



# **Community Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy**





## Community Mental Health and Well-Being Renewal Team\*

### Andrew Szeto

Director, Campus Mental Health Strategy, Office of the Provost;  
Professor, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts

### Sasha Lavoie

Senior Communications Specialist,  
Campus Mental Health Strategy

### Michele Moon

Team Lead, WellBeing and WorkLife,  
Staff Wellness, Human Resources

### Jennifer Thannhauser

Evaluation Lead, Campus Mental Health Strategy;  
Counsellor (Professorial), Student Wellness Services,  
Student and Enrolment Services

### Kevin Wiens

Director, Student Wellness, Access & Support,  
Student Wellness Services, Student and Enrolment Service

\* As of the strategy's approval by the Board of Governors in May 2024

## Contents

Land Acknowledgement .....	2
Elder Acknowledgement .....	3
<b>UCalgary's Community Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>Ahead of Tomorrow</i> and the CMHWS .....	5
The importance of a university mental health and well-being strategy .....	6
We do this work together .....	7
<b>History of UCalgary's Campus Mental Health Strategy .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Development of the Community Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy 2024-29 .....</b>	<b>10</b>
Engagement and consultation .....	12
<i>Elders' Leadership Circle</i> .....	13
What we heard .....	14
<i>Holistic approach</i> .....	15
<i>Upstream focus</i> .....	15
<i>Shift academic and workplace culture</i> .....	15
What guides us forward .....	16
<i>Our position at the university level</i> .....	16
<i>Collaboration</i> .....	17
<i>Evaluation</i> .....	17
<b>The Community Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy: culture, education and support .....</b>	<b>18</b>
Community Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy draft development and feedback .....	19
About our new framework .....	20
<b>Guiding Principles .....</b>	<b>22</b>
Influence Culture and Sustain an Environment That Values Mental Health and Well-Being .....	24
<i>Core Components</i> .....	24
Work Collaboratively to Sustain Supportive Environments for Mental Health and Well-Being .....	25
<i>Core Components</i> .....	25
Advance Knowledge to Support Ourselves and Others .....	26
<i>Core Components</i> .....	26
Create Awareness of and Facilitate Access to Supports at UCalgary and in the Calgary Community .....	27
<i>Core Components</i> .....	27
<b>Laying the Foundations of Success .....</b>	<b>28</b>
Planning .....	29
Evaluation .....	30
Community engagement .....	31
<b>Definitions .....</b>	<b>32</b>
Health promotion .....	32
Holistic approach .....	32
Mental health and well-being .....	33
<i>Mental health</i> .....	33
<i>Well-being</i> .....	33
Principle-focused approach .....	33



## ■ Land Acknowledgement

The University of Calgary, located in the heart of Southern Alberta, both acknowledges and pays tribute to the traditional territories of the peoples of Treaty 7, which include the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprised of the Siksika, the Piikani and the Kainai First Nations), the Tsuut'ina First Nation and the Stoney Nakoda (including Chiniki, Bearspaw and Goodstoney First Nations). The city of Calgary is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta (Districts 5 and 6).

The University of Calgary is situated on land northwest of where the Bow River meets the Elbow River, a site traditionally known as *Moh'kins'tsis* to the Blackfoot, *Wichispa* to the Stoney Nakoda and *Guts'ists'i* to the Tsuut'ina.

We acknowledge and honour the enduring presence of the people who have stewarded these lands for time immemorial, who have generously offered Indigenous knowledge and traditional teachings on wellness and well-being. On this land, in this place and with one another, we strive to continue gathering, learning, walking and growing together “in a good way” in the environments we study, teach, work and play in.



## ■ Elder Acknowledgement

We acknowledge and pay tribute to Traditional Knowledge Keepers who are a part of the Elders' Leadership Circle for Sustainability and Campus Mental Health. These Elders helped inform our strategy by sharing their stories, knowledge and traditions with us. Concepts of interconnectedness, holism and relationality as intrinsic to our well-being are central to their teachings. These stories highlight how deeply important connection is with ourselves, others and our greater community, as well as to the land.

