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Executive Summary

[The Best Practices in Canadian Higher Education Network](#) and [the University of Calgary Campus Mental Health Strategy](#), hosted the second biennial Collaborations for Change conference virtually on August 16th and August 17th, 2023. The Collaborations for Change Conference is the first national conference to focus exclusively on post-secondary student mental health within the Canadian campus context. Lead funding for the conference was provided by the Rossy Foundation, sponsored by RBC Future Launch, and supported in part by the Mental Health Commission of Canada and Health Canada.

The Collaborations for Change Conference provided an opportunity to 1) Address gaps between evidence-based recommendations and the clinical landscape amongst post-secondary students in wellness centres and across campus; 2) enhance knowledge translation where research on campus mental health practices and issues among emerging adults can inform practice and vice versa; 3) encourage collaborations to present and discuss research, and exchanges knowledge and practices among the postsecondary community; and 4) bring together students, practitioners, student life professionals, and faculty to define problems, identify gaps, and brainstorm ways to enhance the mental health and wellbeing of post-secondary students.

The conference included an opening keynote session (provided by Dr. Chika Stacey Oriuwa), formal presentations, an Indigenous Elders panel, a student panel, poster sessions, mindfulness breaks, and networking opportunities. There were 30 presentations across the following five conference streams: Collaborations and Partnerships; Impact; Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Accessibility (EDIA); Decolonization and Indigenization; and Systemic Approaches.

Conference presenters came from a variety of backgrounds and regions with six provinces and territories represented, including 15 universities, two colleges/technical institutes, three community organizations, two mental health networks and two technology startups. In terms of the presenters' roles, 31% were students, 24% were student life professionals, 24% were faculty or researchers, 10% were consultants or from a community organization, 7% were clinicians, and 4% were Indigenous Elders.

Of the 294 registrants, 57% were student life professionals and staff, 19% were students, 7% were clinicians, and 7% were faculty or researchers. External organizations were also in attendance, with 4% from private organizations, 4% from community organizations and 2% from the government.

A thematic analysis identified key themes that emerged from presentation content, including co-designing research studies and initiatives with students as partners, utilizing peer-support as an impactful service model, and centering the experiences of equity-deserving students.

Feedback from the post-conference evaluation was positive, with registrants identifying some areas for improvement, including more frequent breaks in the day and a longer break for lunch.

Collaborations for Change Conference: Connecting Research and Practice in Post-Secondary Mental Health

Participation and Reach

The Collaborations for Change: Connecting Research and Practice in Post-Secondary Mental Health Conference was held online on August 16th and 17th, 2023 (<https://www.collaborationsforchange.ca>). Throughout the day and a half, attendees participated in an opening keynote session (provided by Dr. Chika Stacey Oriuwa), four panels (Elder panel, Indigenous Counsellor panel, Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) panel, student panel), a Blanket exercise Information Session, two mindfulness breaks, five poster presentations, three networking opportunities, and 30 concurrent sessions across five conference streams. Attendees utilized the chat box feature to ask questions, provide comments, connect with fellow attendees, and share resources, with 487 chat messages sent over both conference days. The Collaborations for Change 2023 conference was made possible through lead funding from the Rossy Foundation, sponsored by RBC Future Launch, and supported in part by the Mental Health Commission of Canada and Health Canada.

This conference brought together post-secondary students, student life professionals, mental health providers, and researchers from across Canada to have meaningful conversations on how to integrate research and best practices within post-secondary mental health. Conference presenters came from diverse settings including post-secondary institutions (PSIs), technology startups, mental health networks, and community not-for-profit organizations. There were 89 presenters, with 17 PSIs represented across six provinces and territories (15 universities, two colleges/technical institutes), in addition to three community organizations, two mental health networks, and two technology startups. Of the presenters, 31% were students, 24% were student life professionals, 24% were faculty or researchers, 10% were consultants or from a community organization, 7% were clinicians, and 4% were Indigenous Elders.

