



Future Launch

# THINKING WELL

Supporting Post-Secondary Student  
Mental Wellness in Newfoundland & Labrador

Supporters of student mental wellness in our communities, public institutions and the private sector are all looking to deepen their understanding of the varied needs of post-secondary students across diverse campus environments.

This report aims to shed light on these needs by leveraging student, faculty, staff and community perspectives, helping identify important opportunities for investment in student wellness.

# 1. Introduction

Conversations about mental health that once happened in whispers - if at all - are now happening on billboards and playgrounds, around board tables and camp fires, and across digital platforms and public institutions. This is challenging the stigma and taboos that have historically hindered our collective awareness of mental health issues and the nuanced and complex ways in which these issues effect our lives. However, the stigma of speaking openly about personal mental health challenges has not been eliminated and remains particularly prevalent amongst specific demographics.

For many, the increased sense of safety in seeking mental health support and discussing their challenges can be cathartic and emotionally healing. This is an important step in changing our systemic approach to mental health, specifically from the perspectives of crises prevention and health response. The encouragement for individuals to seek help and to celebrate self-care, however, has not yet been matched with complementary increases in the availability of services, or through an approach to designing workplaces, public institutions, and spaces that inspire mental well-being. Nowhere is this more evident than within post-secondary institutions, where students, staff, and faculty are all grappling with how mental health – or, much more often now, mental wellness -- fits into their lives, their academic pursuits, and into their jobs. As students transition into the workforce, it is also clear that student mental wellness is the foundation of a successful journey through a competitive labour market that is also in the midst of profound change.



5

communities



25

discussion forums



130

in-person participants



534

survey responses

In Newfoundland and Labrador, this conversation coincides with major shifts in the landscape of supports available for young people.

In 2017, an All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions delivered 54 recommendations for change to the province’s mental health and addictions system through *Towards Recovery*, a prescription for change that was quickly and unanimously accepted and moved into implementation.

At the same time, a Premiers’ Task Force on Educational Outcomes delivered a report that included a major focus on early intervention and the social determinants of mental health; a new Children, Youth, and Families Act was proclaimed; and work began on a new housing and homelessness plan for the province. On campus, both the college and university systems have invested in new resources for students facing challenges to their mental wellness. In the community, agencies focused on young people and on mental health are expanding their coverage as fast as budgets allow. Nationally, many new initiatives and research projects are taking off.

This is an exciting time for mental health initiatives, but also an uncertain one. Community, public sector, and private-sector supporters of student mental wellness are all looking to understand what students need, where the opportunities are for investments, and how students’ needs vary from place to place. That’s where this report comes in. Over the course of several months, staff from Choices for Youth heard from hundreds of students, faculty, staff, and administrators all over Newfoundland and Labrador. Arriving on campuses loaded down with pizza and appearing online with survey links, we were inspired by the thoughtfulness and commitment we heard from students and staff alike. This report aims to do justice to that richness.

This process was made possible by RBC’s Future Launch initiative, and more broadly by RBC’s commitment to ensuring that its work in the student success and mental health space is achieving maximum impact through a concerted effort to listen and to learn. Building on a long history of partnership between RBC and Choices for Youth, the conclusions of this report will help inform the next era for Choices for Youth as we transform ourselves to a provincially-scaled organization, and will guide RBC in their investments in the future of our province’s young people and post-secondary institutions.

# Project Partners

## Choices For Youth

Choices for Youth (CFY) is a professional services, youth-focused, non-profit, charitable organization that creates spaces and conversations, and operates programs and social enterprises to help vulnerable youth secure stable housing, employment, and education while improving health and family stability.

For 30 years, CFY has been providing at-risk youth and emerging adults in St. John's, NL with programming and services that meet their present and long-term needs. Our work is informed by the lived experience and expertise of young people, feedback from program participants, input from community partners, and guidance from national programming and research.

Last year, CFY programs engaged more than 1600 young people, a huge number for a small jurisdiction, and one that continues to grow. Many of these young people have come to St. John's from communities across the province – but we know that by the time a young person has uprooted themselves and made that journey, they're already farther into the challenges they're facing than when they first identified that they needed help. With that in mind, CFY has launched a process of expansion that will see programs and supports distributed across the province, closer to the young people who need them.

CFY is also heavily engaged in policy research and advocacy. Between major research work, extensive engagement with all levels of government, membership in many national organizations, and the work of our Youth Leadership Council, CFY brings a youth voice and an innovative and progressive lens to social policy.



## RBC Future Launch

Future Launch is a 10-year, \$500 million commitment to young people in Canada – RBC's largest-ever and most sustained social issue commitment.

Canada's youth are not set up to succeed in our current economy. In fact, today's generation is at risk of ending up poorer than their parents. Young people deserve a chance, and that's why RBC created Future Launch: if youth fail, we all fail.

RBC Future Launch is focusing on three critical gaps:

**Helping youth get work experience:** Young people need more opportunities to apply their skills in the real world. 83% of educators feel youth are prepared for work, yet only 34% of employers and 44% of youth agree

**Helping youth grow their network:** There are few things as important as your network. 85% of all jobs are filled via networking, yet many young people feel they lack or are unable to develop professional relationships.

**Helping youth gain new skills:** The nature of work is changing, and so are the skills required to win. 33% of core skill-sets for most jobs will be different in 2025 and 42% of the labour force will have skills that are at risk of automation in 10-20 years.

As RBC Future Launch explores these critical gaps, it has become clear just how much mental health and wellness underlies success in all three focus areas. As young people move through their post-secondary education, they are being equipped with knowledge and with skills – but they are also facing many challenges. Equipping young people to face these challenges opens doors that could otherwise stay shut for the rest of their lives.



**Future Launch**



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# Executive Summary

Over six months in 2019, staff from Choices for Youth (CFY), in partnership with RBC Future Launch, organized a series of province-wide consultations on the topic of mental wellness for post-secondary students in Newfoundland and Labrador as well as a review of the existing research and policy literature.

When we surveyed students here in Newfoundland and Labrador, they said they were:



## Under pressure

63% rated their own mental health as fair or poor.

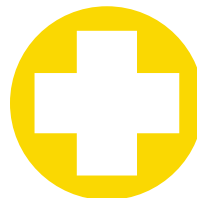
32% rated their own mental health as good or very good.

None rated their own mental health as excellent.



## Stressed out

58% said that most of their days were quite stressful or extremely stressful.



## Working on self-care

64% said they were doing fairly well, well, or very well at taking care of their mental health.

30% said they were doing “not well” at taking care of their mental health.

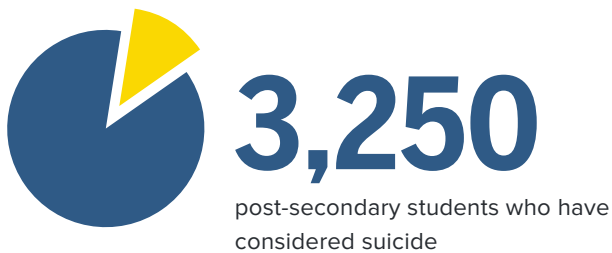
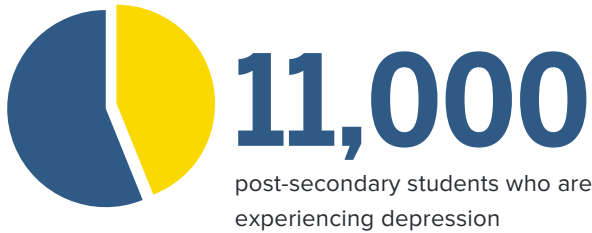


## Struggling to cope

41% of students said that when they run into challenges with their mental health, they don't feel equipped to handle them well.

## The Scope of the Challenge

Applying national survey findings to the Newfoundland and Labrador population, the data suggests that our province has approximately:



## Our Province-Wide Consultations

Staff from Choices for Youth consulted with more than 600 people. This included:

**Two online surveys** for students and for staff/faculty

**Student, Staff, And Community Service Provider Consultation Sessions** in St. John's, Grand Falls-Windsor, Corner Brook, Stephenville, and Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

**Government Consultation.** CFY hosted staff from the Department of Health and Community Services and the Department of Advanced Education, Skills, and Labour for a consultation in St. John's.



## Brought together, these conversations have painted a broad, informative, and hopeful picture of the mental wellness amongst post-secondary students.

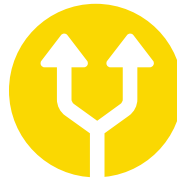
### The conversation has changed

Students - and to some extent, staff - feel like there is much more open discussion of mental health and wellness than in the past, but there is still far to go.



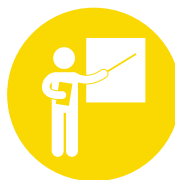
### Separating situations and illnesses

Students, staff, and faculty all highlighted the changing nature of mental health and specifically the fuzzy line between situational stress and clinical anxiety. There is work needed to broaden student vocabulary and understanding of these nuances, and improve general coping skills and resiliency to stress while ensuring mental health challenges do not go undiagnosed.



### Empowering staff and faculty

Staff, faculty and students all see an important role for campus staff, and especially for instructors, in supporting student mental health – but supports for this are very limited.



### The power of peers

Access to peer support for students is patchy at best, particularly in the college system where students often do not stay long enough to self-organize. There is a strong desire for more peer support programming and more structures to support it.



### Coping skills

Both staff and students spoke of the gaps they saw in their students or peers' ability to cope with school and independent life; supports to address this are an important element of better preparing young people for a mentally well adulthood.



### Addressing substance misuse

Students and staff rarely mentioned substance use and misuse in the context of mental wellness. This is sometimes seen as a separate health issue, but with so many relationships between substance use and mental wellness, it should be part of the conversation.





## Physical spaces matter

Quiet, private, calming physical spaces are an important support to students' mental wellness, but are very hard to come by on most campuses. General common spaces on campus are also important to consider through the lens of mental wellness.



## It is difficult to reach young men

The vast majority of student survey respondents identified as female. In person attendance was more balanced, but overall, students who identify as men are less likely comfortable discussing these issues. Young men also face a quite high risk of mental illness. Attendees also made it clear this dynamic was a challenge. Targeted supports are important here.



## Integration with community support services

There is an opportunity to provide closer integration between on-campus and off-campus mental wellness supports, and for those supports to be organized in a way that makes them accessible to students.



## Distance learning opportunities and challenges

There is little integration of mental wellness supports into online and distance-learning systems; there is considerable opportunity here to empower these students through better access to supports.



## Gaps to Fill

Opportunities for nearer-term investments in mental wellness through existing partners and structures:

- Investing in peer support
- Creating physical spaces for wellness
- Integrate mental wellness resources into distance-learning platforms
- Critical training for staff, faculty, and students
- Reducing financial barriers to accessing wellness supports
- Student mental wellness manuals for faculty
- Life skills developmental opportunities for students

## Transformational Investments

High-impact, high-effort initiatives that could move the needle at the provincial scale:

- **A new resilience curriculum:** With resilience and coping skills emerging as a major challenge, more resources are needed.
- **Integrated service delivery:** Bringing together all the supports that students need through one point of access.
- **Empowerment for wellness:** Investing in shifting the dialogue around global challenges away from a feeling of powerlessness.
- **Addressing the social determinants of mental wellness:** Investments in the foundations of a healthy and safe life.

## Critical conversations

Topics for continued research and dialogue

- Supporting male-identifying students
- Strengthening community-campus connections
- Finding new language to talk about mental wellness
- Harm reduction and substance misuse supports

## Mental wellness and the new economy

Mental wellness has a major impact on successful participation in the new economy.

Areas of impact:

- Equipping students for the gig economy
- Helping students thrive in flexible, tech-driven workplaces
- Meaningful economic inclusion and skills for self-advocacy
- Mental wellness as empowerment in the workplace

# 3.

## National and Provincial Data on Student Mental Wellness

Mental health challenges are extremely common for Canadian students. In the 2016 National College Health Association (NCHA) survey of Canadian post-secondary students (the primary source of data on this topic), 44.4% reported that at some point in the previous twelve months they felt “so depressed it was difficult to function,” 13% had seriously considered suicide, 2.1% had attempted suicide, and 18.4% had been professionally treated for anxiety.<sup>1</sup>

At these rates, this would mean that in Newfoundland and Labrador, with more than 25,000 post-secondary students at any given time:

# 11,000

At least 11,000 students are experiencing depression

# 4,500

At least 4,500 have been treated for anxiety

# 3,250

At least 3,250 have seriously considered suicide, and more than 500 have attempted it

These rates may seem shocking, but bear in mind that ages 20-29, when most people are completing their post-secondary education, are the ages when rates of mental health challenges are the highest.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, our post-secondary institutions, and the communities they create, are also uniquely positioned to impact mental wellness in the whole population.

Trends in the data on student mental wellness are generally upward. For example, between 1994 and 2014 the share of students being prescribed psychiatric medication rose from 9% to almost 25%.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, rates of depression, anxiety,

suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts tracked by the NCHA survey have all consistently risen from survey to survey. It is important to remember, though, that over the same timeframe it's become much more normalized to talk about mental health – so some or all of this increase might be due to people feeling more comfortable in reporting mental health challenges.

There is, of course, much more to student mental wellness. The journey through post-secondary education is one that involves learning to live independently, to cope with stress, to navigate substance use, and to find a place for yourself in a world with a shifting workforce and a changing climate.

## The Journey for Students in NL

There is no one model for the post-secondary student experience in Newfoundland and Labrador. Students may be taking classes at one of the two Memorial University campuses (in St. John's and Corner Brook), one of the 17 campuses of the public College of the North Atlantic, or at one of the 23 private training institutions (PTIs) around the province. Those classes might be in-person or online, in the student's home community or half a world away from it.

The colleges, PTIs, and universities also operate on vastly different scales. Memorial University's St. John's campus has more than 18,000 students while some of the smaller college and PTO campuses have fewer than 100. Campus dynamics and the nature of the surrounding community vary greatly as a result, and existing services and supports for student mental wellness look quite different from place to place.

At the campuses of the College of the North Atlantic and most PTIs the primary connection with mental health supports are through guidance counsellors, and through accessibility services (since some students with a mental health diagnosis work with accessibility offices to structure accommodations). Here, the guidance counsellors are often playing a dual role of supportive listener and service navigator, connecting students to outside mental health services. This can be a complex juggling act, since counselling staff also provide many other kinds of support, especially academic advising, and their time can be constrained.

The journey through post-secondary education is one that involves learning to live independently, to cope with stress, to navigate substance use and abuse, and to find a place for yourself in a world with a shifting workforce and a changing climate.

On the campuses where they exist, another important resource for wellness supports are Indigenous student spaces and services – these provide the access to traditional cultural practices and connection to peers that is an important element of wellness for many Indigenous students. There are also student-led groups and initiatives that provide some access to peer support or awareness-building campaigns. Finally, where students live on-campus in residences, residence staff (typically students themselves) are a key support and often serve as first responders to mental health crises happening after-hours.