**Their teachings are woven into our strategy and will continue to inform our journey.**

# UCalgary's Community Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy

The Community Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy (CMHWS), the renewed and refocused Campus Mental Health Strategy, is a foundational commitment made by the University of Calgary to the mental health and well-being of the UCalgary community.

UCalgary's CMHWS is a systems-based holistic health promotion strategy. It is a call to action that requires the whole campus community's engagement with, collaboration on, and commitment to its guiding principles and core components.

Our strategy is also positioned at the institutional or university level. The strategy is sponsored by the Provost and the strategy team partners with leaders, faculties, units and the broader community on various mental health and well-being initiatives on campus.

## ■ *Ahead of Tomorrow* and the CMHWS

As we move forward with *Ahead of Tomorrow*, the University of Calgary's new strategic plan for 2023-30, we also need a new, bold approach to creating a healthy and caring campus community that can support the goals of the plan. *Ahead of Tomorrow* outlines our commitment to excellence in teaching, learning and research while also highlighting a key value: we strive for community-focused excellence and a sense of belonging where all can thrive.

Universities that are research-intensive require excellence, achievement, expertise and focused work. It is imperative that we create at UCalgary a culture that can embrace both excellence and caring, so our community can flourish while contributing to our achievements.

For our students, postdoctoral scholars, staff and faculty to be thriving, successful and whole persons, they need an environment and structures around them that promote their well-being while they achieve the aims of a post-secondary institution.

## The importance of a university mental health and well-being strategy

Well-being, health, education, teaching and learning are intertwined. Post-secondary institutions have the opportunity and responsibility to promote the health and well-being of the people who learn, work and live within them. UCalgary was one of the six original signatories to formally adopt the Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting Universities and Colleges in 2015. The Charter calls on post-secondary institutions to make a commitment to health and well-being in all policies and practices and UCalgary took that commitment to heart through its Campus Mental Health Strategy (2015-24).

The vision for the renewed strategy, the Community Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy (CMHWS), is to create a UCalgary community where individuals can achieve well-being, thrive and excel. The strategy addresses well-being programs and resources and our connection with each other and to ourselves, as well as with the land, environment and our greater community. Finally, such a strategy helps build a culture that is respectful, supportive and caring.

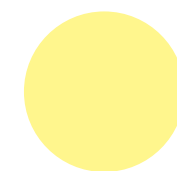
The CMHWS (2024-29) is UCalgary's overarching commitment to the well-being of its community. To do this work, the strategy acts at the university level to inspire, build connections across our campus and serve as a catalyst for change. As well, the CMHWS collaborates with both those at UCalgary and in the broader Calgary community to achieve its goals, with impact at the broad university level, as well as at the individual level.



## We do this work together

UCalgary's long-term foundational commitment to Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility; Global Engagement; Indigenous Engagement; Mental Health and Well-Being; and Sustainability are woven into the fabric of our institution. We recognize the interconnectedness of these foundational commitments and work collaboratively to create a just and caring community, living interdependently with one another and all our relations in the natural world. Through these foundational commitments, we advance reconciliation and work together to transform systemic inequities and to create a just, sustainable and thriving community for present and future generations.

As well, the work of the strategy is a community effort and requires students, postdoctoral scholars, staff, faculty and executive leadership to contribute their own unique skills and positions of influence to forward the strategy's mandate.





# History of UCalgary's Campus Mental Health Strategy

“When a new student, faculty or staff member begins at the University of Calgary, they need to know that our campus supports their holistic well-being: mental health, physical health, spiritual well-being and social connection. The revitalized Community Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy empowers us to – individually and collectively – build our capacity to cope with challenges in healthier ways.”

President Ed McCauley

The Mental Health Task Force was formed in late 2014 to develop a comprehensive strategy with the goal of addressing the mental health needs of UCalgary students, postdoctoral scholars, staff and faculty and creating a caring and supportive community.

