evaluation will be needed to ensure policy makers, post-secondary institutions, health professionals, system partners, stakeholders and all Albertans can see how implementation of the above recommendations improves mental health and recovery for Alberta's post-secondary students. It will also enable system partners and stakeholders to:

- Monitor how well the system is working towards achieving desired outcomes for Albertans;
- Understand how the system is evolving relative to prior performance;
- Identify areas of strength and opportunities to enhance continuous quality improvement efforts; and
- Develop strategy and policy, and set investment priorities.

A draft approach for impact measurement and evaluation is included in Appendix C, including the following three tools:

- **A Logic model**: an illustration of how the recommendations are expected to achieve outcomes.
- **An ongoing impact measurement strategy**: identification of draft indicators for the outcomes included in the logic model and a measurement strategy describing how these indicators will be collected and how often.
- **An evaluation strategy:** a plan for the evaluation of the recommendations, including identification of formative and summative evaluation issues and questions, the identification of the associated data requirements, and a data collection strategy.

Linking Recommendations to Outcomes

The following diagram, further explored in Appendix C, is a draft logic model. Building on the desired outcomes described in Section 3 of this document, the logic model provides a visual representation of how change is expected to occur for Alberta's post-secondary students, and illustrates the envisioned impact of each recommendation. Wording has been paraphrased – please refer to Section 3 and Section 5 for actual wording of outcomes and recommendations.

Enhancing Capacity to Measure Impact

While there are some initial metrics to assess changes related to the micro, meso and macro outcomes – as shown in Appendix C – it is recognized that the process of measuring for results needs to evolve over time. It is recommended that a comprehensive approach be designed and implemented that ensures there are a variety of results-measurement activities that occur at different points in time, contributing to the ongoing evaluation of these recommendations.

An additional component required to enhance impact management includes the identification of indicators and measures for the following outcomes:

- Social, economic, cultural, spiritual, and medical supports systems are coordinated;
- Campus policies, procedures and behaviors contribute to positive mental health and wellness for students;
- Intake procedures optimize mental wellness;
- Students are supported when transitioning between and among care systems;
- Students experience welcoming, engaging, safe and respectful post-secondary environments; and

- A systemic approach to mental health creates space for reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

The current system of supports and services does not have data to report on these outcomes. In some instances measurement of these outcomes may require the development and implementation of new data collection methodologies. In some instances, it is suggested that Advanced Education leverage the work being undertaken by other government ministries to identify appropriate indicators and measures. For example, the Ministry of Education is in the process of developing a performance measurement framework for welcoming, respectful, safe and caring learning environments. There may be opportunities to leverage this work to identify consistent indicators and measures.

Given this situation, it is recommended that Advanced Education lead the further development and refinement of the impact management framework for post-secondary mental health, included in Appendix C, in partnership with post-secondary institutions, Healthy Campus Alberta, and Alberta Health Services and other government ministries.

It is also recommended that all post-secondary institutions administer the National College Health Assessment (NCHA) every three years to gather information that can inform planning and reporting. The NCHA is a nationally recognized research survey that assists in collecting precise data about students' health habits, behaviors, and perceptions, with respect to alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use; sexual health; weight, nutrition, and exercise; mental health; and personal safety and violence. This will establish a baseline of data for and enable comparison across Alberta's advanced education system. It will also enable comparison with other jurisdictions. It is anticipated Healthy Campus Alberta may play a coordination or system-level analysis role relative to the survey, as part of their evaluative function.

Reporting and Accountability

Section 7 includes a comprehensive outline of entities that contribute to post-secondary students' mental health and the roles each will be accountable for playing in the implementation of recommendations in Section 5. Several of these entities will be directly accountable to Advanced Education for execution of their roles.

In particular, post-secondary institutions, as well as Healthy Campus Alberta if it agrees to accept grant funding and play an expanded role, will be accountable for achieving the results associated with each entity, respectively, as shown in the draft logic model (above). And, Advanced Education will be accountable to Albertans for the overall results of recommendation implementation.

A draft accountability framework is included in Appendix D, outlining a set of planning and reporting processes for post-secondary mental health, focusing on requirements for Advanced Education, Healthy Campus Alberta and post-secondary institutions. The purpose of the framework is to ensure accountability to government, students, and the public for long-term outcomes.

