



# 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 Approaches 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.

### **Who could use this toolkit?**

- Individual services, programs, and organizations (e.g., student leaders, governance bodies, service providers, program managers, leaders);
- Regional hubs;
- Funders and government.

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

- Informing the development of well-informed mental health approaches for Alberta post-secondary institutions;
- Learning about the student experience and ways to center the student experience in mental health approaches;
- Offering helpful tools to be used in everyday practice by staff, and faculty.

# Toolkit Contents

## Conceptual Tools

A conceptual tool provides framing perspectives for the toolkit.

### *Framing Holistic Mental Health Strategies*

**p. 4** This tool provides the definition, terminology and assumptions used in developing this toolkit. Later sections provide information on the underlying mechanisms that are associated with positive mental health.

### *Student Mental Health Journeys*

**p. 9** This tool includes two types of journeys – a human’s macro life journey, and a set of micro-journeys that are important to inform purposeful design of health promoting / capacity building strategies.

### *Grounding Strategies in Diversity*

**p. 14** This tool provides some tools for considering the possible diversity of student experiences, and can be used for the range of strategies involved in a comprehensive strategy.

### *Systemic and Comprehensive Approach*

**p. 18** This 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.

## Practical Tools

A practical tool is a resource that can be used in day-to-day practice.

This toolkit contains a three-part set of practical tools:

**p. 22** *Student Diversity Profiles*

**p. 29** *Student Scenarios*

**p. 36** *Service Evaluation Mapping*

## References

**p. 25** A list of resources related to mental health, mental illness, frameworks, etc.

# Framing Holistic Mental Health Approaches

## *Conceptual Tool*



Part of the Holistic Mental Health Approaches Toolkit.

## About Framing Holistic Mental Health Approaches

The **Framing Holistic Mental Health Approaches** tool provides the definition, terminology and assumptions used in developing this toolkit. Later sections provide information on the underlying mechanisms that are associated with positive mental health.

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

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

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

- Learning about the student experience and ways to center the student experience in mental health strategies;
- Offering helpful tools to be used in everyday practice by staff, and faculty.

# Establishing a Common Mindset

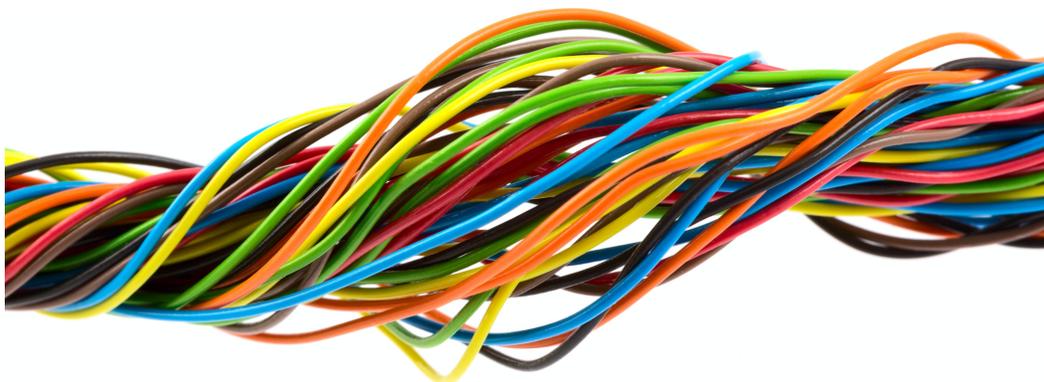
## **Why Common Mindsets?**

Part of being purposeful is being clear about what is meant by key elements in a strategy. It is also important when engaged in a collaborative endeavour. Because no single professional, sector or organization can create a comprehensive strategy for students' positive mental health and health-enabling environments, it is important for participants to be watchful that they all either mean the same thing by a word or term they all use, or are clear about key differences in meaning. It is especially important in this work of improving student mental health, since many of the underlying concepts are an evolution from the traditional focus on mental illness, disorders and addictions to an integrated approach that embraces both these and positive mental health.

## **The Common Mindset**

Each person's mental health journey is personal and unique. The infinite variability of students' possible journeys has many causes. In addition, there are a myriad of terms, definitions, personal and professional worldviews, services and sectors that aim to support students in both building their positive mental health and in diagnosing, treating or recovering from mental illness, disorders and addictions. However, they all have different messages, so it becomes overwhelming for a student to recognize which are more relevant to them and at a particular time and circumstance, as well as those designing and delivering programs and services.

Some may find it difficult to believe it's possible to design and deliver comprehensive strategies that support this infinite variability, but this toolkit supports the task of doing just that. It starts by developing a common frame for student positive mental health and health-enabling environments that encompasses the myriad of terms, definitions and worldviews, while honouring the key essence of each. This enables the myriad of views to be woven into a whole person perspective, more representative of a student's perspective, as illustrated by the image of a multi-strand cable. The collaborative student mental health strategy is based on collaboration to help do that weaving.



# Common Definitions

## Why Common Definitions?

When one wants to be purposeful, theory-and evidence-based about health promoting strategies, it is important to be clear what the desired outcome involves. Only in this way can one then be clear about the causal web of factors and actions that will lead to the desired outcome, as well as identify relevant and reliable leading and lagging indicators of progress.

Continuously increasing knowledge, from basic research in many fields as well as from clinical and practice-based evidence, makes it hard to keep up with terminology refinement. In actively developing fields, good collaboration depends more on understanding each other's terminology than on having a common term.

## Positive Mental Health

The toolkit is based on a framework that embraces variability in definitions for mental health. According to many definitions, positive mental health can refer to:

1. the subjective or internal feelings of the person;
2. a resource for achieving one's goals in life, i.e., capabilities, positive functioning or other such terms;
3. the importance of the person's environments (e.g. peace, social justice, equity etc.);
4. only a function of a person's internal states;
5. an aspiration that health can be more than 'good enough' and that mental health includes achieving one's potential.

## Background Reading



### The Student Led Initiatives Toolkit

- Overview of "Mental Health"
- Framing Mentally Healthy Campuses
- Student Journey Map



### Definitions and Frames

- The Alberta Post-Secondary Mental Health and Addiction Framework.
- The First Nations Mental Health Continuum Framework.
- The Mental Health Strategy for Canada.

# Foundational Assumptions

The following seven assumptions are core to this toolkit's approaches to designing health-promoting and health-enabling environments strategies to help develop positive mental health and mentally healthy campuses. The Background Reading section offers additional resources that expand upon these assumptions.