Acting on this commitment, the Task Force developed a comprehensive Campus Mental Health Strategy (CMHS) that contained 28 recommendations across six strategic focus areas. The CMHS launched on Dec. 6, 2015. In 2016, a director was hired to lead the strategy. As well, an Implementation Advisory Committee and additional subcommittees were formed to advise on and address the specific recommendations of the CMHS.

Since the strategy was launched, UCalgary has seen stigma-reduction strategies positively impact our community. The CMHS has supported burgeoning projects and collaborations; co-created innovative new roles and models in the mental health space; built capacity and participation in mental health-related training; and has developed new programs, and educational offerings and so much more. Not only has the strategy been impactful at UCalgary, it has had positive impact locally, provincially and nationally.

# Development of the Community Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy 2024–29

“ Together, we have a duty of care to create an environment where everyone can flourish, reach their potential and find joy in doing so! The renewal of the strategy signals the university’s commitment to mental health and the well-being of our UCalgary community, which is even more important in these current times of unrest, uncertainty and rapid changes. I am deeply appreciative of this commitment and I am looking forward to all of us working together to translate the strategy into action.”

**Dr. Renata Weller, PhD**  
Dean, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine

The Community Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy (CMHWS) continues our journey towards cultivating a nurturing and empowering UCalgary community that promotes open dialogue and awareness about mental health and well-being and builds an environment where all students, postdocs, staff and faculty can thrive.

The CMHWS is committed to promoting mental health and well-being through a systems-based holistic health promotion approach. The strategy has also been influenced by the following documents:

- The socio-ecological framework recommended by the National Standards for Mental Health and Wellbeing for Post-Secondary Students, 2020;
- The five actions of health promotion in the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, 1986;
- The calls to action outlined in the Okanagan Charter, 2015;
- The findings of the engagement conducted at the University of Calgary by the Mental Health Task Force in 2014–15; and
- UCalgary Human Resources’ Well-Being and Worklife Strategy, 2022.

The revised strategy takes a community-based approach and looks beyond solely focusing on individual needs to offer a broader, more holistic approach to support student, postdoctoral scholar, staff and faculty well-being.



## ■ Engagement and consultation

The development of the renewed strategy started with an external review of the CMHS in late 2021. A team composed of clinicians, academics and experts in campus mental health met with various groups from the UCalgary community to discuss the work of the CMHS. Their report acknowledged the accomplishments of the strategy over its first six years and its standing as a national leader in post-secondary mental health. It also set aspirations for the CMHS as it moved forward in the future.

Although there has been continual engagement and listening over the years, gathering feedback and data from the university community has been a priority for the CMHS, particularly from 2020 to 2023. This feedback included various large surveys, such as the Canadian Campus Wellbeing Survey, the Graduate Mental Health survey, the Student Wellness Services Needs Assessment, and, most recently, the 2022 Faculty and Staff Mental Health and Well-Being Survey. An internal survey and a process evaluation of the CMHS was also conducted as a part of the data collection. In addition, UCalgary's implementation of both the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace and the National Standard for Mental Health and Well-Being for Post-Secondary Students involved surveys, extensive consultations and reviews that generated data and information on addressing mental health and well-being. All these data points and feedback were qualitatively analyzed by the CMHS evaluation team, generating broad themes.

## Elders' Leadership Circle

One of the most fundamental pieces that informed the direction of the revised strategy were stories and learnings from an Elders' Leadership Circle. This group of Elders was formed specifically to advise on the renewal of both the CMHS and the Institutional Sustainability Strategy. Through multiple circles, we discussed the meaning of mental health, the meaning of well-being, our connection with the land, and how we can work together to embed Indigenous ways of knowing and being in what we do.