The journey for Memorial University students, and particularly students at the St. John's Campus, is quite different. At both the St. John's Campus and at Grenfell Campus students have access to treatment and clinical support, with the much larger St. John's campus having, consequently, a larger counselling centre. The Student Wellness and Counselling Centre at Memorial has emerged as a national leader through its adoption of a "Stepped Care" model of support that aims to connect with students through an initial consultation and then match them with the least-invasive level of treatment that will address their needs – they can then move up or down "steps" of intensity as their needs require, including through connection to outside service providers.<sup>4</sup> This model is being scaled up to settings outside the university in the coming years.

# A Look at the Literature

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (also supported by RBC) is in the process of partnering with the Canadian Standards Association to develop a new National Standard for the Psychological Health and Safety of Post-Secondary Students<sup>4</sup>, and their researchers have completed an extensive look through the literature.<sup>5</sup>

Some key takeaways that have impacted our approach to developing this report include:

## Stress

- The majority of students report above-average stress and that stress impacts their performance in school.
- The biggest stressors for students are primarily predictable: coping with academic demands, learning to live independently, integrating into campus life and relationships, financial issues and fears about the future.
- Feelings of safety matter to mental wellness, and rates of physical and sexual assault are a major concern.



## Seeking help

- Many more students report various mental health challenge than report being diagnosed and treated for them. Whether treatment is needed is, though, hard to know.



- There are groups of students at particular risk: international students, students from ethnic minorities, and LGBTQ2S students encounter discrimination in the broader community and services that don't meet their needs.
- Medical students also face particular challenges with both stress and stigma
- Students often struggle to seek help for mental health challenges. This is particularly true for students who identify as male, younger students, STEM students, and students from ethnic minorities.

## Services and strategies

- Students are looking for institutions to strengthen their mental wellness supports, especially for sub-populations like LGBTQ2S students.
- Electronic mental health resources have a role to play, but students still show a preference for in-person supports and are unsure if they can trust online sources.
- Post-secondary institutions are already engaged in mental health support, both in providing traditional counselling interventions (which are often limited) and prevention/skills-building initiatives.
- Most universities and colleges don't have comprehensive strategies and policies around mental health and opportunities for staff training are limited.
- Newfoundland and Labrador is on the cutting edge with the implementation of "stepped care" models that emphasize a 9-step range of interventions, from least to most intense, with the understanding that providing



traditional one-on-one support for everyone is neither sustainable or necessary. There's not much data yet on outcomes, but usage rates are showing an increase.

- Improving mental wellness has been an impetus for many universities to implement a fall semester mid-term break.

## What works, and what doesn't

- Animal therapy, broad-spectrum counselling, online cognitive behavioral therapy, and peer counselling all show positive impacts on mental wellness in the literature.

- The evidence is mixed on mindfulness programs and indicates that it may not be an appropriate tool for certain types of mental illness.

- There is very little data on the impact of social media-based messaging.

- All strategies appear to have limited reach amongst young men, who are especially resistant to intervention.

# Suicide Prevention



Inside of the comprehensive mental wellness conversation is a specific and critically important conversation around suicide prevention within post-secondary institutions. As noted above, approximately 2% of Canadian students report having attempted suicide in the last year, and another 13 percent have seriously considered it.

The leading organization in this space is the Jed Foundation, which has developed an extensive framework for suicide prevention and crisis response in post-secondary institutions<sup>6</sup>. When implemented, this looks like:

- Students and administrators able and prepared to identify students at risk of suicide
- Discussions and MOUs with health-care providers around emergency response and hospitalizations
- Helping students re-integrate after a crisis or leave of absence and providing continued follow-up with both the student and others involved
- Having a strong emergency contact notification protocol

There is a great deal of public conversation happening at the moment about how institutions can and should react in these situations, how to ensure that prevention programs work for people coming from different cultural perspectives, and how to de-stigmatize the suicide prevention conversation.

### 3. National and Provincial Data

## Substance Use and Misuse

Substance use and misuse are issues within the post-secondary student population in Canada. Drawing from 2016 data, while rates of treated substance abuse are relatively low at 1.3% of students, rates of substance use are significant. Just short of 70% of students drink alcohol (35% having had more than 5 drinks at a time within the last 2 weeks), and about 18% report consuming cannabis. Just over 11% of students report using prescription drugs not prescribed to them (opioids and antidepressants, most commonly)<sup>7</sup>.

Data from student focus groups held by the Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse<sup>8</sup> provide some context. Students report significant use of prescription medication, particularly around exam time to help with focus. There is also a complex conversation happening around cannabis consumption, perceived as a largely risk-free option and as a way to mitigate anxiety and stress.

In Newfoundland and Labrador's general population, rates of heavy drinking are significantly higher than the Canadian average, particularly for men (48.5% against a Canadian average of 33.9%). Rates of cannabis use (11.6%) are relatively

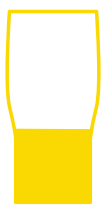
low, and reported use of illicit substances is, at 1.4%, the lowest in the country. A 2007 survey of high school students in Atlantic Canada also includes NL data, which puts rates of both cannabis (29.5%) and illicit drug (2.4% to 7% depending on the drug) at higher rates than in the broader Canadian population. University campus survey data from Atlantic Canada in 2005 also has the region's students reporting the highest level of frequent and harmful drinking in the country, by a wide margin.<sup>9</sup>

There is a large body of literature supporting links between substance use and mental illness. Broadly speaking, as per the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse<sup>10</sup>, there are multiple links between substance misuse and mental illness. Each can be a cause of the other, and there are many shared risk factors between the two. With the frequency of concurrent issues, strategies around substance use, substance misuse, and harm reduction are very much part of the broader dialogue around student mental wellness.



# 48.5%

Rate of NL post-secondary students considered heavy drinkers



# 33.9%

Rate of Canadian post-secondary students considered heavy drinkers



## The Role of Faculty and Staff

Students are just one part of the campus community. There has been much less written about how staff and faculty engage with student mental wellness. Where do institutions' responsibilities start and end? Should faculty be directly involved in student mental health interventions? What kind of mental health training and support do staff need? These questions are getting asked more often in recent years, though major reports and surveys are still rare. One of the more comprehensive looks at this topic comes from the United Kingdom, where Student Minds (their national student mental health charity) commissioned a report.

Looking more directly at a Canadian context, articles in *University Affairs* and the *International Journal of Mental Health and Addictions* explore how faculty fit in. A few common themes emerge:

- **There is a sense of urgency on campuses on this issue, but faculty in particular aren't sure where their role starts and ends.**
- **Student support staff play key roles in triage, wellness, and connections to clinical supports.**
- **Faculty are often the first to know when a student is facing a mental health challenge, either through indirect indicators or direct disclosures.**
- **Few faculty members feel like they are provided with the necessary support to fulfill the role they now often play as frontline points of contact on these issues.**
- **Policies and procedures have limits: staff and faculty feel ethically obliged to help.**
- **Helping students navigate complex systems of care is challenging and complex work that involves significant time costs**
- **There is work to do to find common ground between student services staff and faculty on these issues.**

There is now a broad understanding that faculty play a key role in the student mental wellness space – but few faculty members have been prepared or trained to take that role on. There are initiatives already happening across Canadian campuses, but many gaps remain.



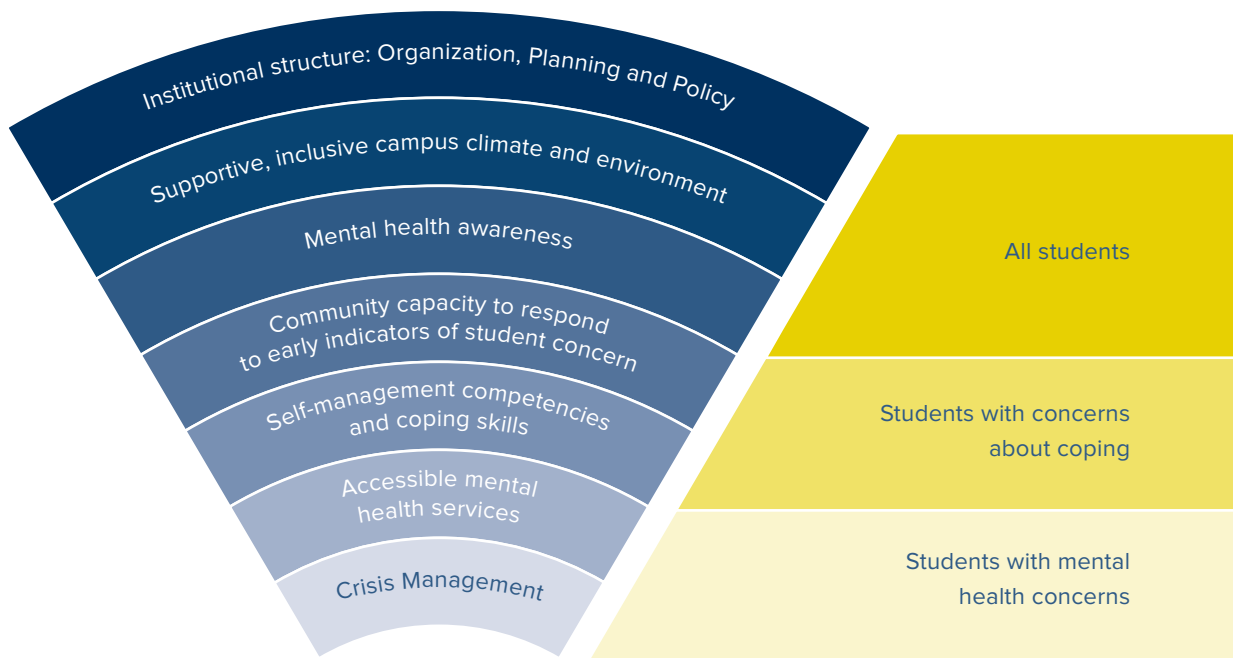
### 3. National and Provincial Data

## Action Plans & Recommendations

The national standards that are currently under development are one part of a larger dialogue happening between institutions, advocacy organizations, governments, and funders around policies and strategies to address what many regard as a crisis.

Student advocacy organizations have been pushing loudly for more action around mental health supports. At the national level, Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) released its Roadmap for Federal Action on Student Mental Health<sup>14</sup> in 2014 and a major policy paper in 2018<sup>15</sup>.

In Ontario, the College Student Alliance, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, Colleges Ontario, and the Council of Ontario Universities have come together to develop an action plan on post-secondary student mental health<sup>16</sup>. While the policy detail is Ontario-specific, the broad themes of their recommendations are not. Speaking from the on-campus service-provider perspective, the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CAUCUSS) partnered with the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) to produce a guide that details how to take a systemic approach to these issues on campus<sup>17</sup>. The paper includes a graphic, included below, to help map different areas for action on this issue.



Improving mental wellness for post-secondary students involves taking action across all these levels. Diagram from "Post Secondary Student Mental Health: Guide to a Systemic Approach by College and University Student Services (CACUSS) and the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), 2014.<sup>17</sup>



## What Could the Future Look Like?

Within the last decade in Canada, there have been hundreds of recommendations made across multiple reports on student mental health and wellness. The literature is continuously evolving and expanding, but there are some themes that run through much of these proposals. Incorporating these themes, a strengthened system of student mental wellness in Canada would include:

- Stronger integration between on-campus and off-campus services
- More after-hours support
- Strengthened awareness-building and anti-stigma programs
- Supports for students to provide structured peer support
- A focus on resilience-building for students as they prepare for post-secondary
- Smoother and more affordable navigation of the accommodations system
- Strengthened support and training for faculty and staff

## Remaining Questions

Even as student mental wellness receives well-deserved attention, there are still many questions:

- 1. How do we best support students who are studying primarily online?**
- 2. How do we help students who have come of age in an era of mental health awareness to distinguish between chronic problems and situational stress?**
- 3. How do we make student mental health services more welcoming to people from diverse cultural backgrounds, to LGBTQ2S people, and to young men, who are often very resistant to help?**
- 4. What do these services look like for institutions with small and distributed student populations?**

All of these, and more, are the questions we took into our conversations with students, staff, and faculty across Newfoundland and Labrador's post-secondary sector.

# 4.

## Gathering Insights on Post-Secondary Student Mental Wellness in NL

Staff from Choices for Youth spent the Winter and Spring of 2018/19 on the road, online, and on the phone consulting with more than 600 people across the province to take the pulse of post-secondary student mental wellness. This process included:

### Student Survey

We launched a 33-question online survey for post-secondary students. Co-promoted by on-campus partners and boosted by online promotion, it captured 159 responses. The survey questions are in Appendix B at the end of this report.



### Student Consultation Sessions

CFY's team hosted in-person consultations with students at Memorial University campuses in Corner Brook and St. John's and at College of the North Atlantic campuses in St. John's, Grand Falls-Windsor, Corner Brook, Stephenville, and Happy Valley-Goose Bay. More than 100 students participated. The discussion guide is in Appendix A.



### Off-Campus Service Provider Consultations

CFY staff met with staff from health authorities and community-based mental health service providers in St. John's, Grand Falls-Windsor, Corner Brook, Stephenville, and Happy Valley-Goose Bay. 19 organizations participated.



### Staff & Faculty Survey

An online survey for staff and faculty about their perspectives on student mental wellness brought in 375 responses. The faculty and staff survey questions are in Appendix C.



### Staff Consultation Sessions

CFY hosted discussions with college and university staff in St. John's, Grand Falls-Windsor, Corner Brook, Stephenville, and Happy Valley-Goose Bay. 26 staff members participated, including guidance counsellors, student service staff, and administrative staff.



The goal of these surveys and conversations was to first establish informed insights on what's happening, on what's needed, and on how our understanding of student mental wellness is changing; and second, to help develop recommendations for investments to improve student wellness on campuses in Newfoundland and Labrador.



### Government Consultation

CFY hosted staff from the Department of Health and Community Services and the Department of Advanced Education, Skills, and Labour for a St. John's consultation.

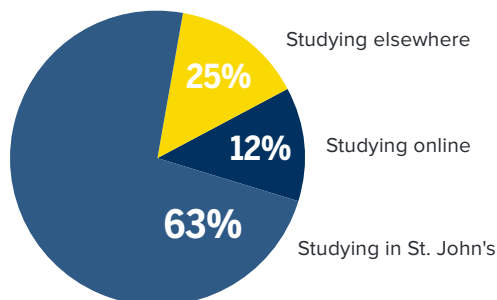
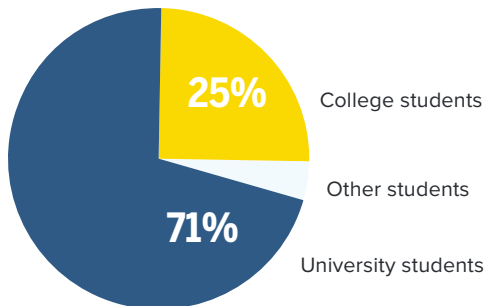


# What We Heard From **Students**

**5.**

Between in-person conversations and online surveys, we heard from 260 students across the province. We reached them through social media, promotion from staff at the College of the North Atlantic and Memorial University Student Services team, co-promotion with student-led organizations, and media releases. The survey was open to anyone who had attended post-secondary in the last 5 years. It is important to note that these surveys and conversations were designed to draw out their perspectives, ideas, and solutions, rather than diving into details about individual student experiences or diagnoses.