## **People define positive mental health for themselves.**

A person has agency to make choices. That includes their definition about what positive mental health means for them, at different times and in different circumstances as well as the strategies that are likely to achieve their priorities and goals. This contrasts with that of mental illness and disorders, which are defined from a professional perspective.

## **Positive mental health is unique to the individual.**

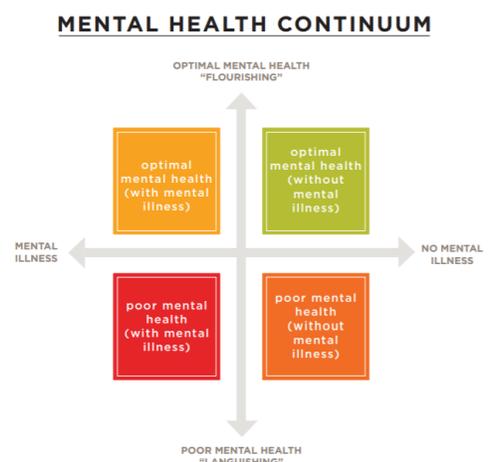
The toolkit addresses the seeming paradox of a person experiencing strategies for their personal and unique perspective with the parallel need to have organizations that can plan and organize consistent and reliable services in an efficient and effective way. The individual aspect of positive mental health arise from several reasons:

- Positive mental health has many strands, including biological and other physical facets, cognitive, emotional, psychological, creative, social and relational, spiritual, as well as the individual's interaction with their environment.
- Positive mental health is a journey: a dynamic and ongoing process.
- Positive mental health is a spectrum. Though different people will define flourishing or thriving from their own perspective, achieving these will require developmental or transformational shifts.

Embracing this variability means that health-promoting and health-enabling environment strategies are most effective and comprehensive when they engage multiple disciplines and multiple sectors and incorporate multiple worldviews.

## **Positive mental health and mental illness exist together.**

Positive mental health and illness are related, but do not develop along the same trajectory, so to be health promoting, a strategy requires more than treating illness and managing stress. Recovery oriented services are those that combine the maintenance of mental illness treatment plans with supporting the person to develop positive mental health strategies, to be able to be more in charge of the quality of their life.



# Foundational Assumptions

## **A person is an ecology.**

Many fields are focused on individuals, and the primacy of the individual is a characteristic of western society, so it is not surprising that the focus of many health or illness-oriented strategies is on the individual. Some professional fields assume a more interactive relationship between a person and their environment (community social work, structural psychology, human ecology, architecture are some examples). Advances in neuroscience are helping to increase our understanding of how deeply the interaction with one's environment influences development of brain pathways and mental health. Accepting that positive mental health includes interacting within and with one's environments means paying attention to the characteristics of students' various environments.

## **Everyone has mental health.**

The pursuit of positive mental health is relevant for anyone – with or without a mental illness, disorder or addiction. Integrated health promotion and health-enabling environments strategies must be relevant to all students, their families, and the faculty and staff of mentally healthy campuses and communities. This means incorporating strategies appropriately for people needing treatment and support for illness, disorders and addictions (which will also need to be trauma-informed services), as well as recovery-oriented services that support people treated for mental illnesses to regain their quality of life. Health promoting strategies are important for all, and need to be designed appropriately for the variation among people.

## **Positive mental health exists beyond people.**

Organizations, communities, settings or places of different kinds (campuses, workplaces, homes etc.) can also be more or less healthy. Mentally healthy campuses are important not only as health-enabling environments for the benefits to the people who work and study, but also to the organization's effectiveness at achieving its vision and mission.

## **Focus on intent, not activity.**

The conventional approach of different professional groups prescribing different activities leads to multiple, sometimes conflicting, prescriptive advice. For example this might be one or another of: go to the gym, eat well, practice mindfulness each day, spend time in nature, etc. Without having a way to determine relevance of the range of prescriptions to their particular situation and priorities, a student may reject all information. Focusing on a student's experience includes helping students to sort information coming from different sources for relevance to their situation and experience.

# Student Mental Health Journeys

## *Conceptual Tool*



Part of the Holistic Mental Health Approaches Toolkit.

## About Student Mental Health Journeys

The **Student Mental Health Journeys** tool includes two types of journeys – a human’s macro life journey, and a set of micro-journeys that are important to inform purposeful design of health promoting / capacity building strategies.

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

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

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

- Learning about the student experience and ways to center the student experience in mental health strategies;
- Offering helpful tools to be used in everyday practice by staff, and faculty.

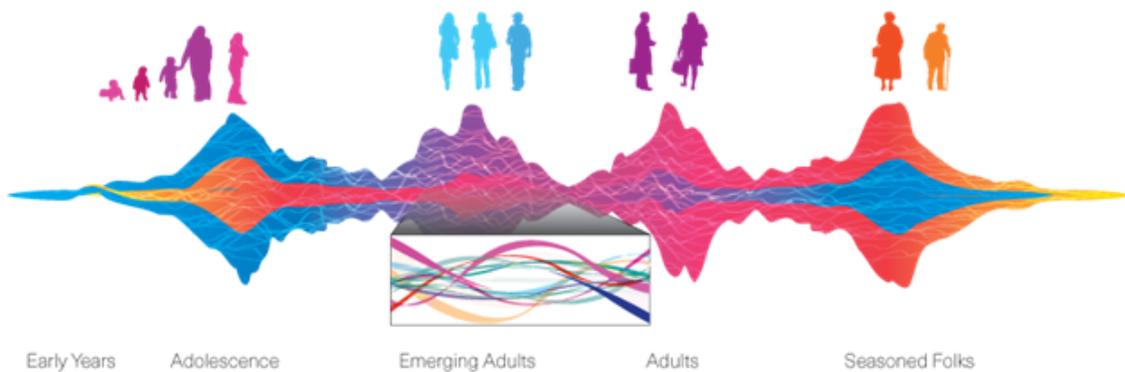
# Mental Health Journeys

As described in other parts of these toolkits, many factors interact to influence a person's positive mental health – over time as a process, a journey that never ends – thus the phrase “positive mental health is a developmental journey with many ingredients”. This concept of ‘journey’ aligns with Keyes’ vertical axis of his ‘dual continua’ – moving upwards from languishing to flourishing is one way to characterize the potential for developmental growth along this journey.