**We are grateful to the following Traditional Knowledge Keepers: Piikani Elders Dr. Reg and Dr. Rose Crowshoe, Métis Elder Kerrie Moore, Stoney Nakoda Elders Virgil Stephens and Ollie Benjamin and Cree Elder John Crier for their wisdom, knowledge, guidance and willingness to share their stories.**

“Everything around us and within us will affect our healing and wellness. What we do will affect everything around us, too. We are just another species on Mother Earth and we need to know who we are in order to heal. Within a Western concept, healing becomes an individual issue which is seen as a cognitive process. Within an Indigenous community and many diverse communities, healing is a whole and relational concept. We must understand wellness from a much broader, relational concept or transformation and healing is not possible.”

**Elder Kerrie Moore**  
Wellness Elder and Lodgekeeper  
Kiiipitakyoyis (Grandmothers' Lodge)  
Faculty of Social Work



## ■ What we heard

Through all these consultations, engagements, and data points from the UCalgary community and the Elders' Leadership Circle, there were three clear and consistent themes:

“Leaders, whether we like it or it, we're visible. And people are watching how we behave. We have the opportunity to step up and model the way — showing that we have boundaries, take vacation, take time to recover and make sure that we make space for our teams to do that, as well. We set the pace that it's a marathon, not a sprint.”

**Dr. Sandra Davidson, PhD**  
Provost & Vice-President (Academic)

### Holistic approach

Although mental health continues to be a priority for UCalgary and the renewed strategy, consideration of the other components that affect our overall well-being was clearly indicated in the data, such as physical health, spiritual well-being and social connection.

### Upstream focus

This refers to a proactive and preventative approach to mental health and well-being. This approach focuses on identifying and addressing the underlying factors that support our well-being and prevent mental health problems. By focusing on creating supportive and nurturing environments that foster well-being, we can work as a community to reduce the likelihood of individuals experiencing more severe mental health problems.

Even though the new strategy adopts an upstream focus, “downstream” mental health supports and services, such as counselling and clinical care, remain a priority and will continue to be offered, reviewed and optimized, along with the creation of more-efficient pathways to community-based resources and services.

### Shift academic and workplace culture

The focus on growth, achievement and excellence at UCalgary has brought about increased research funding, new infrastructure and a strengthened global reputation. However, we must work to dispel the perception that an achievement-oriented culture makes it hard to cultivate a caring community. A university community that values respect, work-life balance, boundaries, interpersonal relationships and supporting each other, as well as excellence, is possible and necessary to create a better environment to work, study and play and acts as the foundation for achieving creativity and innovation.

## ■ What guides us forward

During the original mandate of the CMHS, we learned from our various initiatives, projects and events, as well from the planning and implementation of an institutional strategy. These lessons will help the new strategy be successful and operate efficiently and effectively.

### Our position at the university level

Based on factors such as resources, capacity, reach and scope, working at a broader institutional level will enhance the effectiveness of the renewed strategy. By this, we mean the actions and initiatives we engage in are applicable and influential across our university and will impact our community of students, postdoctoral scholars, staff and faculty. Some examples of operating at this level include broad, media-based initiatives to increase awareness of well-being resources and reduce stigma related to mental illnesses and working with university policymakers to understand the mental health and well-being impact of a new policy.

Front-line resources, programs and services (e.g., counselling services for students) are vital to supporting the well-being of the UCalgary community. The renewed strategy will continue to support the units that provide these vital initiatives.

### Collaboration

Much of the work that has been done under the CMHS has involved collaborations with various units, faculties, departments, groups and individuals at UCalgary and in the broader community. Strong relationships have been built that facilitated the success of CMHS initiatives. Over the years, work has been initiated with various faculties and units to adopt the CMHS and prioritize mental health and well-being. For example, we partnered with Legal Services to review policies through a mental health lens, with the UCalgary Recovery Community to support their programming and reach and with various researchers and staff members to support training and workshops for the university community. Student Wellness Services and Staff Wellness are two examples of the strong ties built over the span of the CMHS. In collaboration with these units, UFlourish, UCalgary's annual well-being initiative, has grown from a small wellness fair to a two-week expo with more than 50 events reaching thousands in the UCalgary community and broader public. Collaboration will continue to be important with the renewed strategy.