## Who took the survey



### Institution and Enrollment

71% were university students and 25% were college students

63% were currently in post-secondary in the province

71% were studying in person in St. John's, 14% elsewhere, and 12% online

### Field of Study

50% were working on (or just finished) a bachelor's degree, 31% a diploma/certificate, and 17% a graduate degree

22% studied the humanities, 18% sciences, 12% business, 10% social work, 9% education, 7% health and medicine, 8% engineering, and 11% other subjects

### Identity and Location

5% had left school before completing a degree – and all said that mental health challenges were part of the reason

85% were from Newfoundland and Labrador, 11% from elsewhere in Canada, and 2% from outside Canada

Of the people from Newfoundland and Labrador, 45% were from St. John's, 13% the Avalon, 12% from Central Newfoundland, with 1-5% from each of the other regions. No online respondents came from the North Coast, Central Labrador, or Southern Labrador

80% identified as female, 7% as male, and 12% as other genders.

## Who came to the sessions

We did not collect detailed demographics from the in-person discussion sessions, but they were significantly more gender-balanced than the survey responses (only 7% male). We also had more college students participate in the in-person sessions, providing some balance to the high share of university students in the survey pool. All of the discussion participants were current students.

# Defining Student Mental Wellness

At every conversation we had with students, we started the discussion with this question – and few struggled to answer it. To the students we talked to, mental wellness was about meeting the world in a healthy way – with the tools to cope with setbacks and stresses when they happen, with circles of support to rely on, with knowledge of and access to mental health care, and with an understanding that staying mentally well is ongoing work for all of us.

For students, so much of this is about managing the rhythms of academic life. Some students are out on their own for the first time. Others have families of their own to support. Regardless of background, almost all our discussion participants talked about how much of an impact stress made on their mental health – and how important it was to learn to manage it.

According to our survey, this is still a challenge.

"Students should be made more aware of available resources and services to improve mental health, and these services should be more accessible"

## Under pressure

- 63% rated their own mental health as fair or poor
- 32% rated their own mental health as good or very good
- None rated their own mental health as excellent

## Stressed out

- 58% said that most of their days were quite stressful or extremely stressful

## Self-care

- 64% said they were doing fairly well, well, or very well at taking care of their mental health.
- 30% said they were doing “not well” at taking care of their mental health.

## Coping challenges

- 41% of students said that when they do run into challenges with their mental health, they don't feel like they can handle them well.

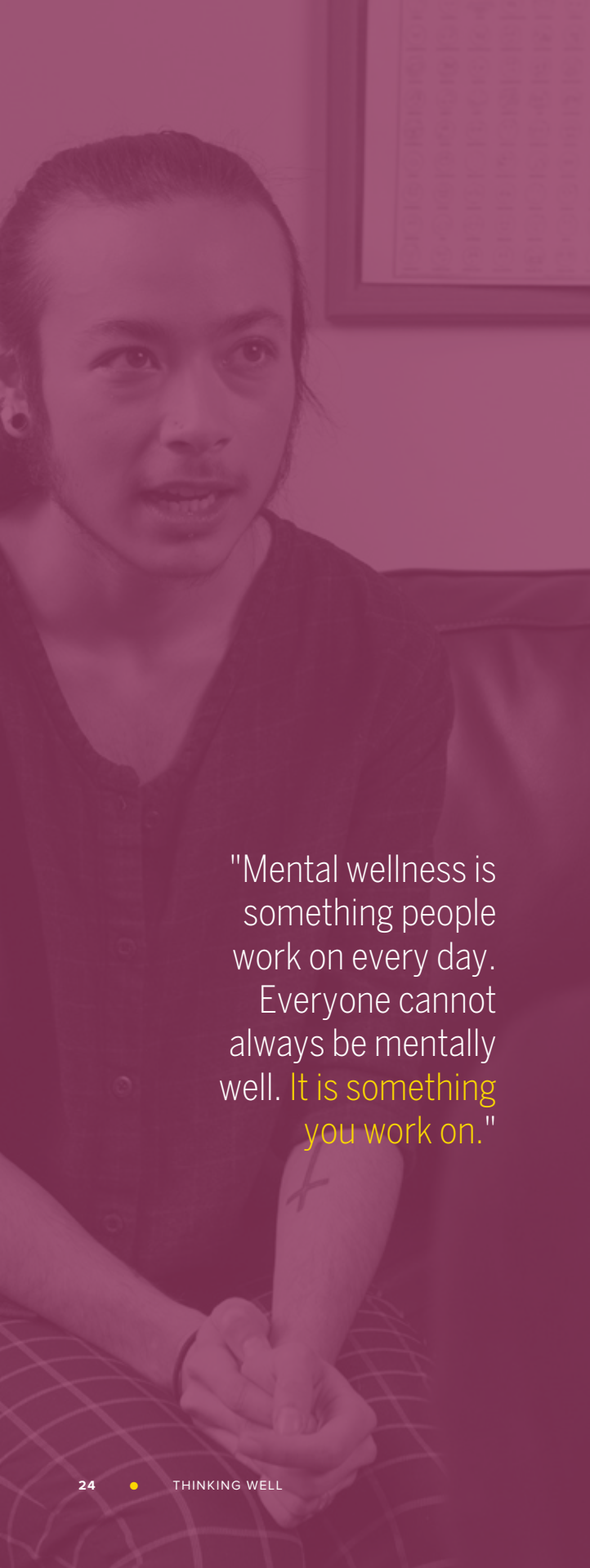
The students we talked to didn't draw a sharp line between broader conversations about mental wellness and responses to diagnosed mental illnesses. To most of the students we talked to, it was clear that there was a continuum – both in terms of what they and their peers might be facing on a given day, and in terms of the supports available. Treatment through prescription medication, in particular, was identified mostly as a starting point – the necessary step towards having a foundation for a mentally well life, rather than the solution.

# Key Takeaways on **Defining Student Mental Wellness**

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1. Mental wellness is coupled closely to levels of academic stress and the ability to manage it.
2. Both the challenges students face and the supports they have access to are on a wide continuum.
3. Mental wellness is critical to overall health.





"Mental wellness is something people work on every day. Everyone cannot always be mentally well. **It is something you work on.**"

## Communications and outreach by institutions

Universities and colleges are talking and students are listening – 84% have heard about stress and anxiety in communications from their school, and 76% about accessing mental health services. There is still room to grow here, though – fewer than 45% recall hearing any messages around suicide, grief, and other mental health topics.

We also asked about visible efforts in this space – 58% of students reported seeing visible efforts (posters, ads, events, etc) to talk about mental health.

When we talked to students about this, they often made the case for these conversations to move from the hallways posterboards and into the classrooms themselves; for mental wellness to be integrated into curricula as a learning topic; and for mental wellness strategies to be a part of the orientation to a new class or a new field of study.

## Role models

We also asked students whether they knew of any student, faculty, or staff leaders who were open about their mental health challenges – 38% said there were student leaders who did, and 15% said that they knew of faculty and staff in a similar role.



# Key Takeaways on **Talking About Mental Health**

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1. Students see their peers as slightly better equipped to have conversation about mental health than other individuals in their lives.
2. Students indicate that disclosure of mental health challenges would not significantly affect their relationships.
3. While students have people around them who are open about their mental health challenges, there are not many formal or informal spaces to discuss mental health and wellness more broadly.

# Seeking Support

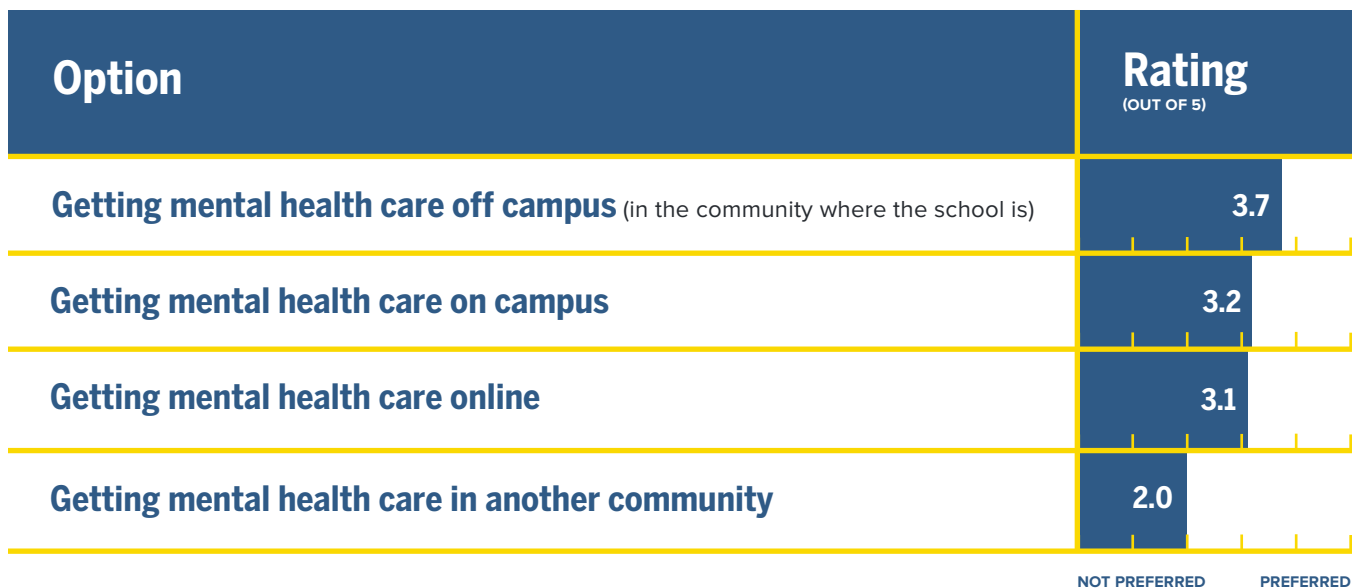
When something goes wrong, do students know where to go? On the survey, 58% reported being “pretty sure” or “sure” of where to go for support with a mental health issue, against 38% who were a bit or very unsure.

In our in-person conversations, we dove a little deeper. Most of the students we spoke to were quite aware of their options for mental health support both in their school and out in the community – they could often name the community organizations, and many students were aware that there is

now single-session walk-in counselling offered through the provincial health care system.

This awareness of support services is an important piece of knowledge, since many students spoke to us about the need of having mental health supports available outside of school. Some felt that they’d be more anonymous accessing help there; others recognized that they and their peers needed a wider range of supports than their school could offer on site.

Here’s how the results break down for preferences where of supports are accessed, and the importance in the availability of different types of support services.



Survey respondents also rated the importance of different types of support, again on scale of 1 (least important) to 5 (most important). Here's how students saw things – everything was rated quite important, but a few items stand out:

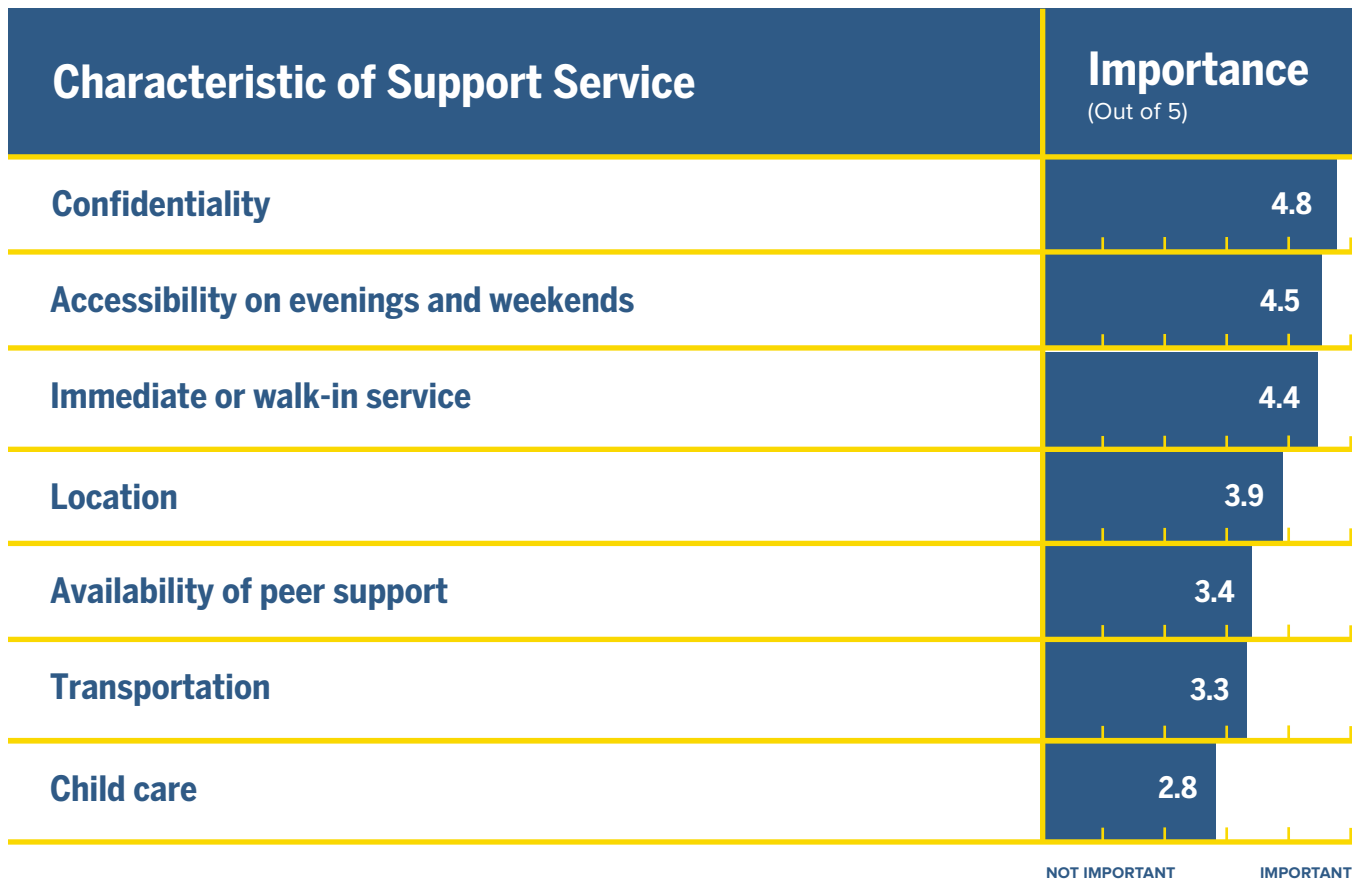
Type of support	Importance (Out of 5)
In-person counselling	4.6
Mental health leave for students	4.6
Suicide prevention programs	4.5
Targeted supports for students with disabilities	4.5
Targeted supports for Indigenous students	4.4
Targeted supports for racialized students	4.3
Targeted supports for LGBTQ2S students	4.3
Stress reduction programs (recreation, animal programs during exams, etc)	4.3
Crisis phone lines	4.3
Peer support from other students	4.0