7. Implementation Roles

Implementing these recommendations will require more than provincial leadership: many players at all levels of the system will need to work together to address gaps, solve problems, and continuously improve. The Advisory Panel does not envision a system in which the provincial government must direct all activity or measure all change. An intentional approach to system governance, in which roles and responsibilities for varying types of actions and results are clear and integrated, including the role of the province, is needed.

The following descriptions identify and outline the envisioned contributions of each major stakeholder that will play a role implementing the Advisory Panel's recommendations. A detailed table of envisioned roles for each recommendation is included in Appendix F.

Advanced Education

Advanced Education will be responsible for coordinating full implementation of all recommendations. In some cases, this will involve direct action, while in many cases a high-level oversight and coordination role will be played. Advanced Education will monitor system-level outcomes, evaluate and update policy over time, and coordinate as needed with other areas of government to ensure policy coordination – including advocating for the mental health of post-secondary students in efforts underway through *Valuing Mental Health*. Advanced Education will also establish and oversee a funding approach for post-secondary mental health, based on the recommendations in this report, and determine how to proceed with the creation of the integrating mechanism described under recommendation 10.

Alberta Health

Alberta Health will play a partnership role in a number of recommendations, bringing to bear subject matter expertise, and ensuring ongoing efforts under *Valuing Mental Health* take into consideration the advice of the Advisory Panel and lend momentum to its recommendations.

Alberta Education

Alberta Education will play a key partnership role in working with Advanced Education to shape mental health literacy strategies for post-secondary students; and to develop and continuously improve mental health literacy strategies for the early learning, primary and secondary school systems, taking into account the perspective of the higher learning system. Alberta Education will also bring to bear their past experience with regional collaborative mental health service delivery models, and their knowledge

of the K-12 education system more generally, to help guide the design and establishment of the integrating mechanism contemplated under recommendation 10.

Alberta Health Services

Alberta Health Services is responsible for delivering safe, effective, and appropriate health care to all Albertans, including post-secondary students. Where opportunities, exist, AHS will participate in collaborative planning with post-secondary institutions to identify their needs within the community, and partner to coordinate appropriate access to services. It is anticipated that Alberta Health Services will be a major partner in the integrating mechanism described under recommendation 10.

Post-Secondary Institutions

Post-secondary institutions will lead the development of mental health supports for students at their respective institutions, and be accountable for achieving comprehensive systems of support through the integrating mechanism described under recommendation 10. They will be responsible for submitting annual plans and reports to Advanced Education to ensure accountability for achievement of desired outcomes.

Indigenous Communities and Higher Learning Institutions

The roles of Indigenous communities and higher learning institutions, such as First Nations Colleges, will be determined through respectful and collaborative dialogue. It is anticipated that Indigenous students, First Nations Colleges, Elders, and community knowledge keepers may wish to partner with Advanced Education in identifying and making needed changes to the advanced education system for the benefit of Indigenous learning, such as guiding Advanced Education to understand invisible barriers to mental health.

Indigenous Student Services

Indigenous Student Service providers at publicly funded post-secondary institutions where they exist, will play a role in identifying, developing, and providing culturally safe mental health supports for Indigenous learners. This role will be especially important in years 1-2 of recommendation implementation, as the Indigenous Adult Learner Policy will not yet be complete to guide a longer-term approach to Indigenous student mental health.

Students

Students will partner with Advanced Education and post-secondary institutions to ensure the student voice, including the perspectives of those with diverse lived experiences, guides implementation of all recommendations. As shown through post-secondary mental health grants provided to student organizations through the Alberta Students' Executive Council, students see their lives as a whole, rather than

compartmentalized based on the services available to them. This can be particularly valuable in disrupting assumptions about models of care, and the roles of diverse stakeholders in promoting mental health.

Student Advocacy Organizations

As proven relationship-builders within the campus community – catalyzing action, interest/attention, and building campus wide coordination – provincial and campus-level student advocacy organizations and student groups will partner in and guide actions to implement the recommendations. Students' associations, student leaders, athletes, and peer supporters will play a key role in shaping and shifting dialogue, events, and the overall culture on campus. This will be particularly critical in determining the design of the integrating mechanism described under recommendation 10.

