

# Systemic and Comprehensive Approach

## *Conceptual Tool*



Part of the Holistic Mental Health Approaches Toolkit.

# Introduction

## About the Tools and Toolkits

These tools and toolkits are hosted by **Healthy Campus Alberta**, a provincial community of practice committed to cultivating caring campus communities in Alberta. Originally developed by **Alberta Campus Mental Health Innovation** (an initiative carried out by the **Alberta Students Executive Council**), the tools and toolkits are learning-focused, living documents that serve to support our community of practice.

## About the Holistic Mental Health Strategies Toolkit

This toolkit is an introduction to systemic and comprehensive approaches to a mentally healthy campus and community strategy. It has been developed to support the policy-mandated collaboration of the Alberta post-secondary student mental health strategy. Achieving the intended outcomes of this strategy requires post-secondary institutions, student leaders, healthcare organizations and community support agencies to work closely together to align services and supports, and navigate student transitions. This requires common understanding of terms and diverse worldviews, shared frameworks, and tools. This toolkit can be used to support purposeful, theory-based approaches for designing and implementing health promoting and health-enabling environments strategies.

## About Systemic and Comprehensive Approaches

The **Systemic and Comprehensive Approach** tool provides an overview of the ways to implement a systematic and comprehensive approach, i.e., perspectives that acknowledge the interdependence and holistic nature of student mental health.

### **Who could use this tool?**

- Individual services, programs, and organizations
- Regional hubs;
- Funders and government.

### **What purposes could this tool serve?**

- Informing the development of well-informed mental health strategies for Alberta post-secondary institutions;
- Offering helpful tools to be used in everyday practice by staff, and faculty.

# Systemic and Comprehensive Approach

Taking a *systemic approach* means taking into account the systemic nature of people, organizations, communities and societies. This means, in part, understanding that no one dimension can be considered on its own – the interdependence of many factors arising from the people, physical environments, social environments, and informational environments becomes important. This means understanding the importance of having a multi-dimensional strategy, and paying attention to the interaction between them. Evaluation and learning components of the strategy need to be sufficiently robust to assess the systemic nature of people, the campus, the larger community and the interaction between them.

A *comprehensive approach* includes a holistic approach to improving student positive mental health and access to services for mental disorders and addictions, as well as initiatives to improve faculty and staff mental health and services for mental disorders and addictions.

Thus, a *systemic and comprehensive approach* would include:

- Individual and group-oriented initiatives (addressing diversity);
  - Health promotion, capacity building;
  - Illness/disorder, addictions treatment, diagnosis, chronic disease management, recovery-oriented services;
  - Life skills
  - Learning and wrap-around supports;
- Health-enabling environments (including natural environment, built environment, social environment, informational environments) at the micro-, meso- and macro-levels, across the entire geographic footprint of the campus;
- Linkages and interactions between campus and community environments.



View the [Grounding Strategies](#)  
in [Diveristy Tool](#).

# Environments and Ecosystems

A person's ecosystem is their family, their circle of friends, but also the nature of their housing, their community, the post-secondary campus layout and buildings, workplaces as well as places of worship and recreation.

There are multiple dimensions of environment:

- *Sociocultural environment* including equity, culture, social norms;
- *Built environment* (houses, roads, buildings, classrooms, etc. ) including alignment with cultural diversity of student body, and impact on the emotional experience of persons in those buildings.;
- *Informational and digital environment* (media, social media, diverse information resources);
- *Organizational environments*, including the health-enabling or health-draining characteristics of organizations' core operational model. In post-secondary institutions it speaks to the level of stressors established by the way the institution operationalizes the processes of registering, attending classes, demonstrating knowledge gained and retained, withdrawing for various reasons and re-engaging with a program of study etc.;
- *Natural environment* (all dimensions – land, water, air, plants and animals, climate).

## **Core Business**

For those who wish to go beyond the limits of a strategy focused only on mental health-oriented services and supports, and look at the way the institution's normal operation influences the mental status of students, faculty, staff, as well as the model it sets for the community and other organizations, there are a number of fruitful places to examine, including:

- Design of curriculum;
- Design of buildings;
- Registration procedures and policies.

The key is not to eliminate all stress. However, taking steps to make the core business align with human development can bring value not only to students and society, but to the institution's effectiveness in advancing its mandate for improving society.

## **Places**

Places or settings such as campuses, workplaces, churches, as well as neighbourhoods, communities and whole societies are where persons, and persons in relationships and all dimensions of environment all come together. The relationships, and the existence of an organizing mechanism (an organization) make it helpful to operationalize health-enabling environment strategies.

# Services and Policy Architectures

The design of health promoting and health enabling environments strategies also needs to consider whether the delivery and management of those strategies is congruent with health-promoting and capacity building assumptions and worldviews. This has several implications for the service delivery and management design. Not only is the design of the intervention important, but also the HOW a service is delivered and managed. And the process of design itself can be congruent or not, with health promoting assumptions and worldviews.

A few considerations:

- The positive mental health of service delivery agents – whether staff or professionals, as well as their working environments;
- Planning processes that are a combination of ‘bottom up’ and ‘top down’, and delivery management systems based on distributed networks rather than multi-level hierarchies;
- The social innovation process described in the Complex Collaboration Toolkit will also provide some insights for design and planning processes;
- Attention to the ways that existing policies support or repress the health-promotion assumptions and worldviews will give insight on whether a promising prototype or pilot can be scaled.



View the [Complex Collaboration Model](#).

## Resources



View the rest of the [Holistic Mental Health Approaches Toolkit](#)



Access the [Postsecondary Student Standard](#).

## Questions for Consideration

- Have you considered how your programs/services meet the diverse needs of students? What students might be excluded?
- How are student transitions incorporated in your programs/services?
- How do your programs/services find a balance between providing for all students and accommodating students' diversity?