These descriptions of the underlying patterns of students’ positive mental health journeys are intended to provide highlights that will help to ground health promoting strategies in ways that respect and work with students’ stage of their journeys.

## Life Journeys

Our lives have many developmental stages, where we weave our development and wellness from many strands. These strands are within ourselves and in our environment.



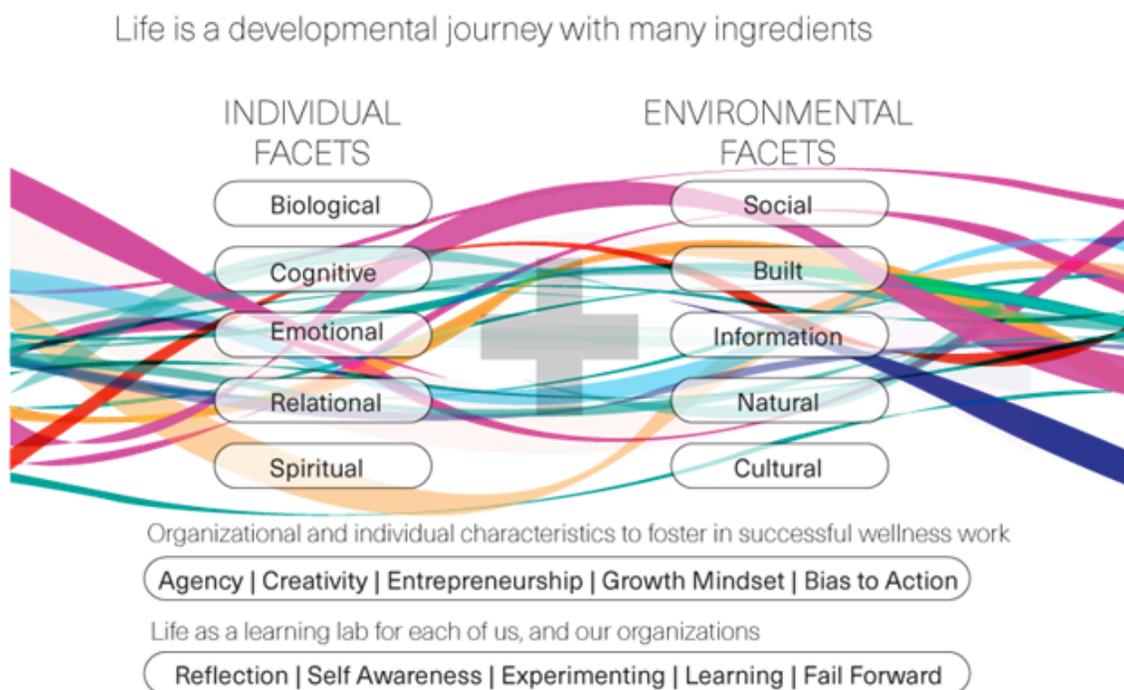
Successful collaborations must consider all of these strands

Students' mental health journeys in their post-secondary years are a continuation of, and an opportunity to redirect historical patterns. Each person's life-span journey evolves through a series of developmental stages, building on the foundation created through the prenatal period and intergenerational influences. This way of looking at a life journey could as easily be called a person's *life-span health journey*. The student's mental health journey is one or more segments of that person's life journey. Times as a student can occur in different developmental stages. This is one way in which the current world differs from a historical patterns that segmented the student experience in to only one life stage.

# Life Journeys cont.

a student arrives, armed with the capabilities they established through their earlier life developmental stages. For some, the post-secondary experience provides challenges that greatly exceed any they have experienced, as well as being separated from their traditional ecosystem supports, so their capacity to cope productively is significantly challenged. In turn, students' strengthened or weakened capacity developed while at post-secondary will influence their journey through the rest of their life-span, as well as influencing others in their lives, their ecosystems and descendants. This means the potential return on investment for individuals and society in health promoting, ecological capacity building strategies in post-secondary campuses is significant.

Illustrated in the graphic are the five main facets that comprise the developmental stage: biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional. Underpinning all of these is brain development and brain plasticity, and the meaning-making that a person develops with the influence of their environment. A person's overall capacity for coping with their life challenges ebbs and flows, growing or weakening through life with the strength of these facets and their experience of support, trauma or neglect from their ecosystem.



People's positive mental health, challenges, and resiliency emerge from the interplay of these different facets. By understanding developmental stages and strengthening varied facets and environments - the holistic approach - teams will create more resilient communities and individuals.

# Micro Journeys

Underlying the patterns seen at the human and life level are a set of micro-journeys – those that are seen using research instruments that can track living systems. Three micro-journeys are described briefly, because they give pointers for refining health-promoting strategies to be more purposeful, and to improve the ability to choose metrics that measure what is really being targeted with a strategy.

## **Stress Response Journey**

One critical micro-mental health journey is the stress response at a person's biological level, sometimes called the stress response. The stress response is a set of body reactions to new or threatening situations. The reactions were established over the course of human evolution so we would have appropriate automatic reactions to the dangerous situations we faced as early humans. Some stress is essential to life, it is of concern when the level of stress far exceeds our ability to deal with it.

The cycle happens very quickly but happens in a series of steps which are largely outside of a person's conscious awareness. These happen continuously through a person's day. A person's patterns of reaction to stress are based on the brain pathways that have been developed, based on what the person has learned and remembered in their life, influenced by learning from their family and social group. Understanding this is relevant for students because learning and memory, and thus success at school or work are very sensitive to stress. Thus, knowing the different steps helps be more precise at design health promotion strategies that can help the person learn better skills for relieving or managing their stress.



Read more about the [psychobiology of the stress response](#).

Health promotion strategies need to address both legs of this journey:

- First, cognitive and emotional strategies can help the person retrain their meaning-making process.
- Second, once the fear response (flight, freeze or fight) has been triggered, then relaxation and/or mindfulness practices help to reduce the impact.
- Positive psychology practices can also influence the stress response.

Stress relief strategies will help only in the short term. A student will need to develop a routine practice of stress management skills to develop any significant capability to handle stress in productive ways.

# Micro Journeys cont.

## **Capacity Building Journeys**

If a student wishes to go beyond stress relief and stress management to improve their capacity to engage with life challenges, they can add practices that help them learn from their experiences. Learning can either be horizontal or vertical. Horizontal learning means growing more confident and competent at the same level. Vertical or transformational learning means making the developmental leap to a higher level of complex problems. Such improved capacity is a life asset since it advantages the person throughout their life journey.