Healthy Campus Alberta

It is envisioned Healthy Campus Alberta will expand and develop key envisioned functions described under recommendation 9, playing an enhanced role relative to mental health data collection and evaluation, capacity building, and knowledge transfer.

Community Health and Social Service Partners

Community-based organizations, such as the Canadian Mental Health Association, the Distress Centre, 211, Primary Care Networks, Alberta Health Services zones, and non-profit organizations such as the Schizophrenia Society of Alberta will work closely with post-secondary institutions to design and implement the integrating mechanism described in recommendation 10. Some may also play roles in the implementation of recommendation 7, potentially entering into a service agreement with Advanced Education to enhance existing services.

8. Next Steps

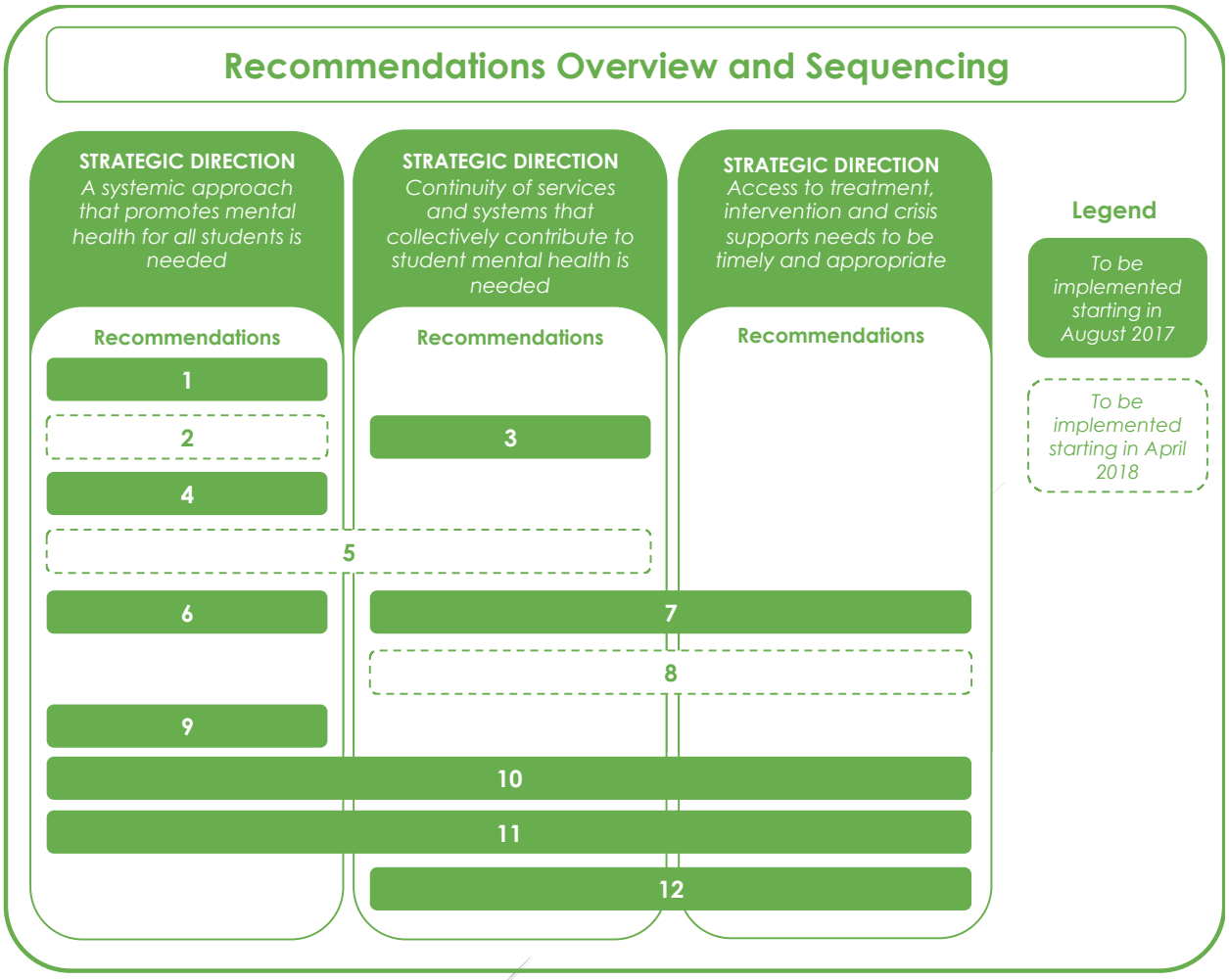
Guided by the Advisory Panel Co-Chairs, this work was considered to be a first phase in a longer-term, multi-phased process. The recommendations outlined in this report provide a blueprint for initial actions needed to create a long-term, province-wide approach for post-secondary mental health. However, more work is needed. This section identifies a phased approach to implementing all recommendations included in Section 5 of this report, a phased approach to implementing recommendation 10, and immediate next steps.