NOT IMPORTANT      IMPORTANT

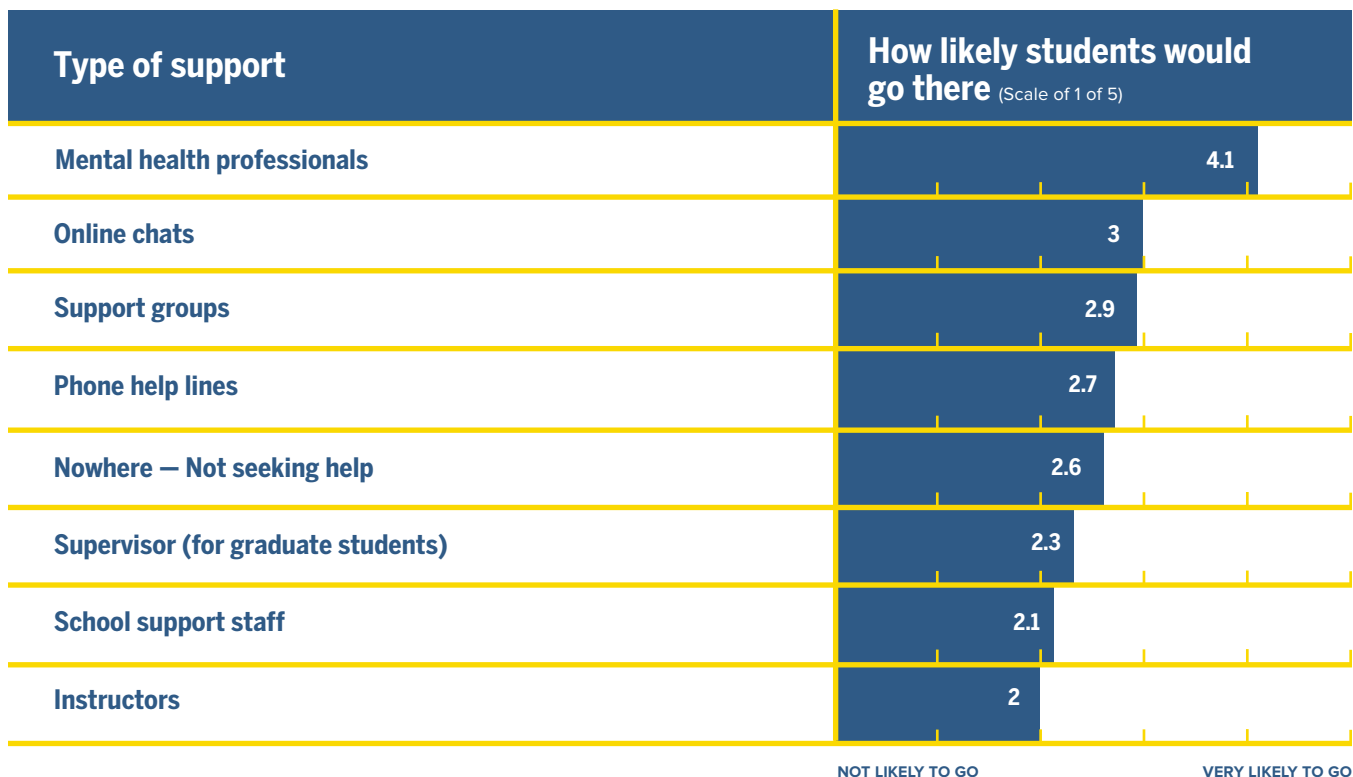
"Online mental health support would be a fantastic resource for anyone, not just students. ...Different barriers would be dismantled if students had access to immediate mental health resources **at their fingertips.**"

## 5. What We Heard From Students

We also asked students which characteristics of support services were most important when it came to considering access. On our survey, confidentiality, evening and weekend hours, and immediacy of service mattered the most. In our in-person discussions, students repeatedly mentioned how the need to fit in mental health care within their already-scheduled day was a barrier and a stressor.



Finally, we wanted to get a sense of where students would go, or would suggest their friends go, to access mental health support services. Clinical services with mental health professionals was the clear preference.



NOT LIKELY TO GO

VERY LIKELY TO GO

"[I would like] for friends and family to be more supportive, for fellow students to not bully others based on their mental health, more awareness and training for staff and others involved in the post-secondary institution."

# Key Takeaways on **Seeking Help and Nature of Services**

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1. Students prefer to discuss their mental health in-person and off-campus. Through closer integration and coordination, services on-campus and online provide important stop-gaps and can serve as preliminary avenues towards in-person dialogue with mental health professionals in the community.
2. Confidentiality, immediacy of service (walk-ins) and broad hours of operations are considered to be the most important factors when students consider seeking help. It should be noted that the prefer to access services off-campus may be related to perceived or real challenges with confidentiality when accessing services on-campus, especially in smaller campus environments.
3. Students have a clear preference to connect with mental health professionals when seeking help. The capacity offered by peer support, staff, online services, instructors etc. should be focused on helping with system navigation, allyship, encouragement and crisis intervention.

# Circles of Support

We know that mental wellness is rooted in much more than access to mental health care – it depends on a rich mix of relationships, and on access to the social determinants of health. To help map a landscape of mental wellness, we asked students about their access to these things and the impact they make on student mental health.

Factor	Access (OUT OF 5)	Impact (OUT OF 5)	Gap between access and impact
Academic support	3.1	3.7	0.6
Help getting employment	2.5	3.5	1
Support from family	3.2	4.3	1.1
Nutritious food	2.4	3.7	1.3
Social life	2.6	3.9	1.3
Help managing finances	2.0	3.5	1.5
Affordable housing	2.1	3.6	1.5

NO ACCESS    GOOD ACCESS    SMALL IMPACT    BIG IMPACT

There is clearly space for more support for these social determinants, particularly around housing, employment, food, and finances. In all cases, the level of access is not proportional to level of impact on student mental health, offering some unique insights into where broader investments in support can be made to improve student mental wellness.

We also asked students about the impact that social and political issues have on their mental health – in particular, we heard quite a bit about the emotional impact of climate change. The average rating here was 3.5 out of 5 for impact, positioning it is similar to the impact of the other factors more commonly associated with wellness. Sitting down with students, this point was emphasized repeatedly – the state of the world, and concerns about the future, are really weighing on students and contribute to the level of stress

they experience. This suggests that avenues to engage in activism, civic engagement, and social justice in order to contribute to solutions around these concerns may offer an outlet to reduce their associated levels of stress. Looking ahead, it should be noted that there does seem to be an elevated awareness and anxiety around global challenges – particularly climate change – amongst the population that will be entering post-secondary institutions over course of the coming decade.

# Key Takeaways on **Circles of Support**

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1. Housing affordability and finances aren't always seen as components of mental wellness—but students flagged them as having similar impacts to many other factors, with much less access to support.
2. Engagement in broader global challenges and issues (poverty, climate-change, etc.) are seen as both a positive outlet and driver for mental wellness, and a source of additional stress and anxiety as levels of awareness increase. Student-organized initiatives focused on such issues will become important areas to target future investments and programming focused on student mental wellness, and can help create unique spaces for students to connect with one another.
3. Social isolation is a major risk for post-secondary students. Some might assume that a rich social life comes with participation in post-secondary, but that isn't necessarily true.



# Comparing College and University Student Experiences

The post-secondary experience in Newfoundland and Labrador is incredibly varied. A student might be attending a small college campus with only a few dozen or few hundred students, or they might be one of the 18,000 students at Memorial University in St. John's, a population larger than that of most of the communities that host college and private training institution campuses.

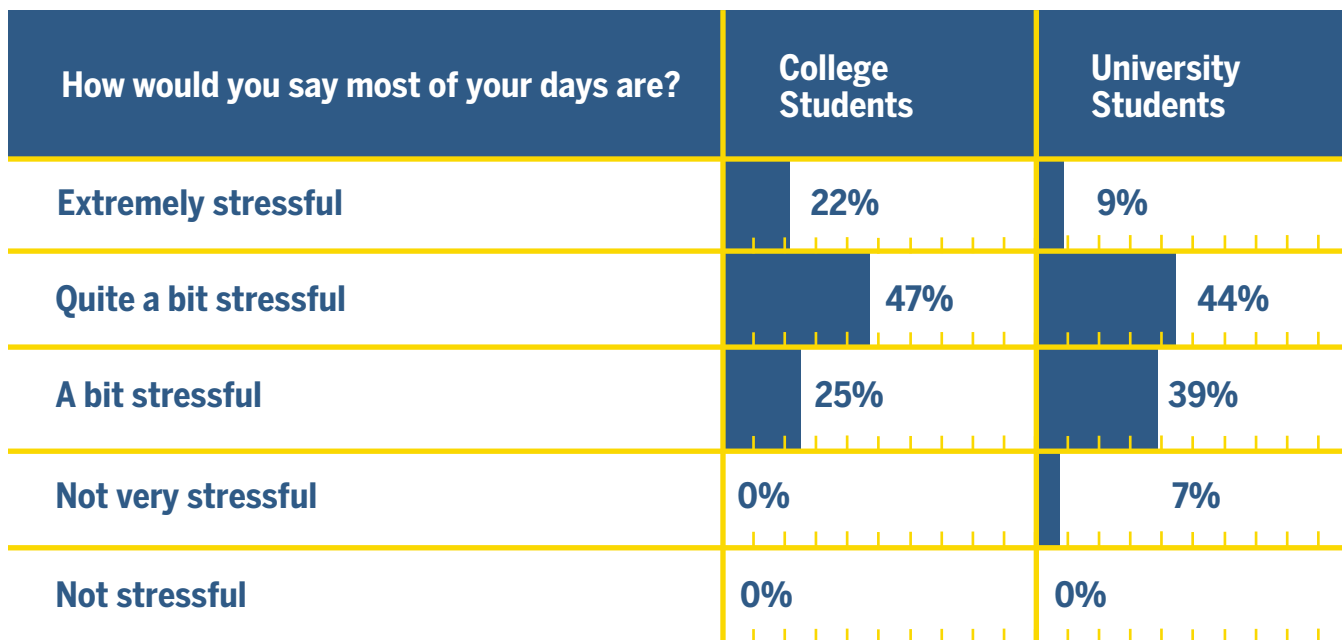
With that in mind, it is important to break out the differences we heard in both the online survey responses and the in-person consultations. In reviewing this section, it should be noted that about 75% of our survey responses came from university students, with a relatively small sample size of college student's participating. Our in-person consultations, however, were the reverse – we visited five college campuses as well as the two university campuses; adding it up, about 80% of our discussion participants were college students.

Below is a review of the survey results and a comparison of these two broad groups of students. When asking about overall mental health, we see the biggest difference at the positive end of the rating scale – few college students rated their overall mental health as “Very good”, whereas a reasonably large share of university students did.

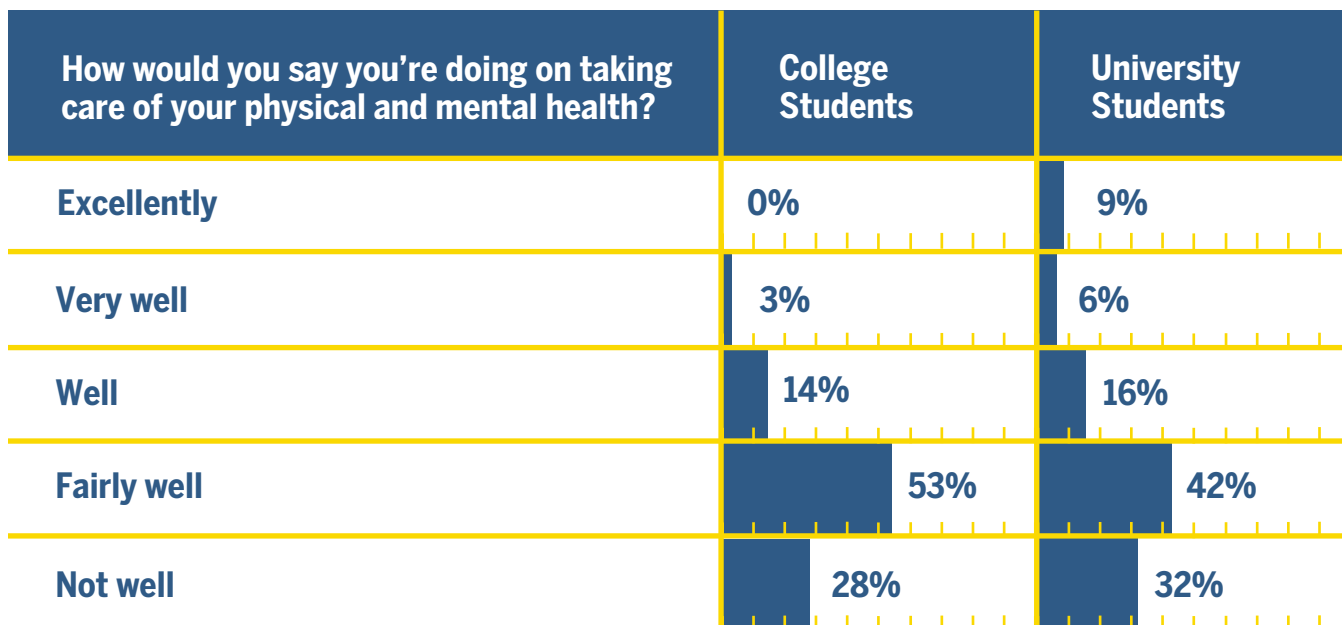
How would you rate your mental health?	College Students	University Students
Poor	31%	30%
Fair	42%	32%
Good	22%	21%
Very Good	3%	13%

"I think student mental health could be supported much more by incorporating the topic into our curriculum."

