



**CSA Z2003:20 *Mental health and well-being for post-secondary students*  
Project Update – September 2020**

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC), in collaboration with CSA Group (as the standards development organization), has championed the development of the CSA Z2003:20, *Mental health and well-being for post-secondary students* standard. This standard is the first of its kind in the world drawing on expertise, including [scoping research](#) as well as cross-country dialogues with students, administrators, service providers, health agencies, governments, and individuals with lived and living experience of mental illness. Together, these diverse voices build on the exceptional work of Canada's post-secondary institutions and aspire for further actions through principle-led approaches.

### **Post-secondary student mental health is a critical issue**

More than three in four mental illnesses are first diagnosed between the ages of 16 and 25 – a time when many are studying at the post-secondary level. The 2019 National College Health Assessment by the American College Health Association found that 52 per cent of post-secondary students in Canada felt so depressed it was difficult to function (an increase from 46 per cent in 2016). About 69 per cent reported feeling overwhelmed by anxiety (up four per cent since 2016). While many post-secondary institutions have been diligent in implementing student mental health and well-being strategies and initiatives in their learning communities, sharing knowledge-based, best practices through a systematic pan-Canadian framework can lead to further benefits.

### **The standard**

CSA Z2003:20 *Mental health and well-being for post-secondary students* is the world's first standard in this area. Based on holistic and upstream approaches, the standard is voluntary and is meant to influence, shape, and set benchmarks for creating healthy and safe environments among post-secondary institutions and communities.

These voluntary guidelines support the following outcomes:

- raise awareness around mental health and decrease mental illness-related stigma
- greater levels of relational connection and sense of belonging within the learning community
- increase access to student supports, on and off campus
- promote life and resiliency skills students can use at school, work, and in daily life
- provide healthier and safer institutional environments
- improve opportunities for student success and flourishing.

The standard is adaptable for any post-secondary institution: each can decide what is achievable given its specific situation, resources, and the local or community context, and each can determine priorities based on their most pressing opportunity or challenge. Using a knowledge-informed framework, the standard creates a platform for key

messages and priority setting while helping an institution focus its energy and resources on assessing capacity and priorities. The standard is underpinned by a commitment to continuous improvement; regardless of where an institution starts, improvements can be made to student mental health and well-being over time.

Supporting the standard is an online resource centre that includes a compendium of additional guidance for the community, access to the [Best Practices Network in Canadian Higher Education](#), and other resources, models, and tools, including a CSA Z2003 internal audit instrument.

### Supporting Resources and Tools

#### CSA Community online resource centre

Enabling access, implementation, and ongoing dialogue with the community by

- providing access to complimentary copies of the standard
- hosting access to a template for the CSA Z2003 Annex A: Sample internal audit tool
- sharing additional guidance on many topics, including policy, executive sponsors, privacy and confidentiality, learning environment strategies, data gathering and evaluation, crisis management and postvention, and aligning efforts with [CAN/CSA-Z1003-13/BNQ 9700-803/2013: Psychological health and safety in the workplace](#) standard.

### Responding to student and institutional needs

The standard responds to the mental health complexities in the post-secondary community. It provides institutions with a broad range of solutions to foster the conditions in which students can flourish in terms of student success including their health, safety and wellbeing. The CSA Technical Committee that developed the standard is composed of a balanced matrix of technical and subject matter experts across relevant interest groups.

#### *From the Introduction...*

*This standard presents an opportunity for post-secondary institutions to affirm their commitment to promote positive student mental health and well-being. Achieving this requires an approach based on compassion and informed by human rights. This Standard is an instrument to ignite further action. With recognition of the complex and varying needs of Canadian post-secondary institutions, the Technical Committee sought to provide guidance with an emphasis on continuous improvement to address the factors relevant to the mental health and well-being of post-secondary students. In undertaking this journey, post-secondary institutions will strengthen their contributions to the cultural, ecological, social, and economic sustainability of their communities and wider society. By embedding mental health and well-being into learning environments, everyday operations, business practices, policies, and academic mandates, post-secondary institutions will inspire lifelong learning and foster more creative and innovative communities.*

*Student mental health and well-being is a shared responsibility. Post-secondary institutions cannot meet this growing challenge alone. An approach to supporting student mental health and well-being that encompasses all students, faculty, and staff within the post-secondary community, in addition to all stakeholders in the broader community, is vital.*

*Post-secondary institutions and students can utilize this Standard to bolster the co-creation of opportunities for students to develop competencies about, and capabilities that support, their health and wellness, address barriers to wellness which exist as part of the institution and its community, as well as offer a variety of services, programs, and policies to support the existing and emerging needs of students.*

*As we work to create safer and more supportive post-secondary communities across this country, and inspire action across the globe, the Technical Committee seeks to underline the need to work in respectful collaboration with Canada’s diverse communities from coast to coast to coast. We recognize that this Standard has been developed and will be applied on traditional lands of Indigenous communities. This reality informs the work and initiatives put forth in the Standard, as we endeavour to support the health and success of all students. Embedded throughout the underlying principles and approach of this Standard is a celebration of the strength and power of students who showed up despite the obstacles and challenges in their path, to tell stories, and transform post-secondary environments into more inclusive and more equitable spaces where all students can flourish.*

*It is highly recommended that users of this Standard consider and integrate CAN/CSA-Z1003-13/BNQ 9700-803/2013, Psychological health and safety in the workplace — Prevention, promotion, and guidance to staged implementation for the staff and faculty of the institution. Addressing the mental health and well-being of staff and faculty working within post-secondary institutions is necessary to support an authentic movement for student mental health and well-being.*

**Scope**

*This Standard provides a foundation for a socio-ecological framework for the development, implementation, and continuous improvement of policies, programs, environments, and initiatives, including*

- a) promotion of student well-being through enhancement or creation of sustainable environments which reduce modifiable stressors or risk factors;*
- b) recommendations for a systemic or holistic approach which include*
  - addressing institutional level activities (e.g., leadership, commitment, confidentiality, and stakeholder participation and engagement);*
  - psychosocial factors linked to mental health and well-being;*
  - post-secondary environments;*
  - literacy, education, and stigma reduction;*
  - accessibility;*
  - early intervention, mental health supports, and suicide prevention; and*
  - crisis management and postvention;*
- c) articulation of roles and responsibilities;*
- d) protective factors to consider; and*
- e) indicators to measure success.*

**CSA Group and standards development**

CSA Group is a not-for-profit, non-government body. Its nationally accredited standards development process combines rigour with a transparent, balanced, consensus-based approach. CSA Technical Committees follow CSA’s directives and guidelines that govern its standardization work. The outcome is a consensus-based, voluntary standard focused on the betterment of Canada that applies to a wide range of stakeholders and end-users.

**Project Funders**



**Project Supporters**