Implementation Phases for all Recommendations

The following table provides a draft, notional timeline for recommendation implementation, using two broad implementation phases: August 2017-March 2018, and April 2018-March 2019. Actions that require a longer implementation period are started earlier, as well as actions with the greatest potential impact on overall system performance – such as investments in mental health literacy. An evaluation of implementation will be carried out in spring, 2019, to guide next steps, followed by periodic progress reviews every three years, immediately following administration of the NCHA survey.

Timeframe	**Recommendations**										
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6/11**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**12**
Phase 1 - August 2017-March 2018	**S/C**			**S**		**S**	**S**	**S**	**S/C**	**S**	**S**
Phase 2 - April 2018 – March 2019		**S/C**	**S/C**	**C**	**S/C**	**C**	**C**	**C**		**C**	**C**

Actions that can be implemented relatively quickly are started in the second phase. In the table, "S" indicates the start of an action, "C" indicates the estimated timing of completion. The diagram on the following page provides a snapshot of the recommendations in relation to the strategic directions each supports. Recommendations that would not commence implementation until April 2019 are shown in white boxes with dotted borders.



Immediate Next Steps

The following next steps are proposed to kick-start implementation of all recommendations leading up to August 2017.

Build Stakeholder Readiness

Many key partners in implementation, including those internal to government and Alberta Health Services, post-secondary institutions, student associations, and community partners, such as Healthy Campus Alberta, 211, and the Distress Line, will have only a limited awareness of the Advisory Panel's work. While formal planning and capacity development will be needed as part of the implementation process, in the immediate term concerted communication and engagement efforts that raise awareness and build support are needed to foster implementation readiness.

Build Forward Momentum Through Ongoing Work

Significant ongoing efforts are underway that have the potential to build forward momentum for the Panel's recommendations. The leaders of these efforts should be engaged at the earliest possible time to identify opportunities for partnership and collaboration in the implementation of the Advisory Panel's recommendations. These efforts include, but are not necessarily limited to, the following.

- A *Valuing Mental Health* Action Plan is being developed.
- A review of student financial assistance policy is underway.
- The Indigenous Adult Learners Policy development process is planned to commence in spring 2017.
- A proposal has been submitted to government to expand 211 services across Alberta.
- Initial efforts are underway to revitalize the Help4Me website.

Project Planning

The development of project plans, including work plans and resource matrices, is needed to guide nimble action while managing the complexity of implementing multiple recommendations simultaneously.

Address Limitations of Recommendations

Two actions are needed to address the limitations stated in the introduction of this report. First, needed enhancements to services and supports for post-secondary students with complex needs and severe mental illness must be identified. As noted earlier, while it is the intention of the Advisory Panel that all students will benefit from their recommendations, more work is needed to address the specific and unique needs of this student population – many of whom rely primarily on accommodations under disability services for support currently.

Second, the introduction to this report acknowledged the scarcity of robust research and evaluation that has been undertaken to guide evidence-informed policy development. It will be imperative to ensure evaluations of mental health supports funded through future grants help to address this gap, and support effective continuous quality improvement over time.

Conclusion

This Recommendations Report represents the first step forward in building a long-term system of mental health support for Alberta's post-secondary students. While there is significant work yet to come, the actions recommended here will set in motion a long-term journey that will have a profound effect on the post-secondary environment, on the industries, communities, and families post-secondary students go on to contribute to, and ultimately the lives of students that pass through our province's higher learning institutions.

The greatest strength of these recommendations is their grounding in the student voice. Going forward, that voice must also become the greatest strength of the system as a whole. The involvement of students as partners and co-creators is the most important critical success factor in building sustainable and effective solutions that meet real needs.