### Evaluation

Continuous measurement of progress and impact will guide the renewed strategy as it moves forward. Evaluation of programs and initiatives and understanding the well-being information that is being collected already at UCalgary, as well as having metrics and indicators that demonstrate effectiveness of the CMHWS, will lay the foundations for success. This approach will also allow us to better understand and adapt to the changing needs of the UCalgary community.





# The Community Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy: culture, education and support

“The new Community Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy is about more than just mental health; it’s about creating a campus culture that is respectful, supportive and caring. By focusing on holistic well-being and preventive measures, we are paving the way for a healthier and more resilient community at UCalgary.”

**Mike Van Hee**  
Vice-President (Services)

The renewal of our strategy signals a shift in focus for mental health and well-being at UCalgary. This renewal involved extensive engagements, consultations and data collection. The university community told us that we need to focus on moving UCalgary’s culture toward being more caring and supportive. All these themes are reflected in the strategy’s new name and four Guiding Principles.

## Community Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy draft development and feedback

In the summer of 2023, external consultants, J5 Design, helped piece together all the data points, the graduate student evaluation team that supported the CMHS and other relevant information (e.g., extensive conversations with the CMHS renewal team) into a coherent set of themes (e.g., need for more training). The renewal team revised this set of themes based on their institutional knowledge and understanding of the needs of the UCalgary community and developed four Guiding Principles. Subsequently, between August and December 2023, we engaged in more than 30 targeted consultation sessions with various groups and units at UCalgary to gather feedback. As well, there were five open-engagement sessions held at the university to capture feedback and ideas from the general UCalgary community. Finally, a survey was developed to obtain feedback on the draft Guiding Principles. Between December 2023 and January 2024, the CMHS renewal team collated and analyzed feedback and data from the targeted consultations, open-engagement sessions and renewal survey.

**This feedback was used to update the strategy’s Guiding Principles and Core Components (see page 24), as well as Example Actions (as listed on our [ucalgary.ca/mentalhealth/renewal](https://ucalgary.ca/mentalhealth/renewal) website).**

## ■ About our new framework

The renewed strategy has moved away from specific recommendations to a principle-focused approach with four **Guiding Principles** at its centre.

Each of the Guiding Principles is a general goal for advancing well-being at UCalgary and is tied to one of four levels of influence in the nested socio-ecological model that the principle operates at (see illustration, opposite).

Each Guiding Principle contains several **Core Components** or specific actions that support the overarching Guiding Principle.

“ The Community Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy articulates clear connections between mental health and well-being and teaching, learning and working at the University of Calgary. This strategy signals that one way we can be *Ahead of Tomorrow* is by ensuring the mental health and well-being of our campus community today, tomorrow and beyond in an ethical and equitable manner.”

**Dr. Sarah Eaton, PhD**  
Professor, Werklund School of Education

### ■ University Community and Environmental Level

**GUIDING PRINCIPLE 1**  
Influence Culture and Sustain an Environment That Values Well-Being

### ■ Community Units Level e.g. Faculties, Teams, Clubs

**GUIDING PRINCIPLE 2**  
Work Collaboratively to Sustain Supportive Environments for Well-Being

### ■ Interpersonal Level

**GUIDING PRINCIPLE 3**  
Advance Knowledge to Support Ourselves and Others

### ■ Individual Level

**GUIDING PRINCIPLE 4**  
Create Awareness of and Facilitate Access to Supports at UCalgary and the Calgary Community

# Guiding Principles



**Influence Culture and Sustain an Environment That Values Mental Health and Well-Being**



**Work Collaboratively to Sustain Supportive Environments for Mental Health and Well-Being**



**Advance Knowledge to Support Ourselves and Others**



**Create Awareness of and Facilitate Access to Supports at UCalgary and in the Calgary Community**



## Influence Culture and Sustain an Environment That Values Mental Health and Well-Being

To create sustainable, positive change in the mental health and well-being of all UCalgary community members, we must prioritize a holistic approach to creating and sustaining supportive environments.