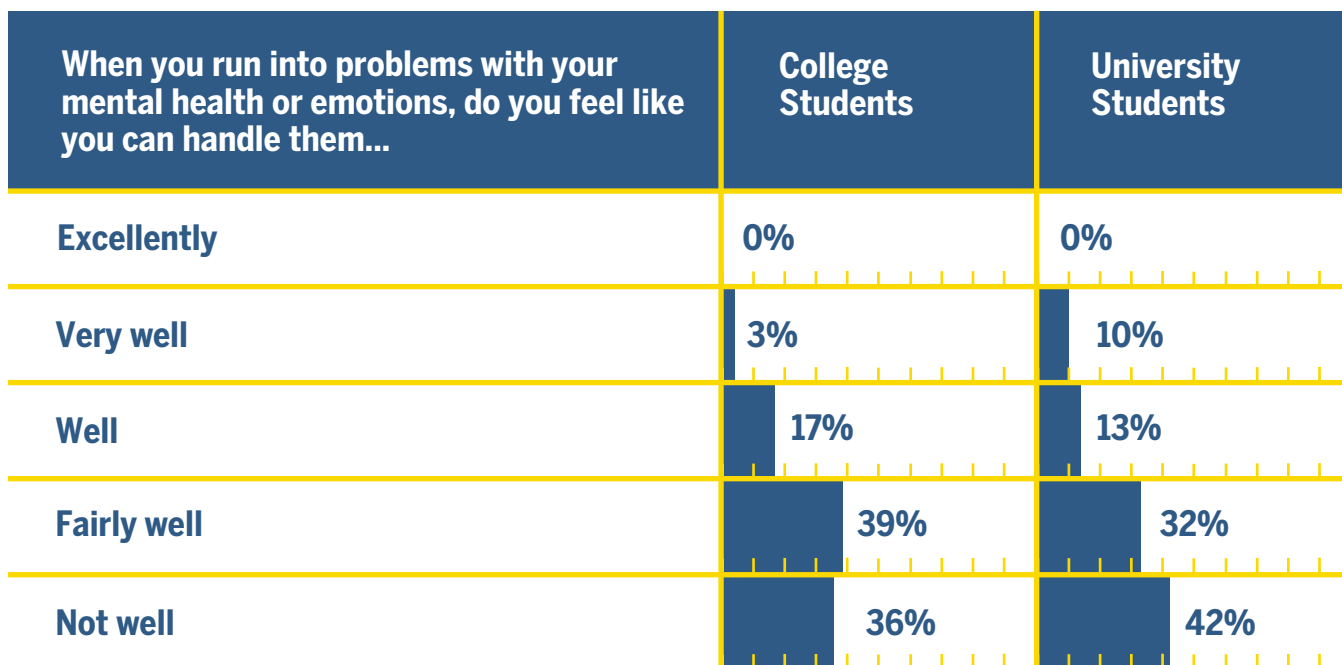
The college students who took our survey reported experiencing higher levels of stress:



Similarly, the university students we heard from were more likely to feel like they were taking good care of themselves.



When we asked about resilience, the difference gets smaller.



Overall, the survey data we gathered is consistent with what we heard during our student consultations, and the types of services and supports students were looking for were quite consistent irrespective of the institution a student was attending.

The student experience is quite different from school to school. College students told us how much they relied on the less formal, smaller-scale atmosphere of their schools for support. They were more likely to talk about the importance of supportive relationships with their instructors and with

school staff. They also often talked about how community life at their colleges could be strengthened – referencing the lack of a broader ecosystem of campus clubs and wellness programs compared to the clubs and programs available on university campuses. College students also saw the limitations of student support services at the college scale, with guidance counsellors playing the critical role of navigators into community supports, which can themselves be quite limited and variable from community to community.

The picture university students painted was in some ways the inverse. Particularly at the St. John’s campus (but also at Grenfell) there is substantial infrastructure provided to support student mental wellness, whether that be through counselling services, other student services, or student-run organizations. On the other side of this, though, university students spoke much less often about the support they gathered from the informal elements of the campus community, or their relationships with faculty. This is perhaps an inevitable consequence of attending a larger institution, but it is nonetheless important to note.

"We are looked at as not having coping skills because we are new to being independent. **That's not the only reason.**"

# Key Takeaways on **Differences Between University and College Student Needs**

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1. The same objective looks different at colleges and universities – supporting mental wellness works through different structures and at different scales.
2. College students face more acute challenges: across the board, college students were more likely to say they were stressed or unwell.
3. There are opportunities for shared services where college campuses and university campuses are in the same community; students expressed very similar needs and an interest in strengthened off-campus support.

# Student-Informed Ideas for Investments

So where do we go from here? The students we spoke to had a lot to say. On both the online survey and during our in-person sessions, we asked them how they would change the ways mental wellness is supported for students.

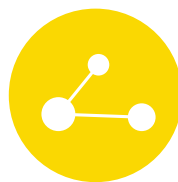
We got hundreds of answers, with consistent themes across our online and in-person conversations, and across both university and college students. In order of how often they came up (most frequent first), here's what the students we spoke to are looking for:

## More training for and engagement from faculty and staff



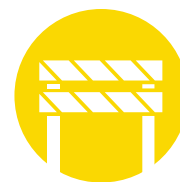
Students are well aware of whom they feel like they could approach with a mental wellness issue – some staff and faculty make a clear effort to open spaces for these conversations, and others don't. Students across the province thought their instructors, especially, would benefit from training and resources in this space. Whether or not it's the best option, instructors and staff will be on the front lines. Many students framed this in terms of sympathy – they see how hard it is to help someone navigate their mental wellness, and know that teachers and staff are being asked to do it. This training will also help staff understand the difference between their role as navigators and crisis supporters and the role of clinical and on-going support through other systems.

## More access to clinical and external supports



While very much embracing a wellness mindset to thinking about mental health, students were emphatic in their desire to see a better-resourced system of supports available through the health system and through community organizations. Particularly at smaller campuses, students rely on staff largely as a gateway into the network of supports out in the community, and become quickly aware of how limited those supports can be – including supports for related issues such as addictions, homelessness, and employment. This will require strengthened coordination between on-campus and off-campus resources.

## Lower barriers to accessing support



Students spoke at length about how much of a difference it would make to see more access to services outside of business hours, to have the different supports they need located conveniently and close together, and to have the costs of getting a diagnosis, assessment and subsequent supports be lowered.

## Strengthened accommodations



Many students felt there could be a much stronger system of accommodations (and simpler access to them) for those who were facing a mental health challenge. Suggestions included mental health leave and greater flexibility around academic deadlines and requirements; and the development of accommodation standards specific to mental health to ensure equitable access to such provisions for all students.

## Enhancing supports within the school ecosystem



Students had many concrete ideas for supports within their schools. Many want to see more in-person supports offered on campus, and more information provided to students about available programs. The dominant thread here in our conversations with students was around peer support. There is little in the way of student-led peer support within any of NL's post-secondary institutions (MUN Minds, a student organization, is the exception and provides this service). Setting it up as a student-led initiative can be challenging due to high student turnover and subsequent challenges around adequate training and ensuring quality of service. Barriers aside, though, many students were looking for more of this. In particular, support from peers for students living in residence came up wherever there were residences to discuss. The final piece of this conversation, which came up quite frequently, was around physical spaces. Students in many communities are facing high stress levels, feeling anxious, and sometimes looking for a quiet, peaceful space to spend time – this can be surprisingly difficult to access. Campus' could consider updating existing physical spaces (lighting, wall colours, ease of navigations, etc.) with a lens to improve wellness.

## Services that respect diversity

LGBTQ2S students, students from ethnic or religious minorities, and students new to Canada all face additional barriers in getting support that really fits their own background and context – many students brought this up as something that needs to change.



## Supporting resilience

Outside of crisis-oriented and direct mental health supports, students are looking for the tools they need to meet the world in a resilient way. This means longer-term engagements with support systems, and a wider understanding of how social determinants of health influence mental wellness.



"Isolation is a huge problem with mental illness, potentially due to the stigma that is perpetuated by society surrounding mental illness. These individuals need to be supported and to know that they're not alone **and that they do not have to suffer in silence.**"

# Student-Informed Program Ideas

The students we engaged with offered numerous ideas on what these kind of changes might look like to put into practice, and shared some fully-formed ideas. These include:

- Investing in resilience and coping skills for students, starting with content in high school and continuing through post-secondary.
- Free mental health first aid courses, mental health awareness/sensitivity and ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Training) training for students and faculty, and especially for students in residence.
- A visiting counsellor who can provide services on campus for smaller institutions.
- Credit courses on positive thinking and resilience.
- Creating youth-focused mental wellness spaces on campus and in the community, with connections to more intensive mental health services when needed.
- Strengthened wellness programs based around activities – chess, book club, hiking, etc. – this is particularly relevant on smaller college campuses with fewer student-organized groups.
- Subsidized access to community wellness resources (gyms, yoga studios, etc.) when not available through the school.
- An online booking system for in-person mental health care support (needing to book via phone represented a barrier for many students).
- An organized peer counselling program with staff support to ensure it continues as students transition in and out, and with compensation for students acting as peer supporters.
- Building online mental health supports such as Bridge the gApp directly into online course portals.
- A student-focused mental health program open to all students (college, university, private training institutions).
- A regular, mandatory mental health checkup for all students that could serve as a doorway into care if needed.
- Expanding or supplementing insurance coverage for mental health care.
- Allowing alumni some access to mental wellness supports provided through the institution.

"I think that every student should have at least one mandatory appointment check up a month. There needs to be more questionnaires. It is a lot easier to rate how you really feel from 1 to 5 than it is to **seek help and open up about all your problems.**"

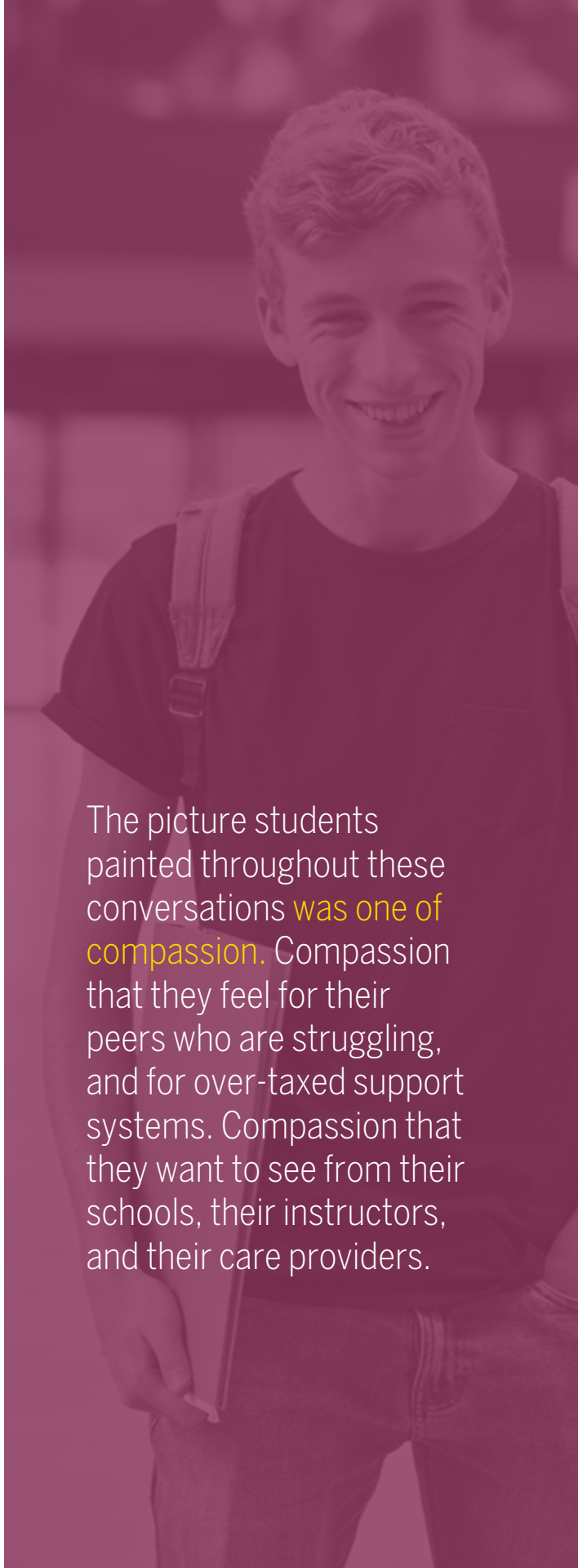
# Tying it Together: Student Voices

Over several months, we spoke to hundreds of students across the province – but it took quite an effort to make that happen, and it was a real challenge in particular to bring gender diversity to these conversations. It is important to recognize that mental health and wellness still holds a stigma that holds particularly true for young people who identify as men. It's also important to recognize that students don't always feel like their input can make a difference to such a huge system.

Once the conversations began, however, students had a lot to say. From their perspective, they see their schools -- large institutions with huge influence over their lives – clearly making an effort in this space. It's important to note that not once did a student question the idea that institutions should play a role in student mental wellness; by now, that understanding is very much established.

The picture students painted throughout these conversations was one of compassion. Compassion that they feel for their peers who are struggling, and for overloaded support systems. Compassion that they want to see from their schools, their instructors, and their care providers.

There is also an important conversation going on among students, and those who work with them, around how we talk about the struggles every student faces on their journey through post-secondary. That journey will always be fraught with stress and moments of anxiety – but also, sometimes, with chronic challenges that need support from our health system. How do we equip students to manage these moments, and to know the difference? The word “resilience” kept coming up, and as the next section of this report will show, that was just as much the case in our conversations with faculty and staff.



The picture students painted throughout these conversations **was one of compassion**. Compassion that they feel for their peers who are struggling, and for over-taxed support systems. Compassion that they want to see from their schools, their instructors, and their care providers.



# 6.

## What We Heard From Staff & Faculty

Between our online survey and a series of in-person engagement sessions, staff from CFY heard from 348 staff and faculty from colleges and universities. With instructors in particular this is among the largest of such surveys ever done on mental wellness issues. Faculty and staff have a unique perspective on the changing needs of students, and many stories to share about their own role in supporting students' mental wellness.