There were 294 people who registered for the conference, with 189 attendees on the platform at the highest moment. The five highest attended sessions include the Indigenous Elder panel, opening keynote, the Plenary Session: Supporting Inclusive Student Engagement in Mental Health – a presentation from the Mental Health Commission of Canada, Evaluation of Perception of Mental Health Care among Students Using Campus-Based Services: A Collaborative Approach, and the student panel.

In terms of registrant demographics, of the 294 registrants, 57% were student life professionals and staff, 19% were students, 7% were clinicians, and 7% were faculty or researchers. External organizations were also in attendance, with 4% from private organizations, 4% from community organizations and 2% from the government. Sixty Canadian PSIs were represented at the conference coming from nine provinces and the Northwest Territories, and eight PSIs were represented from the United States.

Conference Themes

The conference sessions addressed diverse content across five conference streams: Collaborations and Partnerships (eight sessions); Impact (six sessions); Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Accessibility (EDIA) (six sessions); Decolonization and Indigenization (two sessions); and Systemic Approaches (five sessions). See Appendix for full conference program.

We conducted a thematic analysis to identify key themes that emerged from presentation content. Themes were developed by coding key words and ideas that emerged from the data. Descriptive statistics were also conducted on demographic information. The following three themes were featured strongly across multiple conference presentations: co-design, service models and programs: peer support, and equity-deserving student experiences.

Co-Design

A central theme of the conference was co-design, as many presentations highlighted projects and initiatives that were co-created with students. Co-design is a methodological approach that involves end-users in all aspects of project creation, including the conception, design, management, delivery, and evaluation processes.¹ The Okanagan Office of Health & Wellbeing at McMaster University presented the Professor Hippo-on-Campus Student Mental Health Education Program, which utilizes a human-centered co-design process in the co-creation of a Graduate Teaching Assistant workshop that addresses how to support student mental health, including how to communicate with students experiencing distress.¹ Evidence suggests that co-design can lead to increased project uptake and quicker implementation.¹ The University of Toronto stressed the importance of co-design in student mental health research to meet the unique needs and conditions of post-secondary students, in which they cited academic stress, transition and adjustment to post-secondary life, loneliness, and demanding schedules as some of those unique needs.² They used a student-centeredness approach to co-design a survey on student experiences using campus-based mental health services.² The Global Research Network, which is an international research partnership between the University of Toronto, King's College London, National Taiwan University, and The University of Sydney, aims to engage post-secondary students in co-designing research activities to address the evidence gap in mental health and wellbeing research.³ Each institution in the network has its own student working group to provide input on all research activities, and create opportunities for bi-directional learning between global student networks.³ The network also co-designed a series of e-learning modules for how to conduct research within student mental health.³

Service Models and Programs: Peer Support

Various service models and programs including peer support, digital tools, counselling, and group programs were highlighted throughout the conference. Of these service models, peer support featured prominently. The University of Toronto Scarborough Campus presented on their Recovery College, a course co-created and led by students with lived experience in navigating stress and managing mental health and wellness.⁴ Co-designing these peer-led courses allowed students to take control of their own recovery and feel empowered in identifying skills they wanted to build.⁴ The University of Calgary in collaboration with the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is working to identify best practices for students experiencing a mental health crisis including suicide thoughts and behaviours.⁵ Researchers and students at the University of Calgary co-designed a peer support training program on suicide and crisis interventions.⁵ Qualitative results from their research showed students wanted more opportunities for peer support including providing suicide-prevention training to equip all peers with the tools needed to support each other.⁵ Participants also recommended that students mediate the connection between mental health professionals on campus and students experiencing distress and suicide thoughts.⁵ These results aligns with existing research, which shows that post-secondary students who are concerned with academic success or dealing with loneliness, prefer receiving support from others who have lived experience.⁵ The recipient of the 2021 Collaborations for Change seed grant, the

University of Saskatchewan, presented their Peer Health Student Outreach program.⁶ The goal of this initiative was to improve the “out of classroom” experience for racially marginalized students by creating opportunities for connection through peer-led events.⁶ The projects were co-designed and facilitated by students, and students who led sessions were provided with an honorarium for their time.⁶