### Core Components

1. Implement holistic frameworks that support the well-being of the UCalgary community and recognize multiple ways of being doing, knowing and connecting.
2. Work with other UCalgary strategies and priorities to create an inclusive, supportive and well-being-focused culture where diverse backgrounds and experiences are recognized, acknowledged, supported and celebrated.
3. Embed mental health and well-being in institutional policies, processes and procedures.
4. Build relationships with researchers and institutes to advance post-secondary mental health and well-being as a research priority, translating knowledge and informing practice.
5. Provide leadership and achieve excellence in the post-secondary mental health and well-being space at the local, provincial and national levels.

\* For a list of corresponding Example Actions see [ucalgary.ca/mentalhealth/renewal](https://ucalgary.ca/mentalhealth/renewal)



## Work Collaboratively to Sustain Supportive Environments for Mental Health and Well-Being

Collaborate with faculties, units, departments, clubs and various groups at our university to create and maintain environments where everyone can flourish.

### Core Components

1. Enhance UCalgary's community members' ability to recognize and respond to early signs of distress in a supportive manner.
2. Promote protective factors and reduce risk factors that impact the mental health and well-being of the university community.
3. Continue to integrate mental health and well-being into teaching and learning processes and practices.
4. Partner with faculties and units in creating strategic mental health and well-being plans and initiatives.



## Advance Knowledge to Support Ourselves and Others

Develop mental health literacy, skills and understanding to support our own well-being and the well-being of the UCalgary community.

### Core Components

1. Increase mental health literacy for a diverse UCalgary audience.
2. Increase the availability of mental health and well-being training available to the university community.
3. Continually listen to UCalgary community members to understand their skill-development needs and develop programs, training and workshops with a particular focus on upstream (i.e., health promotion and illness prevention) and holistic approaches.



## Create Awareness of and Facilitate Access to Supports at UCalgary and in the Calgary Community

Improve awareness of and facilitate access to mental health and well-being services and supports that meet the varied needs of the UCalgary community.

### Core Components

1. Increase awareness of existing resources available at UCalgary and in the broader community.
2. Reduce the stigma related to mental illness.
3. Where appropriate and feasible, facilitate the expansion of existing resources and/or development of new resources with UCalgary and broader community partners.





# Laying the Foundations of Success

“The renewal of the Community Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy represents a culmination of the dialogue with members of our diverse campus. The incorporation of graduate student feedback signifies a genuine commitment to creating a supportive and inclusive environment that addresses the diverse needs of our campus community. The strategy is a step towards prioritizing mental health and well-being as a cornerstone of academic and personal success in our institution.”

**Seong Eon Ha**

Vice-chair advocacy, Mental Health and Wellness Subcommittee  
Graduate Student Association, University of Calgary

In moving forward an institutional strategy, there are several key actions that need to be taken to lay the foundations for success.

## ■ Planning

Annual implementation plans will set priorities and actionable goals, while allowing the strategy to be dynamic and adaptable to the needs of the whole university community. Plans will be updated each year to be responsive to current needs, as informed by ongoing evaluation.

Implementation plans and progress updates will also be shared with the UCalgary community through diverse means, including annual updates to the General Faculties Council and Board of Governors. In addition to developing implementation plans, one early action to move the renewed strategy forward will be developing a structure to advise on and support the implementation. This structure will involve a diverse group of voices that represent the UCalgary community. In addition, this structure must include leaders that are able to champion and support implementation in their facilities, units and departments.





## ■ Evaluation

Evaluation will be an iterative, dynamic and ongoing process. One of the first tasks will be to develop evaluation questions collaboratively with relevant university partners to assess how the Guiding Principles are contributing to a respectful, supportive and caring university culture.

Evaluation of the CMHWS will involve the following:

- Occur at multiple levels (e.g., program, process, university);
- Assess short-term and long-term impacts;
- Serve as a feedback loop to continually inform actions and strategic decision-making of the strategy across UCalgary; and
- Empower our community to take findings and engage in direct action.