Health promotion strategies aimed at capacity building may involve helping a student learn a key skill (such as how to have a meaningful communication), or helping a student learn their own processes and meaning-making, how to experiment with new ways of interpreting events and or ways of responding. Capacity building may also include strategies to influence one's environments, including by collaborating with others.

## **Stages of Change**

A person, campus, organization or community does not change abruptly from one state to another, and the journey is not a linear one. Rather, the journey is characterized as moving from one stage to another. One way of characterizing these stages is relevant to the readiness to change. A person starts in a place where change may not even be recognized as a possibility – they have accepted the current state as 'just the way they are', 'just the way life works'. Others may have moved through this stage but still considering whether the effort of change is worth the cost (perhaps in time, in change in identity, the potential loss of relationships). Still others may have moved on, tried some ways to change, and have 'slid back' into behaviours that they are more skilled at.

The reason this is important is to make sure to align health promoting strategies to the stage the person is in. This is easier to see in one-on-one strategies, but is also very important to build into strategies that are aimed at groups.

# Systemic and Comprehensive Approach

## *Conceptual Tool*



Part of the Holistic Mental Health Approaches Toolkit.

## 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](#).

# Grounding Approaches in Diversity

## *Conceptual Tool*



Part of the Holistic Mental Health Approaches Toolkit.

## About Grounding Approaches in Diversity

The **Grounding Approaches in Diversity** tool provides some tools for considering the possible diversity of student experiences, and can be used for the range of strategies involved in a comprehensive strategy (i.e. one that aims to cover both health promotion and illness or disorder diagnosis, treatment, and recovery-oriented services).

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

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

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

- Learning about the student experience and ways to center the student experience in mental health strategies;
- Offering helpful tools to be used in everyday practice by staff, and faculty.

# The Student Experience

The key to effectively improving students' mental health and reducing the impact of mental illness, disorders and addictions is, from the very early thinking and design stage, to understand the student experience. This means to understand how a student understands their experience.

This is a different process of development. It means spending time up front understanding the range of student perspectives, and the range of contexts in which the services will need to be carried out. Then, the specific design of services can be thought through by using theory or evidence to choose which type of service will have the desired impact.

## Diversity

As noted in other sections of the toolkits, post-secondary students, campuses, communities are diverse in a number of ways. The tools in this section are intended to assist in designing and 'road testing' early prototype designs against the particular diversity of students and settings in the particular context. The tools in this section can be used for either mental illness / disorders / addictions strategies or positive mental health strategies.

These tools are a starter set – as experience is gained, and initiatives can engage with more diversity, additional profiles and scenarios can be developed. Ideas can be posted on the community conversation section of the website so the post-secondary student mental health community can benefit from the range of experience in culturally competent approaches to ecological capacity building.

### Helpful Tools



View the [Student Led Initiatives Toolkit](#).

- Student Journey Map
- Overview of "Mental Health"
- Mentally Healthy Campus Maturity Model



View the [Complex Collaboration Toolkit](#)

- Complex Collaboration Model

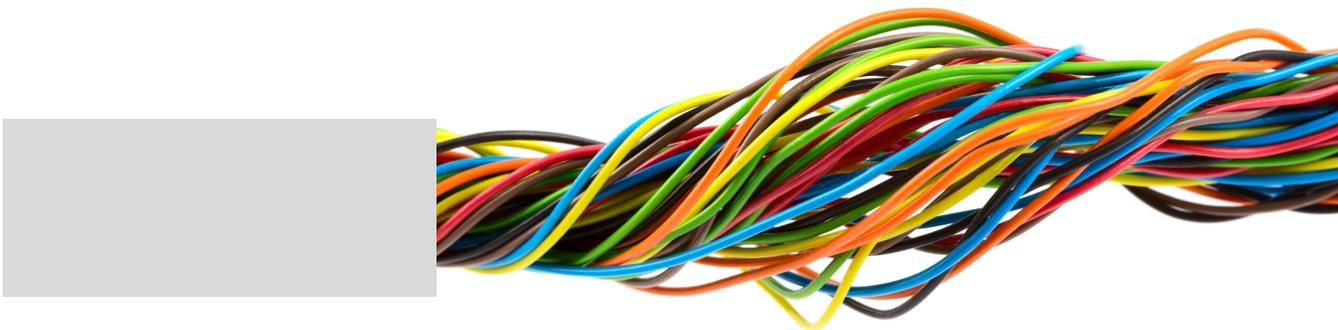
# Diversity in Capacities and Capabilities

An important aspect of effective health-promoting and capacity building strategies is meeting the student where they are at. This then means a strategy must be able to be adapted for students' different capacity and capabilities – which influence the ways they respond to challenges, to stress as well as the ways they learn from experience.

## **Capability, Capacity, Competency**

Our *capacity* includes our ability to draw on both supports from our environment as well as the set of emotional, physical, psychological, creative and spiritual capabilities we have developed in the course of our lives.

This toolkit uses the vehicle of the combined strands of a person's positive mental health as *capacity*, with individual strands as *capabilities* (e.g., emotional, social, creative, spiritual, or cognitive capabilities). The strength of individual capabilities is referred to as *competency*.



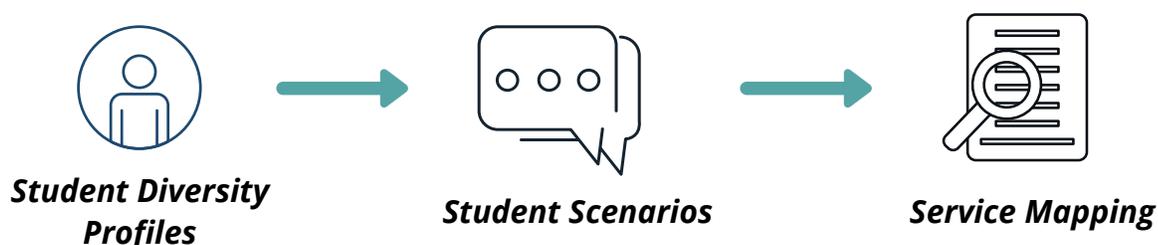
The cable image is a way to picture the relationship between capacity, capabilities and competencies. The grey casing represents capacity. Within that, the twisted colored plastic wires represent the various capabilities, and that they interact with each other. Within each of these capabilities are a variety of competencies. Just as a cable is made stronger by including additional plastic wires, or by strengthening individual copper wires, so a person's positive mental health is improved by strengthening individual competencies or by adding additional capabilities.