### Who we heard from

**192**

full-time faculty  
(almost all online)

**47**

student support  
staff (online and in  
person)

**33**

contract faculty

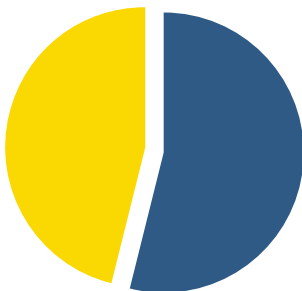
**23**

management staff

**19**

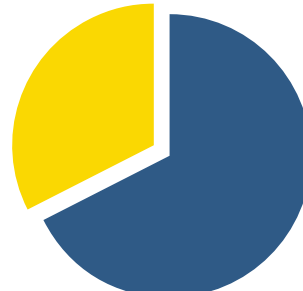
other staff

**46%**  
of survey-takers  
located outside  
of St. John's



**54%**  
of survey-takers  
located  
in St. John's

**32%**  
of survey-takers  
were part of the  
university system



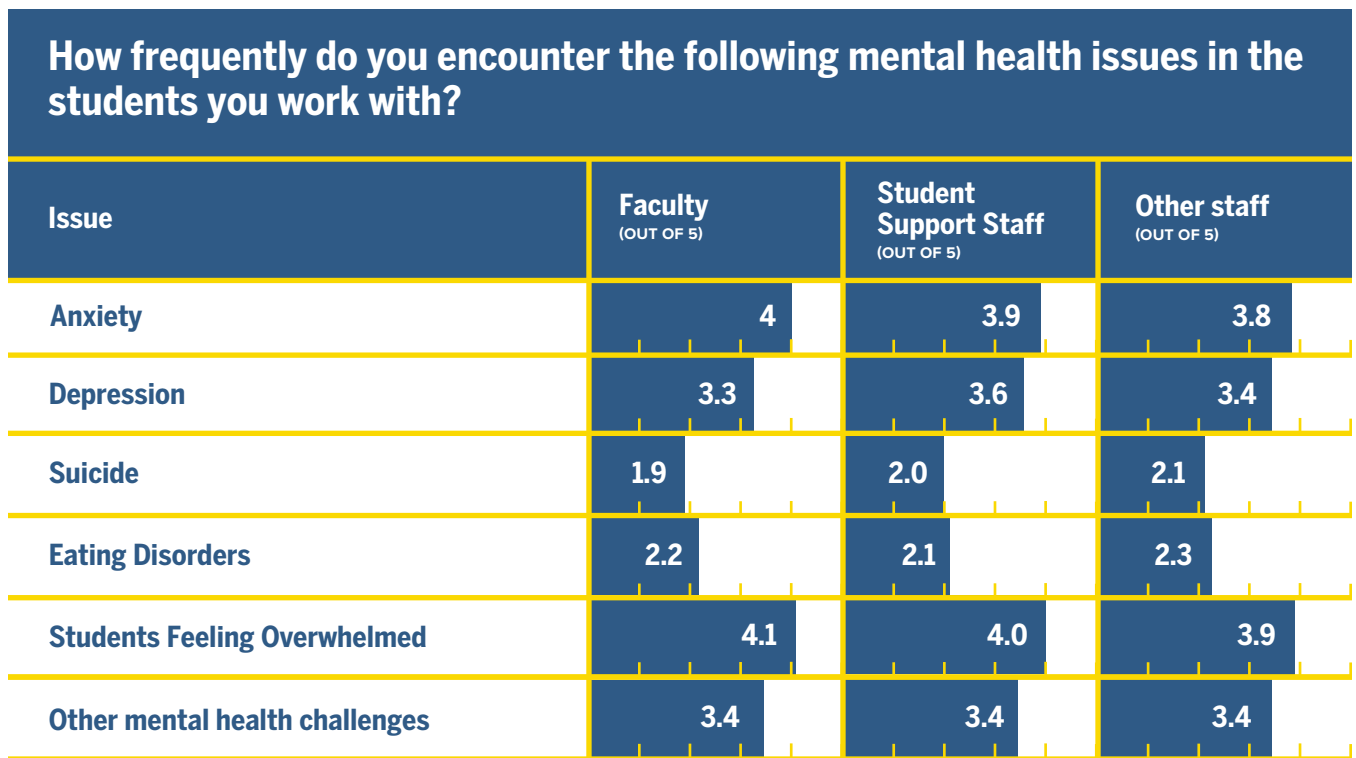
**67%**  
of survey-takers  
were part of the  
college system

# Survey Snapshot:

## Faculty and Staff Perspectives on Student Mental Wellness

For clarity, we first broke down our survey data into 3 categories of respondents: faculty, student support staff, and other staff (which includes management and administration). We also filtered out the “don’t know” responses, which averaged around 10% on any given question.

All these groups frequently encounter a range of mental health challenges in the students they work with, and with no major difference in frequency between faculty, support staff, and other staff.



SCORE FROM 1 = NEVER TO 5 = VERY OFTEN

"Have a larger focus on the difference between mental health and mental illness. **Everyone has mental health, not everyone has a mental illness.** The dual continuum of mental wellness is a great tool to get that discussion going."

We also took advantage of staff and faculty's longer-term perspective to get a sense of how things might have changed in recent years. This was the subject of much conversation in our in-person consultations, and the survey responses reinforce the key finding: that there seems to be a quite sharp increase in student mental health challenges, particularly around anxiety and coping.

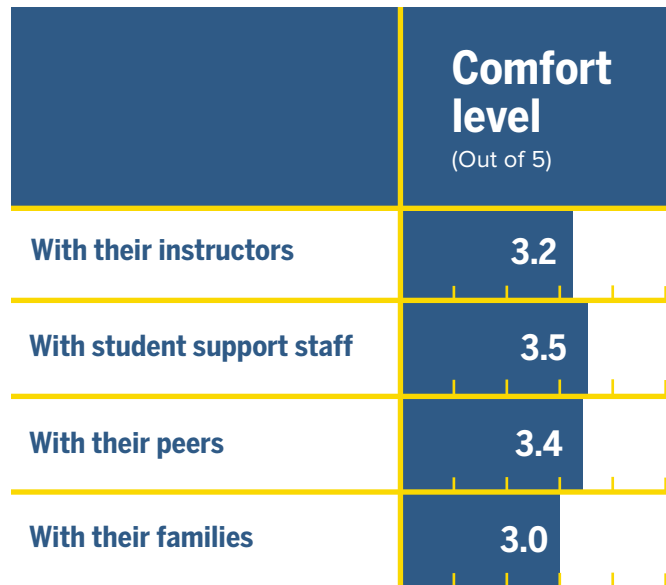
## Since you've been in your role, have you seen a change in the frequency with which you see any of these issues?

Issue	Faculty	Student Support staff	Other staff
Anxiety	+1.4	+1.3	+1.5
Depression	+1.1	+1.1	+1.2
Suicide	+0.5	+0.2	+0.8
Eating Disorders	+0.3	-0.1	+0.4
Students Feeling Overwhelmed	+1.3	+1.5	+1.3
Other mental health challenges	+1.1	+1.3	+1.4

SCORE FROM -2 (MUCH LESS FREQUENT) TO +2 (MUCH MORE FREQUENT).

"There could be an orientation or university prep course that could address mental health issues (weeklong before classes start, or even a one-credit course during the first semester.)"

We also asked for staff perspectives on how comfortable students seemed to be discussing their mental health. With few differences in these assessments between faculty, support staff, and administrative staff, we collapsed the categories together. It's worth noting that – as far as faculty and staff can tell – students are more comfortable speaking to them than to their families.



WITH 1 BEING NOT COMFORTABLE AND 5 BEING VERY COMFORTABLE

With that comfort level established, it is no surprise that disclosures of mental health challenges do happen fairly frequently. Only 15% of respondents said that students rarely or never disclose such challenges to them, while 34% get these disclosures often or very often. How do these disclosures happen? In a variety of ways, but most often by far in a private meeting. Here, respondents were able to write in other ways they have received disclosures; while office hours are by far the most frequent venue, there were also reports of getting disclosures in assignments, during exams, at public events, and in the hallways.



WITH 1 BEING INFREQUENTLY AND 5 BEING VERY FREQUENTLY

"From a personal perspective, I have seen too many students die by their own hand over the course of my career."

Our conversations with staff and faculty reflected how much they have been thinking about these issues. When we asked how prepared they felt to help when a student discloses a mental health struggle, 22% considered themselves unprepared, or very unprepared to play that role. The largest segment – 47% - landed in “somewhat prepared”, so there does clearly remain work to be done here.

Similarly, most staff and faculty did have some awareness of the resources their institutions offered to assist with these issues – only 12% said they were somewhat or totally unaware of what was available, compared to 57% who were aware or very aware. Knowledge of resources outside of the institution wasn’t as strong – 33% aware or very aware, against 25% who were unaware or very unaware. With some obvious gaps to close, it’s no surprise that more than

More than 70% of staff and faculty were interested in training around supporting youth with mental health issues.

70% of staff and faculty were interested in training around supporting youth with mental health issues – and only 10% weren’t.

We were also curious as to whether staff and faculty thought that providing this kind of support was part of their professional role, since students clearly did. Here, a breakdown by the type of respondent is again useful.

## Do you see providing this kind of support as part of your professional role?

Type of respondent	Percent saying "very much so"	Percent saying "somewhat"	Percent saying "not really"	Percent saying "not at all"
All responses	31%	39%	20%	6%
Contract faculty	22%	44%	30%	9%
Part-time faculty	57%	29%	14%	0%
Full-time faculty	30%	39%	23%	8%
Student support staff	48%	28%	20%	2%
Management staff	23%	77%	0%	0%
Administration	29%	47%	12%	12%
Other	33%	39%	28%	0%

With faculty and staff clearly seeing themselves as having a role in this space, we also wanted to get a sense of how much of a stressor that was for them, with respondents indicating that it is very much a present factor of stress.

## How much stress do student mental health issues cause you personally?

Type of respondent	None	A little bit	Some	Quite a bit	A lot
All responses	11%	26%	38%	15%	5%
Contract faculty	9%	28%	56%	6%	6%
Part-time faculty	29%	57%	14%	0%	0%
Full-time faculty	10%	23%	39%	21%	6%
Student support staff	22%	35%	30%	7%	4%
Management staff	9%	23%	41%	23%	5%
Administration	12%	35%	29%	6%	12%
Other	6%	28%	56%	6%	0%

"Institutions need to take on a much more focused strategic approach to student and staff mental health. Policies need to be reviewed, amended and developed with regard to mental health. **Education of staff is paramount.**"

# Key Takeaways from **Faculty, Administrative and Support Staff**

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1. There has been a notable increase in the number of students facing challenges with their mental wellness, and in particular with anxiety and their ability to cope with stressors of their post-secondary experience.
2. Students readily disclose mental health challenges to post-secondary institution staff and there is a broadly shared understanding that staff have a role to play in supporting students.
3. Staff do not feel fully supported by institutions with regard to education and training to appropriately and safely respond to student disclosures and mental health crises.

"[We] need more faculty-wide messages about caring for mental health; more frank conversations about their encounters with student mental health, **especially given that we teach the same students.**"

# Staff-Informed Ideas For Investments and Programs

We also asked faculty and staff the same question we asked students: What would you change about how student mental health is supported? We received many many thoughtful answers which have been pulled into the following themes:

## Training and resources for staff

This dominated our staff/faculty survey and came up often in person. Staff – particularly faculty – spoke passionately about how they are playing a front-line role on student mental health issues, often with little training on how to respond or where to refer students. Respondents, particularly faculty, spoke passionately about how they are playing a front-line role on student mental health issues, often with little training on how to respond or where to refer students. More broadly, many faculty and staff wanted there to be more space for practical conversations about student mental wellness to come up within their workplaces.

## More outreach and student support resources

Through their interactions with students, faculty and staff all see where resources are strained within student services and counselling offerings. Many highlighted the need for more resources around outreach and follow-up with students. Improved access to professional mental health supports: while access has certainly improved in recent years, there is still clearly demand from students for better access to counselling in particular, especially after-hours.

## Coping skills and resiliency development

Perhaps the most frequent topic in our in-person sessions, and a very common response on our survey, was resilience. Faculty and staff are very concerned that students are embarking on post-secondary education ill-equipped to handle the challenges of academic life and independent living, and that there is a tendency to mistake the stress and anxiety this causes for a more chronic mental health issue. While data on this is limited, it seems likely that investing in coping skills (things like workshops on budgeting, organizing, or cooking) would help reduce the load on clinical and more crisis-oriented services

## Training and resource navigation for students

Faculty and staff also agreed with the students we talked to: training (such as mental health first aid and ASIST) and simple guides to available support resources would make a big difference.

## Stigma reduction and awareness programs

While recognizing the progress made in recent years, staff and faculty made it clear that stigma was still a powerful barrier to students reaching out for help and support.

## Enhanced and refined academic accommodations

Many survey respondents suggested that the formal process for academic accommodations for students with mental health challenges could be strengthened – with more staffing, increased consistency, more resources for students to be assessed, and a wider range of possible accommodations.

## More engagement with community-based services

Both instructors and staff saw many opportunities for campus mental health supports to be more closely tied into the programs provided by public and community organizations outside of the school. Some also expressed concern that students were being turned away from some of those supports and told to access care through their institution. There is clearly space for a broader conversation about how these services coordinate and integrate.

## Bringing mental health into the classroom

Echoing a common request from the students we talked to, many staff and faculty saw the opportunity to build mental wellness into curriculum and class content, and to bring student services and support providers into the classroom more often.



## Supporting peer support programs and safe spaces

Staff and faculty see a clear need for more support for students and youth, by students and youth. In particular, resourcing peer support programs and providing safe and quiet youth-focused physical spaces came up repeatedly as promising solutions

## Limiting abuse of the system

This is an uncomfortable topic, but it is important to note that some instructors do feel like students are, at times, taking advantage of the accommodations provided for mental health challenges. At the very least, this shows the need for both training at the staff/faculty level and for students to be equipped with other ways to express challenges they might be facing.

## Better support for online learners

With a significant proportion of students studying online, faculty and staff saw the same need as students did: for more mental wellness resources to be integrated into distance learning systems.

## Improved strategies and policies

Many respondents suggested the development of a more formal mental health strategy for post-secondary students, and for a more comprehensive look at institutional policies from a mental wellness lens.

**In our in-person conversations with staff from both the college and university systems**, we heard a close alignment with the survey responses summarized over the last few pages. We heard the terms “coping skills” and “resilience” over and over again. From educators’ point of view, there is a huge and growing challenge here, one that is diverting many students into a medicalized way of dealing with their mental wellness. There is an ongoing, high-level conversation on how our education system – starting from a young age – equips (or fails to equip) young people for adulthood, and similarly about ongoing shifts in social values and child-rearing strategies. Suggesting a solution to a societal challenge like this is well beyond the scope of this report, but at the ground level it speaks to the opportunity to create and resource programs that fill some of these gaps.

Filling those gaps cannot only be a responsibility of post-secondary institutions. On smaller campuses which have only a small complement of student support staff, it is clear that their primary role has to be student triage and connection to community-based supports, but this is also true for the larger university campuses where more institutional supports exist. There is ample opportunity to better coordinate existing resources in the community to better serve students. That might mean adjusting operating hours, offering services from a more convenient location, or higher-level coordination with university and college administration. In communities where multiple post-secondary

institutions are represented, there is also an opportunity for more shared mental wellness services, tied into the broader move towards integrated service delivery that is currently ongoing in the province.

As important as it is to draw some boundaries around post-secondary institutions’ roles, it is also important to acknowledge the reality: students are looking to institutions, and to their staff, for support. That door is open, and it simply isn’t feasible to close it. Instructors, in particular, can expect to continue to receive disclosures and to manage accommodations for students who are facing a mental health challenge. At the moment, the burden of this work accrues unevenly. Students know which faculty and staff are approachable on these issues, as do their colleagues. A more universal backbone of training and support would help even this out and ensure that a student’s experience was less dependent on which instructors they have access to.

Finally, our conversations with faculty and staff often returned to the many other factors that are influencing student mental wellness. All over the province, students are facing challenges with poverty, food insecurity, cultural barriers, and a lack of LGBTQ2S-focused services. With the ongoing national conversation around Truth and Reconciliation, it is also critically important to continue the work of providing services that operate from an Indigenous perspective.

# 7.

## What We Heard From Service Providers

Alongside our conversations with students, faculty, and staff we also organized several discussion forums for community-based service providers, including both non-profits and government agencies.

In most ways, our conversations with them echoed those with campus staff – service providers also identified challenges with resilience and coping skills as a major and growing issue, flagged the increase in anxiety-related barriers, and highlighted the need for more training in mental health first aid especially.