Equity-Deserving Student Experiences

Elevating the student voice is a critical component of creating meaningful and sustainable programs in post-secondary mental health. Centering the lived experiences of equity-deserving students featured in numerous presentations. Dr. Chika Stacey Oriuwa’s keynote address set the stage for this conference theme, as she spoke on the interconnectedness of mental health, wellness, and equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI), while highlighting her personal and professional experiences.⁷ Queen’s University presented the Shift Project, which was created following the results from a campus student survey that showed equity-deserving students felt less safe and less connected to campus and experienced more instances of harassment and discrimination.⁸ The project used a student-centered approach to build allyship and generate dialogue to create a safer campus culture.⁸ The University of Calgary focused on Indigenous student experiences and conducted a systematic review on the retention of Indigenous students based on post-secondary institutional factors such as Indigenous staff representation, Indigenous student spaces, and campus cultural support awareness.⁹ CICMH presented on anti-oppressive practices in post-secondary mental health, taking a wider lens approach to focus on systems and structures, including colonialism’s impact on post-secondary education.¹⁰ Utilizing anti-oppressive practices helps to approach a student’s identity in its entirety to understand their holistic experiences on campus.¹⁰ The University of Toronto presented three research studies that utilized an intersectional approach to understand and address the mental health concerns of international students, students with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQ+ students.¹¹ Canada’s Student Mental Health Network, which is a national knowledge translation initiative created in partnership by Queen’s University, Western University, The University of New Brunswick, and The University of Manitoba, offers resources to students on the topics of mental health education, social support, and access to services. They adopt a “for students, by students” EDIA approach and have a diverse group of students curate the resources to ensure their lived experiences are represented.¹² Lastly, Soch Mental Health presented on a collaborative arts-based storytelling project with Sheridan College and CICMH to address the mental health needs of South Asian international students at Sheridan College.¹³ They created five short films to combat mental illness stigma and promote campus resources and services.¹³ These presentations also highlighted the importance of creating intentional partnerships with equity-deserving students in the co-creation of these initiatives.

Conference Evaluation

A survey was disseminated to participants shortly after the end of the conference. Surveys without data apart from the attendees’ location/region and/or role in the conference were excluded from the analysis. Partially completed surveys were included in the analysis (n=5). We had a response rate of 16% for this survey; 46 out of 294 registrants completed the post-conference evaluation. This is an improvement in engagement from the 2021 Collaborations for Change conference, where only 9% of registrants participated in the post-conference survey.

Satisfaction with the 2023 Collaborations for Change conference was assessed using respondents’ agreement to three statements presented on a 5-point rating scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree,” to

“Strongly Agree”. Of the respondents, 85% agreed or strongly agreed that this year’s Collaborations for Change conference allowed them to learn and engage in mental health and well-being topics in post-secondary environments. Additionally, 87% of respondents found that the sessions they attended were both relevant and interesting, and 82% found the sessions to be informative. One respondent commented that the information was “timely and relevant,” while another respondent emphasized the “value” of the conference’s content.

Our survey additionally assessed individual sessions using a 5-point rating scale ranging from 1 being “Poor” and 5 being “Great”. The keynote address, Indigenous Elders panel, student panel, and Indigenous counsellor conversation were ranked highly by survey respondents. Of the respondents who attended those sessions, 97% positively rated the keynote address (i.e., rated the session as a value of 4 or 5), 91% positively rated the Indigenous Elder panel, 91% positively rated the student panel, and 89% positively rated the Indigenous counsellor conversation.

Considerations for Conference Delivery:

Survey respondents were asked about their preference on the delivery format of the Collaborations for Change conference. In 2023, the conference was delivered virtually via our online conference platform, Pheedloop. Seventy percent of survey respondents enjoyed using Pheedloop. Registrants were also given six-months access to the recorded presentations through the Pheedloop platform. When asked about their preferred conference delivery format, 43% of respondents preferred to attend a fully online conference format, 36% preferred a hybrid conference format (i.e., involving both virtual and in-person components), and 21% preferred an in-person format.