Developing and improving these key functions are basic health promotion challenges. As brains can remain plastic throughout life with continuous learning, because we now know brain pathways can be changed with practice, seasoned students also benefit from health promoting strategies.

# Grounding Approaches in Diversity Tool

There is a wide diversity of student characteristics that influence the design of approaches, whether those are positive mental health- or illness-oriented strategies. It is important to understand the diversity of students - and the diversity of their experiences - when designing a holistic mental health approach.

The Grounding Approaches in Diversity Tool is a three-part tool. With this tool, you can complete interactive activities that will help you and your team brainstorm student diversity on your campus and map out how your approach could best support these students.



## **Step One: Student Diversity Profiles**

In this tool, you will understand domains of student diversity, view sample student profiles, and create your own profiles.

## **Step Two: Student Scenarios**

In this tool, you will view sample student scenarios and create your own student scenarios.

## **Step Three: Service Mapping**

In this tool, you will evaluate whether your campus' services meet the needs of diverse students on your campus.



The [Student Journey Map](#) complements this tool.

# Student Diversity Profiles

## *Practical Tool*



Part of the Holistic Mental Health Approaches Toolkit.

## About Student Diversity Profiles

The **Student Diversity Profiles** tool provides some tools for considering the possible diversity of student experiences, and can be used for the range of strategies involved in a comprehensive strategy (i.e. one that aims to cover both health promotion and illness or disorder diagnosis, treatment, and recovery-oriented services).

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

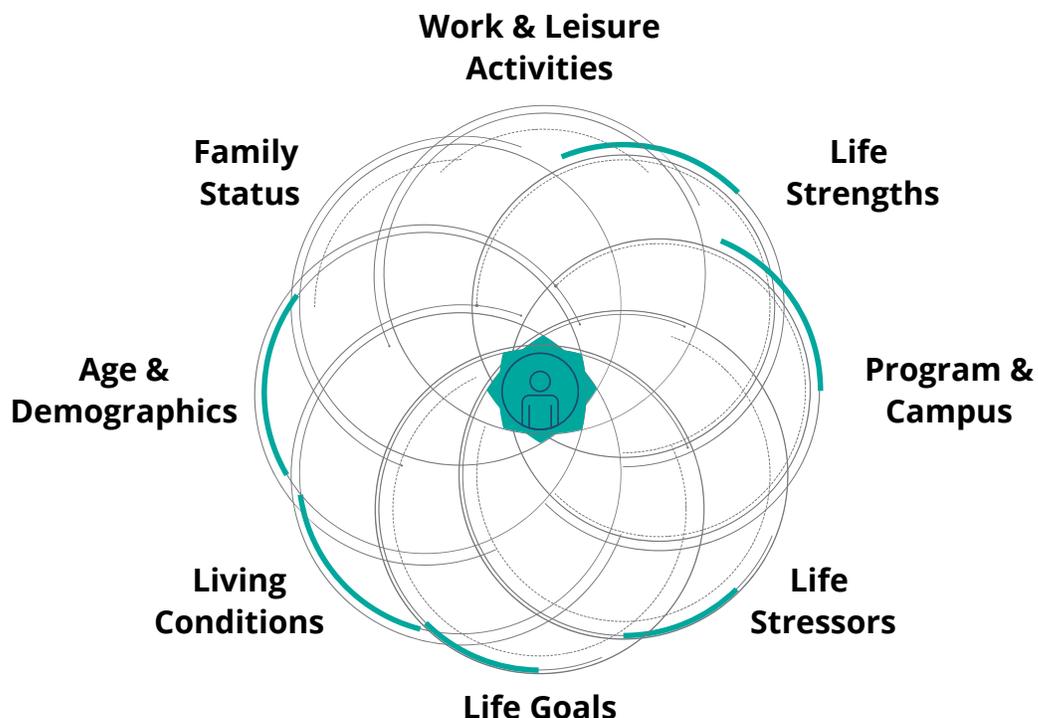
- Individual services, programs, and organizations
- Regional hubs;
- Funders and government.

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

- Learning about the student experience and ways to center the student experience in mental health strategies;
- Offering helpful tools to be used in everyday practice by staff, and faculty.

# Student Diversity

Students' mental health journeys are shaped by their identity and life experiences. Every campus has diverse student populations. The purpose of this worksheet is to help characterize the diversity of students who are served by campus mental health services. Understanding this diversity is one step toward a holistic mental health approach. As the graphic shows, students' identities - and mental health journeys - are a constellation of intersecting characteristics



## How to Use this Tool

Using the worksheet on the next page, think of students who you may have encountered on your campus. Write down the range of characteristics that students may have within each domain. Then, use the next page to make several student profiles from these ranges of characteristics. The starter set of student profiles shows some examples.



***Student Diversity Profiles***



***Student Scenarios***

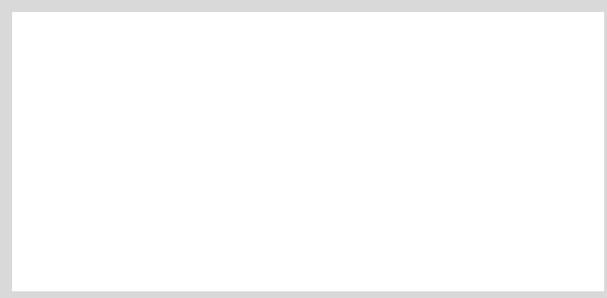


***Service Mapping***

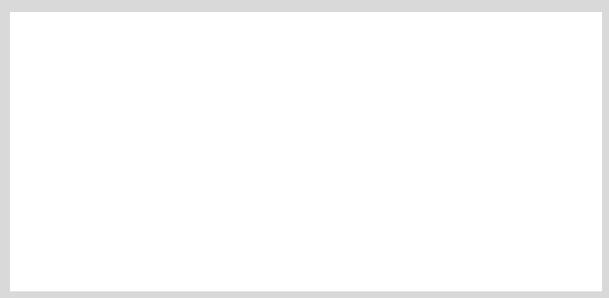
This can be an individual exercise or completed as a team activity.