Community service providers also highlighted some practical issues. Top-of-mind for many was transportation – in communities outside of St. John’s and Corner Brook, public transportation doesn’t exist, and this is a real barrier for students who need to access community-based services. Bringing those services together in one location – at least from time to time – would help alleviate this barrier.

Community agencies engage with student populations in a variety of different ways which are often organized by students’ unions, by student support staff, and by university

and college administration. For the most part, their physical presence on campus is usually to do outreach, presentations, and information sessions. It remains rare to have community or government service providers actively working with clients on campus or to directly coordinate with student services teams, and there may be some opportunities to expand this. By and large, community service providers felt they had a solid relationship with their college and university counterparts, but did highlight that these were often informal relationships of colleagues, rather than formal channels. As such, there is always some risk that turnover leads to these connections breaking down.

The community and government mental health service sector is in the midst of a period of intense change. With the implementation of Towards Recovery, the recommendations from the province’s All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions, there are many new resources coming online including community crisis beds, flexible assertive community treatment (FACT) teams, widespread walk-in counselling, and more. There is very much an opportunity to leverage these changes to support student mental wellness.

# Integrated Service Delivery (ISD) for Youth in Newfoundland and Labrador

Choices for Youth is working to bring **integrated service delivery for youth** to communities all over Newfoundland and Labrador.

Integrated service delivery models bring together multiple services and supports for youth, all behind a single door. Services typically include mental health care, primary health care, addictions care, and supports around family, education, employment, housing, food security, and other basic needs. By making services more accessible outside of St. John's, and by connecting youth to wrap-around supports, there is a far greater opportunity to head off challenges before they become crises.

## Why ISD?

- In the current system, young people too easily fall through the cracks
- Through integration, young people can avoid having to tell difficult or traumatic stories over and over to multiple providers in order access services
- Integrated service delivery models are showing great records of success in other jurisdictions
- Unlocks opportunities for providers to collaborate more closely towards low-barrier and holistic youth-focused service

## Why Now?

- The implementation of Towards Recovery, the recommendations of the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions, including a recommendation around creating integrated models for youth
- Demand from the grassroots: young people and service providers recognize the opportunity
- Implementation of recommendations from the Premier's Task Force on Educational Outcomes that focus on closer integration of services with the education system
- The ongoing development of a new provincial Housing and Homelessness Plan
- The implementation of the new Children, Youth, and Families Act with its renewed focus on prevention
- A commitment by Choices for Youth to the expansion of its services around the province.

## Our Process

Choices for Youth (CFY) has been actively consulting with young people, service providers, governments, and communities about Integrated Service Delivery since 2017. Over that time, CFY has visited more than 20 communities, engaged with more than 500 young people, met with more than 300 service providers, and collected hundreds of online survey responses. We now have active planning groups in 8 communities around the province

We envision **a network of integrated service delivery sites** across the province, some operated by CFY and some by local partners, that **share common backbone support** provided by Choices for Youth.

### Each site is envisioned to include:

- Dedicated youth outreach, natural supports, and employment support workers
- Integration of primary and mental health care services and local community-based supports
- Provision of basic needs (food, hygiene products, showers, access to internet, etc.)
- The administrative supports to supervise and manage the site, the partnerships, and the teams.

# 8.

## The Big Picture

Brought together, what do our conversations with students, staff, faculty, and service providers tell us?

### The conversation has changed

Students and to some extent, staff, feel like there is much more open discussion of mental health and wellness than in the past – but there is still far to go.

### Separating situations and illnesses

Students, staff, and faculty all highlighted the changing nature of mental health and specifically the fuzzy line between situational stress and clinical anxiety. There is work needed to broaden student vocabulary and understanding of these nuances, improve general coping skills and resiliency to stress while ensuring mental health challenges do not go undiagnosed.

### Empowering staff and faculty

Staff, faculty and students all see an important role for campus staff, and especially for instructors, in supporting student mental health – but supports for this are very limited.

### The power of peers

Access to peer support for students is patchy at best, particularly in the college system where students often do not stay long enough to self-organize. There is a strong desire for more peer support programming and more structures to support it.

### Coping skills

Both staff and students spoke of the gaps they saw in their students or peers' ability to cope with school and independent life; supports to address this are an important element of better preparing young people for a mentally well adulthood.

### Addressing substance misuse

Students and staff rarely mentioned substance use and misuse in the context of mental wellness. This is sometimes seen as a separate issue, but with so many relationships between substance use and mental wellness, it should be part of the conversation.

### Physical spaces matter

Quiet, private, calming physical spaces are an important support to students' mental wellness, but are very hard to come by on most campuses. General common spaces on campus are also important to consider through the lens mental wellness.

### It is difficult to reach young men

Student survey respondents overwhelmingly identified as female. In person attendance was more balanced, but few young people who identified as male felt comfortable discussing these issues – and yet, young men are at quite high risk of mental illness and nationally at the highest risk for suicide. Attendees also made it clear this was a challenge. Targeted supports are important here.

### Integration with community support services

There is an opportunity to provide much closer integration between on-campus and off-campus mental wellness supports, and for those supports to be organized in a way that makes them accessible to students.

### Distance-learning opportunities and challenges

There is little integration of mental wellness supports into online and distance-learning systems; providing better access to supports and empowering these students would make a big difference.

# 9.

## Student Mental Wellness and the New Economy

There is undeniably a major shift happening in the student mental wellness landscape. What could that shift mean for students as they emerge into the workforce of the new economy?

### Empowering people for the gig economy

As of 2017, a third of the Canadian workforce was already “non-traditional” – made up of freelancers, contractors, part-timers, and the like<sup>18</sup>. This will likely only increase in the coming years, with many more people working for multiple employers or out on their own. To succeed, post-secondary students will need to graduate with a whole host of practical skills that they could have done without in generations past – from managing their own health benefits, to generating invoices, to keeping up with rapidly changing technology.

Adapting to the gig economy, though, isn’t just business and operation skills. It’s about building a mental toolkit that can cope with the highs of freedom, flexibility, and exploration and the lows of isolation, instability, and weakened work-life balance. It is important to recognize that these demands are real. Whole areas of responsibility that are someone else’s

dedicated job in a traditional employment environment are, in the gig economy, on the shoulders of the employee. The cognitive demands for multi-tasking and self-management are huge, and the isolation that comes from working alone and/or online can range and shift from crippling to empowering.

During the conversations we had with students, faculty, staff, and service providers, it became clear that a gap is emerging around the skills and strategies students need to cope with independent life in general. These skills and strategies will be rigorously tested for those students who go the gig economy route – as, it seems likely, a majority soon will.

## Thriving in the new workplace

There is rapid change occurring in the nature of work. More and more, people entering the labour market will be entering work environments that involve always being “on” and available. This connects tightly to the pervasive use of technology and to not being able to leave work at work. Navigating this in the long-term will require highly developed wellness skills around setting healthy boundaries, taking on stress, making time for self-care, and more.

## Meaningful economic inclusion and skills for self-advocacy

For the workforce of the future to look like the Canada of the future, there must be entry points for a huge range of lived experiences. Students, staff, faculty, and service providers all highlighted the need for more targeted supports for students with these diverse experiences – whether that be of life as an LGBTQ2S person,

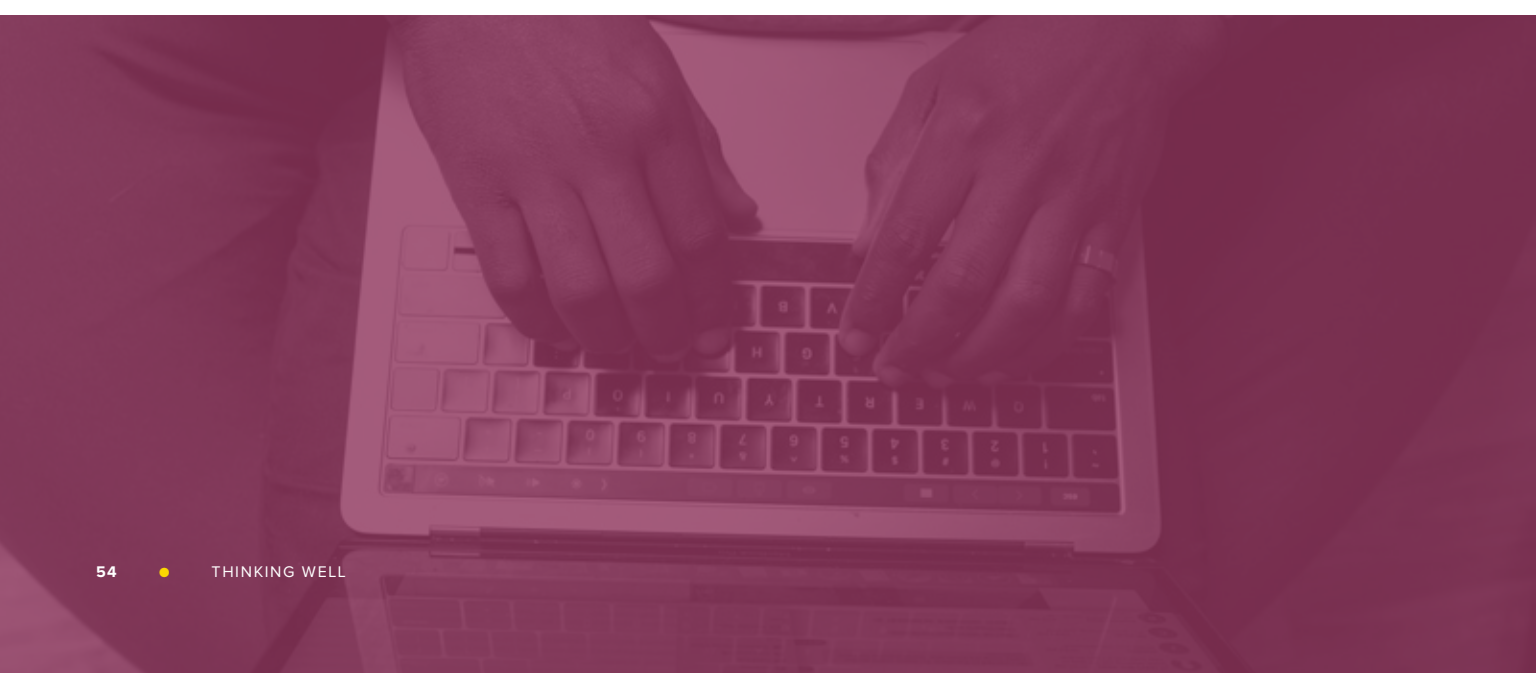
coming from a cultural or racial minority, living in poverty or homelessness, being a new arrival to this country, or being an Indigenous person. Without these targeted supports, there is a real risk that whole groups of people will continue to be systematically excluded from the opportunities the new economy brings. These issues are systemic, with both solutions and responsibility existing in spaces of public policy and corporate values. However, as many students move into the workforce they may not immediately find an inclusive environment and level playing field amongst peers.

As a more diverse group of students enters the workforce, there are real stressors and challenges that come with having an identity or lived-experience that falls outside the traditional majority even in the most progressive communities and workspaces. Self-advocacy and the ability to articulate and lead change in complex structures requires resiliency in mental health, and critical thinking, effective communications and strategy skills.

## Mental wellness and empowerment

Students, staff, faculty, and service providers are looking for a system that responds in an agile, measured way to students’ needs; that equips them with a bigger vocabulary to understand their own experiences; and that thinks about wellness in a holistic way, starting with access to the social determinants of health. Common themes in this vision for a strengthened support system are student choice, student understanding, and student agency.

When we equip students to take a leadership role in their own wellness, we also equip them to take a leadership role in the workplace. There is incredible potential for students to leverage their own individual wellness journeys into a transformation of workplace culture. It is only through this kind of transformation that we will see the skills and talents of a new generation truly reflected in a new economy.



# 10.

## Alignment with the Draft **National Standard on Psychological Health and Safety for Post-Secondary Students**

As this report was being written, the Mental Health Commission of Canada released the initial draft of the new National Standard on Psychological Health and Safety for Post-Secondary students. Developed through intensive national consultations and research, this is to be a voluntary, flexible process guideline to help Canada's academic institutions promote and support students' psychological health and safety, and support students' success<sup>19</sup>. The large-scale strategic approaches identified in the draft standard align closely with what we heard through our conversations in Newfoundland and Labrador and with the practical program directions suggested in the next section of this report.

There are a few areas where this alignment is especially close:

**Confidentiality (Section 5.2.5):** The students we spoke with put a high priority on confidentiality Health and safety factors.

**Diversity (Section 5.3):** The Standard clearly recognizes that mental well-being depends on a wide range of factors - institutional, social, and personal. This fits closely with how the students and staff we spoke to understood it.

**Emphasis on mental health literacy (5.4.3.1):** The Standard requires participating institutions to identify ways to strengthen mental health literacy, and specifically highlights training for staff and faculty – a top request from both the faculty and students we heard from.

**Clear and consistent accommodations (5.4.6):** We heard a lot about how much the accommodations system impacts students and faculty; the Standard calls for clarity and consistency in how these systems work.

**Most importantly, the Standard makes the role of institutional leadership very clear (Section 5.2.3 – Leadership).** It highlights the responsibility that leadership has to embed mental wellness into organization-wide policy and to make a visible commitment to addressing these issues within the academic community.

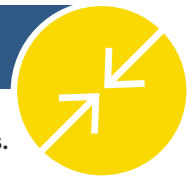
Taken together, the commitments involved in adopting this new National Standard would move institutions much closer to the vision we heard from students, staff, faculty, and service providers. What might some of those commitments look like, once implemented? The concluding sections of this report identify some particularly promising opportunities for Newfoundland and Labrador.

# 11. Opportunities for Investment

This report has brought together the thoughtful input of hundreds of people in Newfoundland and Labrador, along with many more individuals whose ideas have been gathered from our review of the literature. Taken together, these conversations lay out a way forward to a stronger foundation for student mental wellness in this province, and through that, to a successful transition into the economy and society of the future for thousands of students.

These opportunities are captured across 3 categories: Gaps to Fill, Transformational Investments and Critical Conversations.

## Gaps to Fill



Opportunities for nearer-term investments in mental wellness through existing partners and structures.

### Invest in peer support

Students, staff, faculty, and community service providers all highlighted the benefit students could access through peer support programs. With an investment in backbone support – administration, stipends for peer supporters, formalized and free training, etc. – this could become a reliable, widespread, and valuable part of the support landscape.

### Create physical spaces for wellness

Having a safe, quiet, comfortable space to go when things are getting tough is incredibly valuable. There is an opportunity to partner with post-secondary institutions and community agencies to create these spaces on every campus all over the province.

### Distance-learning integration

Supporting the integration of the online mental health resources offered through Bridge the gApp into distance learning portals would connect thousands of students directly to what is one of Canada's best e-mental health portals.

