Subtheme 6: Engaging the Student Voice

How can student-led initiatives, involving post-secondary students in inception, planning, and/or delivery, champion positive mental health in their campus communities?

The breakout sessions around "Engaging the Student Voice" were facilitated by Aaron So and William Yap. Aaron is a current student at the University of Calgary who shared his involvement with the university's Campus Mental Health Strategy, highlighting the importance of engaging the student voice to create connectedness, reduce stigma, and strengthen community support. William is an alum of Lakeland College, whose advocacy work was crucial in creating diverse and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ+ students and sparking a culture shift on his campus.

Celebrating and Learning from Successes
- Students should be viewed as key stakeholders in and engaged early on in the program design and planning process; active listening ensures students are truly heard
- Allow students to engage in ways that feel most comfortable to them – this includes asking them how they would like to be involved, and providing opportunities with varying modes of engagement and time commitments
- *Students leading students* - it is important to empower students to take ownership over and champion mental health initiatives
    - Examples shared included leadership positions, strategic involvement, student staff positions, and providing students with a budget to implement activities
- Working to "de-mystify" campus programs through hallway activities, social media and student-targeted promotion can increase student engagement with these programs
- Being intentional about engaging with students (i.e. with genuine interest, moving beyond small talk, obtaining feedback) can help build relationships and create buy-in

Acknowledging Challenges
- New challenges with COVID and the shift to online learning – one campus shared a phone app they have been using to engage students online
- Difficult to find times/dates, as students are busy and may not prioritize their mental health, nor stay on campus to access these services and resources
- Finding the most effective avenues to share information with students
- Sustaining the momentum and maintaining long-term, meaningful student engagement
- Students feeling like their concerns are being dismissed, or that key decisions are being made without their consultation

Emerging Opportunities and Next Steps
- The shift to online presents unique opportunities to build cross-campus connections
- Students will go first to their peers rather than professionals for information, so it is important to equip these individuals with knowledge, skills, and advice so they can best support their friends and fellow students
- Several ideas for events and initiatives were shared, including wellness fairs, mobile wellness carts, giving out freebies, and social activities (lunches, BBQ, dunk tanks) that bring students, staff, and faculty together in conversation

Resources
- The Healthy Campus Alberta Student-Led Initiatives Toolkit