## Student Diversity Profile Worksheet - Part 1

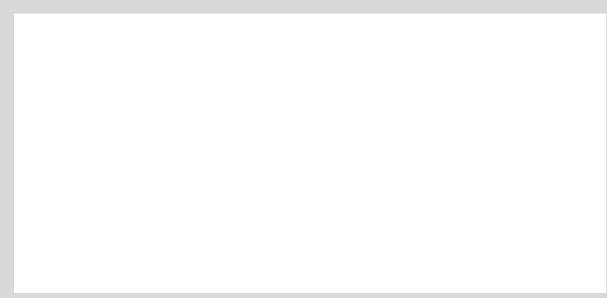
*Age & Demographics*



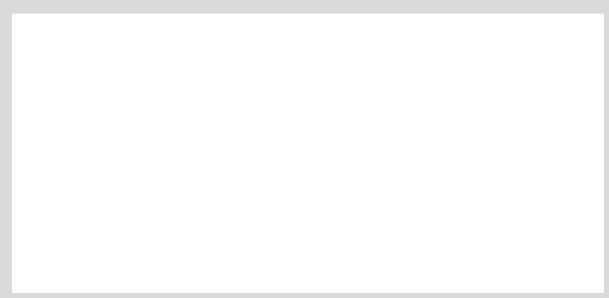
*Life Goals*



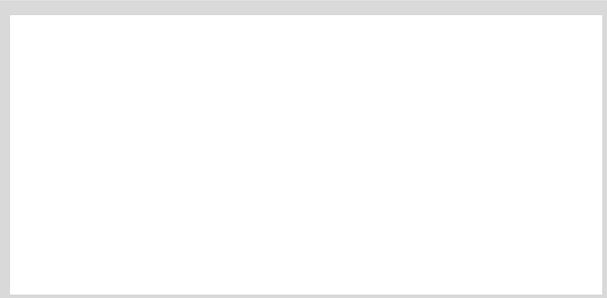
*Living Conditions*



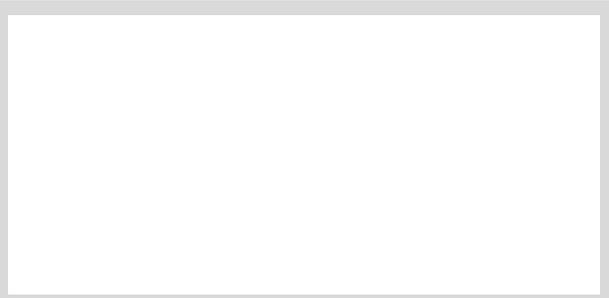
*Life Stressors*



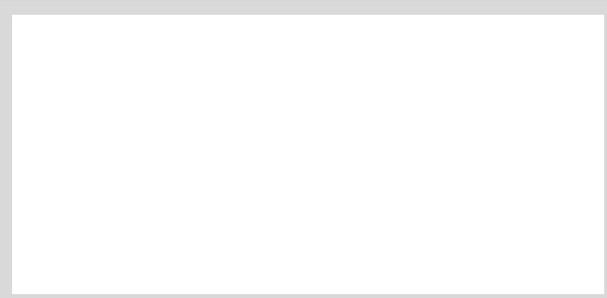
*Program & Campus*



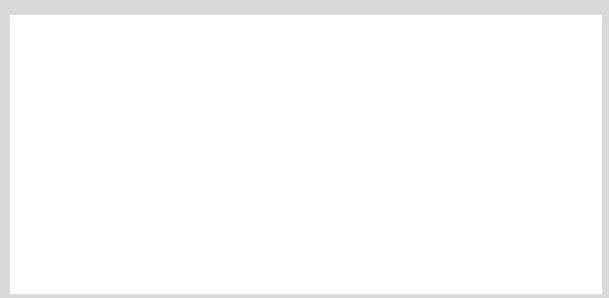
*Life Strengths*



*Family Status*



*Work & Leisure Activities*



## Student Diversity Profile Worksheet - Part 2

### *Student Profile Template*

*Age & Demographics*

*Program & Campus*

*Living Conditions*

*Life Goals*

*Life Stressors*

*Life Strengths*

*Family Status*

*Work & Leisure Activities*

### *Student Profile Template*

*Age & Demographics*

*Program & Campus*

*Living Conditions*

*Life Goals*

*Life Stressors*

*Life Strengths*

*Family Status*

*Work & Leisure Activities*

# Student Profiles Starter Set

There is a wide diversity of student characteristics that influence the design of strategies, whether those are positive mental health- or illness-oriented strategies. Vignettes are quick ways to illustrate student diversity. Although they do not benefit from the deeper research required for personae, they can be helpful to 'road test' prototype services, to assure that the design is not limited to the developers' experience base.



**Sarah**

- Age 22
- Single
- Lives alone with her toddler, distant from nuclear family but has aunts and uncles in the community where she lives.
- Canadian Born, Schooled
- Sarah works part time. She's getting to know people in the community but depends on Skype to keep connections with her old friends. She's a member of the young mothers' club at the library that meets weekly.
- Small college in small city 1 year certificate program, by distance learning. No school clubs or other activities.
- Life stressors: balancing work, school, finances and parenting.



**Colin**

- Age 24
- Single, but casually dating
- Living at home
- Canadian Born / Schooled
- Polytechnic apprenticeship in carpentry
- Life stressors: Colin is pretty laid back so not much seems to bother him. He has to finance his own schooling and sometimes worries about being in debt.

# Student Profiles Starter Set cont.



**Jiixin Lin**

- Age 29 and her husband
- Canadian Born, schooled
- Married with a young daughter
- Rich network of family and friends
- PhD candidate at an Urban university
- Volunteers weekly at the seniors' centre
- Husband' scareer is demanding and requires international travel.
- Life stressors: balancing research, studying, parenting, household management when her husband is travelling.



**Mona**

- Age 35
- Born and raised on Fishing Lake Metis Settlement in northern Alberta
- Single
- Kids (2 x teenagers) living with her
- Canadian Born / Schooled
- BSW at a small urban college – on completion, looking to take an education certificate
- No student activities so far, but seeing a poster for a History club and thinks that might be interesting.
- Works part time as a delivery truck driver
- Life stressors: Mona raised 2 kids as a single mother. One daughter is going through a rough patch and she worries about her.