### Critical training

Students, staff and faculty at post-secondary institutions all over the province would benefit from training in Mental Health First Aid and orientation to the suite of community-based services available to students. Making this training universally accessible across the post-secondary sector would make a huge impact. Additionally, training faculty in ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) would provide critical intervention points for acute disclosures of mental health challenges.

### Non-judgmental, discrete, broad-based bursary programs to break down cost barriers

Students face many financial barriers to mental wellness. It might be the cost of getting childcare to attend a wellness or life skills program, the cost of an assessment they need to access academic accommodations, or the cost of accessing culturally appropriate foods. A bursary program with a broad-based definition of mental wellness would allow students to open doors on their own terms.

### Student mental wellness manual for faculty

Developing documents that faculty can refer to when presented with a student facing a mental health challenge, including directories of resources and a list of actions to take and contacts to make following an initial disclosure.

### Add life skills development opportunities to existing student support infrastructure

In the places where programs are already being delivered to help students adapt and thrive in a university setting, these programs could be augmented with expanded content focused on practical coping skills.



# Transformational Investments



High-impact, high-effort initiatives that could move the needle at the provincial scale.

## A new resilience curriculum

With resilience and coping skills emerging as a major (and growing challenge), there is a significant need for resources in this space. Ideally, a new resilience-building study program would engage students in high school as well as in post-secondary. Developing and resourcing such a program would involve a long-term, sustained, and resourced collaboration that engaged post-secondary institutions, leaders from the K-12 education system, and key community partners. This curriculum could include both practical skills (budgeting, time management, healthy eating, etc.) and psychological skills such as approaches to stress management

## Integrated service delivery

Conversations are already happening in Newfoundland and Labrador around the creation of integrated service delivery hubs for youth and emerging adults. These hubs, which have emerged as a best practice around the country and around the world, bring together mental health services, physical health services, and all the other wrap-around supports (housing, education, employment, etc) that young people need under a single, youth-oriented point of access. Such hubs could provide a vital off-campus complement to services provided through post-secondary institutions, and provide faculty and staff with a place they could direct students in need of support with a wide range of challenges.

## Empowerment for mental wellness

Developing course content and extracurricular programming focused on transforming attitudes about social and political issues from despair towards empowerment.

## Addressing the social determinants of mental wellness

Achieving mental wellness isn't possible with an empty stomach or without a roof overhead. Investments in affordable housing for students, improving access to healthy food, and other programs that give students a more solid footing to meet the challenges of post-secondary would have a large impact.

# Critical Conversations



Topics for continued research and dialogue.

## Targeted support for students who identify as men

The literature, our experience developing this report, and the voices of students, staff, and faculty have all highlighted the critical need for a strategic, research-driven approach to engaging young people who identify as men on mental wellness issues.

## Strengthening community-campus connections

Continued dialogue between post-secondary institutions, community agencies, and government support services could help create more formalized and streamlined connections.

## Talking about language

As things stand, mental wellness is often described using the language of mental illness – even when that isn't the right fit for what's going on in a student's life. An extended dialogue about how we talk about these issues will be an important next step

## Substance use and misuse

How does substance use interact with students' wellness, and what are the service gaps in this space?

# Conclusion

Many of the people we talked to used the word “crisis” to describe the current state of student mental wellness. It is difficult to disagree. By all accounts, demand for support continue to grow, often outpacing the systems we have in place to provide it. Students, staff, and faculty all, at times, feel lost. On the other side of their post-secondary journey, students will face a world that will continuously test their resilience and self-direction as they navigate precarious employment, the gig economy, disruptive technologies, and a changing climate.

With all that on the table, we still reflect on these conversations feeling inspired and optimistic. There is remarkable consensus across students, educators, and service providers alike about what a stronger system could look like. There is a major shift happening inside many of our government and community support systems, with an incredibly strong spirit of collaboration emerging from it. Most importantly, there are countless examples of students who have lived through incredibly challenging circumstances and are stepping up to take leadership.

This report is a snapshot of a conversation that will only grow in the coming years, highlighting the many opportunities for strategic thinking and strategic investments to shift the way students meet the world during their academic life and after it. These investments will have an amplified impact, echoing through decades of life and workforce participation.

For CFY, the voices we heard in this report have important implications. As we plan to provincially scale our own work, we have seen how much demand we could potentially have from post-secondary students for the kind of services we provide. We have heard from a whole new set of voices that will shape how we integrate into and support the growing network of mental-wellness resources in this province.

For RBC, this report is the beginning of an important conversation around how to integrate mental wellness into the work of preparing post-secondary students for the jobs of tomorrow. In the coming months, RBC will be taking a deep dive into these results to identify how and where RBC FutureLaunch investments could make a difference. As this report highlights, the opportunities are clear, and the time is right. As an organization, RBC is committed to supporting the work of the community, academic and government partners, and support organizations who have already done so much to move the needle on student mental wellness. This issue aligns tightly not only with the objectives of RBC Future Launch but also with the values of RBC as an organization, everywhere from branches to boardrooms.

As we move farther into the new economy, we need to keep looking for new solutions –and new ways to find them. We hope that this report, and the partnership that led to it, is one of them.

# Thank you

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The teams at Choices for Youth and RBC are both incredibly thankful for the support and candid conversation provided by the students, faculty and staff at Memorial University and the College of the North Atlantic as well as the many service providers, community partners and government departments that helped inform this work. This is not the beginning of this conversation, nor is it the end – but we hope the ideas in this report will help move it forward.

## APPENDIX A STUDENT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What does mental wellness look like to you?

If you had a friend who needed support with their mental health, where would you tell them to go?

Do you feel like faculty and staff understand mental wellness?

What would you like them to know about it?

If you could design a system of support for student mental wellness, what would it look like?

# APPENDIX B STUDENT SURVEY

Thank you for taking the time to talk about mental wellness with us! This survey is being run by Choices for Youth (a charity that works with at-risk and homeless young people) in partnership with the RBC Foundation. The goal is to build a better understanding of what would support mental wellness for students at post-secondary schools here in Newfoundland and Labrador and shape future investments in these services.

This survey is completely anonymous, and nobody's individual responses will be reported. It is important to note that this survey does involve questions about your own mental wellness and about mental health challenges more broadly - if these are triggering topics for you, you can skip the questions or close the survey window.

At the end of the survey, you'll also have a chance to enter a draw for a \$100 gift card - we use an external link for that to ensure that we can't match your contact details with your responses.

## Section 1: A Bit About Your Education

To start off we have a couple questions to help us get a sense of where you're coming from:

### 1 Which of these describes you best:

- I am currently a post-secondary student in Newfoundland and Labrador (including colleges, universities, and vocational programs)
- I have been a post-secondary student in Newfoundland and Labrador within the last 5 years
- I haven't attended a post-secondary program in the last 5 years I have been enrolled in a post-secondary program offered by an institution outside NL

### 2 Which kind of post-secondary institution are you attending/did you attend? \*

- University (eg. MUN)
- Public College (eg. CNA)
- Private Training Institution (eg. Keyin)

### 3 Where have you taken most of your courses? \*

- Online
- In person in St. John's
- In person outside of St. John's

### 4 What qualification are you working on (or did you work on most recently)? \*

- Diploma or Certificate
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctorate
- Other

### 5 What was your area of study? We don't need the exact program.

### 6 What best describes your current status?

- Graduated
- Working on a degree or certification
- Left school before completing degree or certification

## Section 2: Checking in on Mental Health

In this section, we want to get a general sense of how you're doing. Your answers here are totally private – we'll be using the data from this section to help match services to need.

### 7 In general, would you say your mental health is: (Excellent, Very Good, Good, Fair, Poor, Don't Know, Prefer Not to Answer)

### 8 Thinking about the amount of stress in your life, would you say that most of your days are: (Not at all stressful, Not very stressful, A bit stressful, Quite a bit stressful, Extremely stressful, Don't Know, Prefer not to Answer)

### 9 How would you say you're doing on taking care of your physical and mental health? (Excellent, Very well, Well, Fairly well, Not well, Don't Know, Prefer not to Answer)

### 10 When you run into problems with your mental health or emotions, do you feel like you can handle them:

(Excellent, Very well, Well, Fairly well, Not well, Don't Know, Prefer not to Answer)

## Section 3: Talking About Mental Health

In this section we are looking to get a sense of how comfortable people are talking about mental health, and what would make that easier.

### 11 How comfortable do you think the following people are with discussing mental health? (Very Comfortable, Comfortable, A bit uncomfortable, very uncomfortable, Don't Know, Prefer not to Answer)

- Your peers
- Your family
- Your instructors
- School staff

### 12 If you disclosed a mental health challenge, how do you think it would affect your relationships with the following people? (Much stronger, a bit stronger, unchanged, a bit weaker, Much weaker, Don't Know, Prefer not to Answer)

- Peers
- Family
- Instructors
- School staff

### 13 Have you known other students who've disclosed a mental health struggle?

### 14 Which of these topics do you recall hearing about in communications from your school?

- Stress and anxiety
- Suicide
- Accessing mental health services
- Grief and loss
- Other mental health topics

#### 14 We'd like to get a sense of how visible mental health is as an issue at your school.

- There are student leaders at my school who are open about their mental health challenges
- There are a number of staff and faculty leaders at my school who are open about their mental health challenges
- There are visible efforts (posters, ads, events) at my school that focus on reducing stigma and talking about mental health

#### 15 What do you think would make it easier for students to discuss their mental health with others?

### Section 4: Services

In this section we want to get a sense of what mental health services you have access to, and what you'd like to see change.

#### 16 If you or a friend were experiencing a mental health issue, how sure are you of where to go for support? (Very sure, Pretty sure, A bit unsure, Very unsure, Don't know, Prefer not to answer)

#### 17 As a student, what mental health services are you aware of through your school?

#### 18 What about outside of school? Have you heard of any services available in the community?

#### 19 If you did need to access mental health services, which locations would work best for you? Rate on a scale of 1 (Wouldn't work for you) to 5 (Would work the best)

- Getting mental health care on campus
- Getting mental health care off campus, but in the community where your school
- Getting mental health care another community
- Getting mental health care online

#### 20 There are many different kinds of mental health services provided to students (including distance learning students) in schools around the country. We'd like to get a sense of which ones you think should be a priority here in NL. Please rank each of these for importance,

from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important)

- In-person counselling on campus
- Suicide prevention programs
- Crisis phone lines
- Peer support from other students
- Stress reduction programs (recreation, animal programs during exams, etc)
- Mental health leave for students
- Psychiatrists (who can prescribe medication)
- Targeted support for LGBTQ2S students
- Targeted support for Indigenous students
- Targeted support for students with disabilities
- Targeted support for racialized students

#### 21 Part of the goal of this survey is to get a sense of what would make services more accessible for students. Please rate how important each of the following would be to you if you were thinking about getting support with your mental health.

- a. Accessibility on evenings and weekends
- b. Confidentiality
- c. Location
- d. Child care support
- e. Transportation
- f. Availability of peer support
- g. Immediate or walk-in service (without an appointment)

#### 22 If you could change anything about how student mental health is supported, what would it be?

### Section 5: Circles of Support

We know that many other factors influence mental health. This section of the survey aims to get a sense of how much support you have access to in other parts of your life.

#### 23 How would you rate your access to the following things?

- Academic support
- Affordable housing
- Nutritious food
- Social life
- Support from your family
- Help getting employment
- Help managing finances

#### 24 How much impact would you say each of these has on your mental health?

- Academic support
- Affordable housing
- Nutritious food
- Social life
- Support from your family
- Help getting employment
- Help managing finances
- Social and political issues

#### 25 If you were experiencing a mental health struggle, how likely is it that you would seek help from the following people/groups? (Very likely, Likely, Somewhat likely, Unlikely, Very Unlikely, Don't Know, Prefer not to answer)

- Teachers
- Your Supervisor (if you have one)
- School support staff
- Phone helpline
- Online chat
- Mental health professionals
- Support groups
- I would not seek help

### Section 6: Final Demographics

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey! Your answers will make a difference. Before we go, we'd like to get a bit more information about you.

#### 26 Your age

#### 27 Where did you live before starting post-secondary school?

- In Newfoundland and Labrador
- In another Canadian Province
- Outside of Canada

#### 28 What gender do you most identify with?

#### 29 Would you like to be entered into our gift card draw? This is separated from the survey to ensure anonymity

# APPENDIX C STAFF SURVEY

Choices for Youth, in partnership with the RBC Foundation, is gathering perspectives from post-secondary students and the staff that work with them around student mental wellness and supports. The results of this project (a mix of surveys, focus groups, and research) will help guide the RBC Foundation's investments and help shape the expansion of Choices for Youth's services.

This survey is anonymous and only aggregate data will be reported.

## Section 1: Demographics

**1 Do you engage with students as part of your job?**

**2 At which type of school are you employed?**

- University
- Public college
- Private training institution

**3 Where are you located? \***

- In St. John's
- Outside of St. John's

**4 What is your role there? \***

- Full-time faculty
- Part-time faculty
- Contract faculty
- Administrative Staff
- Student Support Staff
- Other

## Section 2: Student Mental Health

In this section, we want to get your perspective on how the students you work with are doing

**5 How frequently do you encounter the following mental health issues in the students you work with?** (Very often, Often, Occasionally, Rarely, Never, Don't know, Not applicable)

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Suicide
- Eating Disorders
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Other mental health challenges

**6 Since you've been in your role, have you seen a change in the frequency with which you see any of those issues?** (Much more frequent, More frequent, About the same, Less frequent, Much less frequent, Don't know, Not applicable)

**7 How would you assess students' comfort levels with discussing their mental health?**

(Very comfortable, Comfortable, Neutral, Uncomfortable, Very uncomfortable, Don't know, Not applicable)

- With you
- With their instructors
- With student support staff
- With their peers
- With their families

**8 How often do students disclose mental health challenges to you?**

## Section 3: Support Services and Readiness

In this section, we're looking to get a sense of how prepared you feel to support student mental health needs.

**9 How would you assess your own preparedness to help when a student discloses a mental health struggle?** (Very unprepared, Unprepared, Somewhat prepared, Prepared, Very prepared, Don't know, Not applicable)

**10 How aware would you say you are of resources within your institution to assist students with mental health issues?** (Totally unaware, Somewhat unaware, Somewhat aware, Aware, Very aware, Don't know, Not applicable")

**11 How aware would you say you are of resources outside your institution to assist students with mental health issues?** (Totally unaware, Somewhat unaware, Somewhat aware, Aware, Very aware, Don't know, Not applicable")

**12 Would you be interested in training around supporting youth with mental health issues?**

**13 Do you see providing this kind of support as part of your professional role?** (Very much so, Somewhat, Not really, Not at all, Don't know, Not applicable)

**14 How much stress do student mental health issues cause you personally?** (None, A little bit, Some, Quite a bit, A lot, Don't know, Not applicable)

**15 What would you change in how student mental health is supported?**

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Future Launch

# THINKING WELL

Supporting Post-Secondary Student  
Mental Wellness in Newfoundland & Labrador