

Subtheme 4: Building Supportive Campus Communities

How can post-secondary institutions build campus communities that reduce stigma and foster a sense of connection and belonging?

The breakout sessions around “Building Supportive Campus Communities” were facilitated by Sydney Bennell and Rachelle McGrath. Sydney is the Health Promotion Specialist at MacEwan University, who shared her cyclic approach to building supportive campus communities, with a focus on drawing key stakeholders into the conversation to build inclusive, diverse, and equitable programming. Rachelle, the Director of Wellness Services at Mount Royal University, shared how her campus has engaged with students through surveys, consultations, and focus groups to help identify areas of need and to further build supportive campus communities.

Celebrating and Learning from Successes

- Supportive campus communities are based on compassion and patience, and involve connection, collaboration, and respect among all groups on campus
- Individuals that feel authentically and genuinely supported will be more likely to engage in programming and better positioned to provide feedback
- Students tend to be drawn towards recurring, low-risk activities where participants can choose to engage as much or as little as they want
- Several existing initiatives were shared, including social media engagement, peer support, wellness-oriented student spaces, field trips, a drop-in “Community Hub”, “coffee and connect” events, and language-inclusive wellness services.

Acknowledging Challenges

- The shift to online learning presents new challenges for community building, including low student engagement; however, this shift has also forced new and creative ways of providing services and student support online
- Wellness is often a secondary priority for students, behind academics
- Oversaturation of similar programming and information being shared
- Although there will also be people who are not going to be engaged, we can still work to design supportive campus communities that benefit these individuals, even if they are not interacting directly with wellness programming

Emerging Opportunities and Next Steps

- Although students tend to prioritize academics over wellness, staff and faculty can act as role models by taking the lead in prioritizing wellness
- Think creatively about how structures, spaces, processes, policies, and programming can be opportunities for strengthening community connection and support
- Participants shared possible solutions to the challenges presented by online learning, which included leveraging student leadership, imagining new and creative initiatives, and scheduling programming at opportune times for students
- Breaking down barriers and hierarchical structures between students, staff and faculty
- Engage with HCA to find new resources and connections

Resources

- [Resource from CACUSS](#) on building mentally healthy campus communities
- Stay tuned for the upcoming [MHCC Post-Secondary Students Standard](#)