# Student Profiles Starter Set cont.



**Cyndie**

- Age 19
- Single, living in residence
- Identifies as LGBTQ2S
- Canadian Born / Schooled
- Urban university passionate about its Varsity teams
- 4 year Baccalaureate program with expectations of graduate studies.
- Parents are paying for her schooling.
- Serious athlete, trying out for varsity basketball team
- Life stressors: Living apart from supportive family is challenging but Cyndie is gradually making friends. She hasn't come out to her friends and she is cautious about stigma.



**Petr**

- Age 40
- Scandinavian, lives in grad student residences
- Wife back in Sweden caring for an ill family member
- Study permit
- Computer science graduate student at a large urban university
- Member of a Student team in a robotics competition
- Life stressors: Financial stresses and a highly competitive graduate supervisor cause Petr stress. He worries that his wife's caregiving is wearing her down.

# Student Scenarios

## *Practical Tool*



Part of the Holistic Mental Health Approaches Toolkit.

## About Student Scenarios

The **Student Scenarios** tool provides some tools for considering the possible diversity of student experiences, and can be used for the range of strategies involved in a comprehensive strategy (i.e. one that aims to cover both health promotion and illness or disorder diagnosis, treatment, and recovery-oriented services).

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

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

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

- Learning about the student experience and ways to center the student experience in mental health strategies;
- Offering helpful tools to be used in everyday practice by staff, and faculty.

# Scenarios

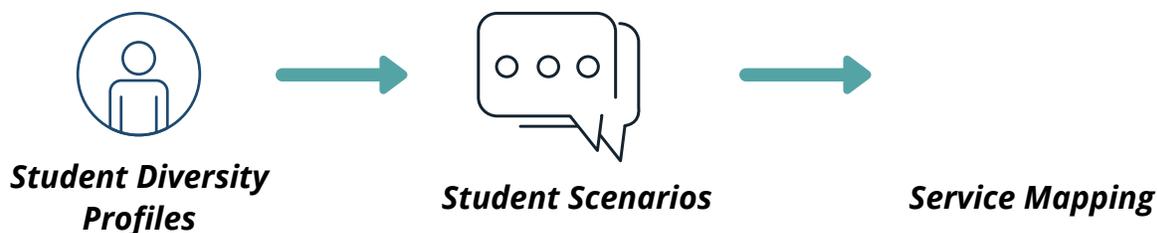
A student's mental health is personal and unique, so a student body will have many different paths. Scenarios help stress test or reality check programs and services. Student Mental Health Scenarios are a tool to work within the reality that each student's journey is personal and unique. However, a post-secondary institution or community agency needs a core approach in order to plan and manage services. One way to bridge this dual requirement is to approach it with a mass customization approach. This means establishing a core approach based on the appropriate underlying worldview – which can then be adapted by program designers and front-line staff to match the specific circumstances they are working with. Management and policy architecture will have been developed with the same worldview in order to support this adaptation by the front-line professionals and staff.

Scenarios provide a way to achieve this dual requirement – to 'road test' potential program design and management processes, as well as the required characteristics of policy to support BOTH adaptation at the front line to match individual clients' realities, AND congruence with the desired overall outcomes at the societal level.

## **How to Use this Tool**

Using the worksheet on the next page, think of the major life events that students may experience on your campus, and the support available to them. Then, think of some of the mental health journeys of the "typical" student on your campus. Use the profiles you created in the Student Diversity Profiles activity think of possible scenarios.

The starter set of scenarios are inspired by stories but are not a single person's story. They may help with imagining student scenarios on your campus.



This can be an individual exercise or completed as a team activity.

## Student Scenario Worksheet - Part 1

*What are some daily stressors that students might experience?*

*e.g., receiving a low grade*

*What are some major life events that students might experience?*

*e.g., breakup with a significant other*

*How might students cope with daily stressors or major life events?*

*e.g., seeking counselling, using substances*

*What are some sources of support for students who are in distress?*

*e.g., family members, campus wellness centre*

## Student Scenario Worksheet - Part 2

*Student Profile - fill this in from the Student Diversity Profile Worksheet*

*Age & Demographics*

*Program & Campus*

*Living Conditions*

*Life Goals*

*Life Stressors*

*Life Strengths*

*Family Status*

*Work & Leisure Activities*

*Student Scenario*

*What daily stressors and major life events did this student experience?*

*How did they cope? Who and what were the major sources of support?*

# Student Scenarios Starter Set



**Max**

*This scenario is inspired by students' stories but is not a single person's story.*

Max had a rough start – challenges in school made it rough as his parents were divorced and he couldn't rely much on his family for positive support or role modelling. Mostly he stayed out of their way rather than watching them fight. Fortunately his athletic skills made him someone that others wanted to hang out with and he was smart enough to do reasonably well in school without much effort.

He had met who he thought was the love of his life in high school and they married soon after graduation – though looking back he realizes that it was probably his way to fill the gap of family loss and disconnection. He'd gotten a job in the oil patch and made good money. Him and his wife would drink and party with their friends. While the early years were great, they started to realize they had little in common. They started to fight most of the time he was home. He also found living in the camps to be lonely.

Then the oil industry collapsed, he lost his job and decided he needed to go back to school and get a job in another field. He had always been interested in IT and impulsively enrolled in a 2-year program in a polytechnic. He had some savings but it was clear that money was going to be tight for awhile. This was when his wife left him.

Although it had its challenges, Max felt he had a good life, certainly compared to lots of his family, and as long as he had lots of energy and felt his body was strong he was certain he could manage anything. A series of challenges – death of a family member, another with a terminal cancer diagnosis and a good friend moving away make it all too much. He begins to depend on alcohol and prescription drugs to make it through the day.

An intervention, treatment and an ongoing recovery program helped rebuild a life without drugs and able to look at how traumas of his childhood were influencing his adult life.

Max started volunteering in a program that provides athletic equipment to underprivileged children. Finding meaningful connections with a new community of friends and peers is also helping him to make different choices.

Max graduates post-secondary with much more capacity than he started. He's looking ahead to the future with the idea that he can make it.

# Student Scenarios Starter Set



**Mary**

In high school, Mary had a very stressful time in which her aunt was diagnosed with cancer, but after the initial scare, a treatment plan with positive prognosis helped settle everyone down. Preparation for first year of university was a challenging – she worried about how to cover financial costs if she needed to live away from home. She shared ideas and asked questions of her Facebook friends and talked to others about how they'd found their first year of college.