Data will be gathered to allow for strategic response to the changing mental health and well-being needs of the university community.

Embedding evaluation in all we do will ensure we are making meaningful impact on the complex issues that shape our university culture.

## ■ Community engagement

Consistent with *Ahead of Tomorrow*, community engagement will be crucial to the success of the renewed strategy. Developing new partnerships and collaborations with the UCalgary community, as well as with local, provincial and national groups will enable the strategy to explore new resources and supports that better meet the needs of the UCalgary community.

“The new Community Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy is a great step forward that allows us and our community to take a more fulsome and proactive approach towards how we think, act and deal with well-being on our campus. Its new and holistic outlook on issues facing our campus will blaze the trail required for us to truly contend with issues of wellness and well-being and create a better campus for all of us.”

**Ernia Rezaei-Afsah**  
President, Students' Union, University of Calgary

# Definitions

## ■ Health promotion

Health promotion is understood as, “the process of enabling people to increase control over their health and its determinants and thereby improve their health.” (Okanagan Charter, 2015).

Health promotion action builds upon the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, which emphasizes the interconnectedness between individuals and their environments and recognizes that, “health is created and lived by people within the settings of their everyday life: where they learn, work, play and love.” (Okanagan Charter, 2015).

The renewed strategy recognizes the unique role that higher education plays in the development of individuals, communities, societies and cultures (Okanagan Charter, 2015) and is taking an active role in the mental health and well-being promotion of its entire university community, including all students, postdocs, staff and faculty.

## ■ Holistic approach

The revised strategy embraces and employs a holistic approach to mental health and well-being. This approach is inclusive of well-being related to emotional, social, psychological, physical and spiritual aspects of an individual's life. By acknowledging the interconnectedness of these elements, the revised strategy will foster and cultivate a more inclusive environment that addresses various mental health and well-being challenges faced by students, postdocs, staff and faculty. This holistic approach integrates personal aspects of well-being, builds strong social networks and promotes psychological and community resilience across UCalgary and beyond.

To ensure the strategy follows this holistic approach, it is rooted in a process that actively engages diverse groups within the university including undergraduate students, graduate students, postdocs, staff and faculty. Through a series of focus groups, surveys and conducting a comprehensive needs assessment, insights can be gathered directly from those impacted by and involved with mental health initiatives at UCalgary.

The renewed strategy not only reflects the input of the community, but it also reinforces our commitment to cultivate a nurturing and empowering UCalgary community that promotes open dialogue and awareness about mental health and well-being, to build an environment where all can thrive.

## ■ Mental health and well-being

**The renewed strategy recognizes that the experience of mental health and well-being exist on a continuum and are influenced by the interdependent factors of physical, social, psychological and emotional determinants.**

### Mental health

The World Health Organization defines mental health as, “more than the absence of mental disorders. It [mental health] exists on a complex continuum, which is experienced differently from one person to the next, with varying degrees of difficulty and distress and potentially very different social and clinical outcomes.” (World Health Organization, 2022).

The National Standards of Canada (2020) defines mental health as, “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes their own abilities, can reasonably cope with the stresses of life, can live, study and work well and is able to make a contribution to the community.”

### Well-being

We see well-being as a multidimensional sphere of care that encourages a higher quality of life. While well-being often relates to mental wellness, it also includes physical, spiritual, social and environmental wellness, among other facets of care. The National Standard for Mental Health and Wellbeing for Post-Secondary Students defines well-being as, “the presence of the highest quality of life in its full expression in the following dimensions of cultural, emotional, mental, physical, social and spiritual.”

## ■ Principle-focused approach

A holistic approach to the strategy based around core values and informed by multiple perspectives. Principles guide our actions and decisions, allowing for flexibility and adaptation in dynamic contexts to serve the diverse needs of our community and emphasizes continuous improvement.



UNIVERSITY OF  
**CALGARY**

**Start something.**

[ucalgary.ca/mentalhealth/strategy](http://ucalgary.ca/mentalhealth/strategy)