She chose a school in another country – in a province called Alberta. She was full of excitement about moving to a new country! The transition was difficult. She found drinking with her friends on Friday night helped her relax at the end of the week. She was anxious about grades and found the work-load of her classes harder to manage than she'd expected. Fortunately, she can keep some of her routines – especially regular meals. Then her father lost his job and she was under pressure to send money home.

In second year, Mary was sexually assaulted by someone who was a part of her social circle. Her friends started to avoid her because they're not sure how to interact with her. She started to spend more time alone and her grades start to slip. Then she failed her exams and, as a result, her scholarships fell through.

Mary found a counsellor off-campus, who helped helped her make sense of the crisis. She started to be able to focus more on her grades, and learned coping strategies that work for her. She also found more supportive friends. Mary finally felt able to tell her family about her sexual assault.

Mary started to run every day, sees a counsellor regularly, and gradually lowers the amount she uses alcohol as self-medication. A couple of bad dates created smaller crises but she worked through them with her counsellor's support. Mary graduated with a close-knit circle of friends who have supported each other throughout the years. She had a bit of trouble finding a job in her field of study, but when she did, she moved into a new apartment that's close to her network of friends.

# Student Scenarios Starter Set



**Ying**

Ying is 22 years old and a member of a large extended family, though she lives on her own now, and is working as a line cook. Her grandfather emigrated to Canada as a boy. His wife, Ying's grandmother, died when Ying was young, but her aunts and uncles tell vivid stories about her cooking and house-making. Ying likes to keep balance in her life – she also loves to cook, and likes to spend her weekend with food preparation for the week's meals. Her relationships and cultural practices are important to her.

Ying has been practicing mindfulness since high school. From the outside, Ying's life looks like it's very busy and intense. She enrolled in a demanding academic program. But, there's always someone in the extended family to support her when she needs it.

She created a routine for studying and was able to juggle many priorities while staying above the average in her classes. She had a boyfriend who was supportive too. She had a bit of trouble sleeping sometimes, but mostly things work pretty well.

Ying was elected to the Students' Association, and that added a lot of unexpected surprises and demands. She found it harder to meditate and stopped cooking for herself. Zoning out with Netflix in the evenings was more and more regular. She broke up with her boyfriend – he was just adding more and more demands.

Then her grandfather got sick and she stepped in to help take care of him. She fails her first midterm. That woke her up. Ying thought back to what worked for her in high-school and remembered the value of mindfulness. She started yoga and reached out to a peer supporter, who encouraged her to see the campus counsellor. She learned some time management and healthy coping skills with the counsellor.

Ying downsized her schedule and gradually regained some of her routines. Upon graduation, Ying started to look for a job in her field, feeling pretty confident that she could manage the stresses of relocation and a new job. Now, she has a new boyfriend who is great at making her laugh. She is much better at managing the balance of personal and family commitments and looks forward to the future with hope and excitement.

# Service Mapping

## *Practical Tool*



Part of the Holistic Mental Health Approaches Toolkit.

## About Service Mapping

The **Service Mapping** tool provides some tools for considering the possible diversity of student experiences, and can be used for the range of strategies involved in a comprehensive strategy (i.e. one that aims to cover both health promotion and illness or disorder diagnosis, treatment, and recovery-oriented services).

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

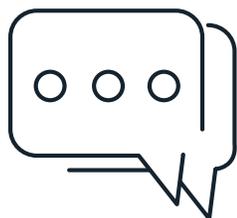
- Individual services, programs, and organizations
- Regional hubs;
- Funders and government.

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

- Learning about the student experience and ways to center the student experience in mental health strategies;
- Offering helpful tools to be used in everyday practice by staff, and faculty.

# Mental Health and Wellbeing Services

The final step in this three-part practical tool is to identify whether and how current campus services and supports for student mental health meet the needs of diverse students. This can help identify strengths, weakness, and opportunities for your systemic and comprehensive approach.



## How to Use this Tool

In the first worksheet, outline the services and supports available on your campus to support student mental health. Then, return to the student profiles and student scenarios from the previous practical tools. Think about how current services align with these students' needs. Finally, think of some ways that services could better meet students' diverse needs.



***Student Diversity  
Profiles***

This can be an individual exercise or completed as a team activity.

## Overview of Campus Services

*What services does your campus offer to support student mental health and wellbeing?*

*Where are these services offered?*

*Who offers these services?*

*What kinds of programs are in place?*

*How do students access these services?*

*When do students typically access these services?*

*Are there any services currently in development?*

## Service Mapping Activity

Student Profile \_\_\_\_\_

*What services could help this student?*

*What barriers might this student encounter when accessing these services?*

*What are the strengths of these services for this student's situation?*

*How would you improve current services to better meet this student's needs?*

## **Review Activity**

*How do current campus services meet the needs of diverse students on your campus?*

*How could current campus services better meet diverse student needs?*

*How would you design a holistic mental health approach that is grounded in diversity?*

# References

## **Mental Health Frameworks and Strategies**

Alberta Post-Secondary Mental Health and Addiction Framework. 2015.

Health Canada. First Nations Mental Health Continuum Framework. 2015.

Mental Health Commission of Canada. Mental Health Strategy for Canada. 2012.

Westerhof and Keyes. Mental Illness and Mental Health: The Two Continua Model Across the Lifespan. 2010.

Mental Health Commission of Canada. National Standard of Canada for Mental Health and Well-Being for Post-Secondary Students. 2020.

## **Mental Health, Mental Wellness, and Mental Illness**

Alberta Family Wellness. The Brain Story Toolkit. 2020.

Mental Health Commission of Canada. Guidelines for Recovery-Oriented Practice. 2015.

Mental Health Commission of Canada. Together Against Stigma: Changing How We See Mental Illness. 2012.

Public Health Agency of Canada. Positive Mental Health Surveillance Indicator Framework. 2019.

Seligman. The New Era of Positive Psychology. 2004.

## **Whole System Approach**

CACUSS / ASEUC and CMHA. Post-Secondary Student Mental Health: Guide to a Systemic Approach. 2013.

Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health (CICMH). Campus-Community Connection Toolkit. 2017.

NASPA. Leadership for a Healthy Campus: An Ecological Approach for Student Success. 2012.



# Contact

[www.healthycampusalberta.ca](http://www.healthycampusalberta.ca)  
[hcaadmin@cmha.ab.ca](mailto:hcaadmin@cmha.ab.ca)