Based on the feedback in the evaluations, hosting the C4C conference online will make attending the conference more accessible and affordable for both our national and international researchers, student life professionals, mental health providers, and post-secondary students. It also allows for flexibility for both conference presenters and attendees in a post-covid environment. Hence, we plan to host our next Collaborations for Change Conference in 2025 virtually.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The 2023 Collaborations for Change Conference successfully brought together students, practitioners, student life professionals, faculty, and researchers from across Canada to exchange knowledge and emerging and promising practices to enhance the mental health and wellbeing of post-secondary students. The conference offered concurrent presentations with Q&A periods, movement and mindfulness breaks, and virtual networking rooms to encourage collaboration and connection. Current and emerging themes in post-secondary student mental health were highlighted throughout the conference including co-designing research studies and initiatives with students as partners, utilizing peer-support as an impactful service model, and centering the experiences of equity-deserving students. Feedback from the post-conference evaluation was positive, with registrants identifying some areas for improvement, including more frequent breaks in the day and a longer break for lunch. In addition, the networking sessions had limited participation and engagement due to some technical interface challenges, revealing an opportunity to improve virtual networking events at the next Collaborations for Change Conference.

References

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2. Brennenstuhl, S., Yuen, S. Evaluation of Perception of Mental Health Care Among Students Using Campus-Based Services: A Collaborative Approach. Conference session presented at: Collaborations for Change: Connecting Research and Practice in Post-Secondary Mental Health; 2023 Aug 16-17
3. Clerverley, K., Lipsitz, O. Post-Secondary Student Mental Health Research: A Global Collaboration and Partnership. Conference session presented at: Collaborations for Change: Connecting Research and Practice in Post-Secondary Mental Health; 2023 Aug 16-17
4. Bastarache, B., Kiosses, E. Recovery College: Empowering Students on their Mental Health Recovery in Post-Secondary Environment. Conference session presented at: Collaborations for Change: Connecting Research and Practice in Post-Secondary Mental Health; 2023 Aug 16-17
5. Dimitropoulos, G., Lougheed, P., Hews-Girard, J. Co-Creating Peer Support Interventions for Crisis and Suicide with Post-Secondary Students. Conference session presented at: Collaborations for Change: Connecting Research and Practice in Post-Secondary Mental Health; 2023 Aug 16-17
6. Hanoski, R., marsland, s., Our Journey in Addressing the Mental Well-Being of Students of the Global Majority Through Peer Collaborations. Conference session presented at: Collaborations for Change: Connecting Research and Practice in Post-Secondary Mental Health; 2023 Aug 16-17
7. Oriuwa, C. Black and Boldly Belonging: Daring to Occupy Powerful Spaces. Keynote address presented at: Collaborations for Change: Connecting Research and Practice in Post-Secondary Mental Health; 2023 Aug 16-17
8. McKenna, T. The Shift Project: A Data Informed Approach to Supporting Equity-deserving Student Mental Health Through Changing Campus Culture. Conference session presented at: Collaborations for Change: Connecting Research and Practice in Post-Secondary Mental Health; 2023 Aug 16-17
9. Grier, M. Improving Indigenous Student Wellbeing at Postsecondary Institutions. Conference session presented at: Collaborations for Change: Connecting Research and Practice in Post-Secondary Mental Health; 2023 Aug 16-17
10. Amaokahene, C. Colonialism on Campus: Using Anti-Oppressive Practices to Reduce Barriers to Positive Student Mental Health. Conference session presented at: Collaborations for Change: Connecting Research and Practice in Post-Secondary Mental Health; 2023 Aug 16-17
11. Ahia, M., Amestoy, M., Uliaszek, U. Equity, Diversity, and Accessibility in Student Mental Health Research in the Post-Secondary Setting. Conference session presented at: Collaborations for Change: Connecting Research and Practice in Post-Secondary Mental Health; 2023 Aug 16-17
12. Ecclestone, A., Linden, B., Rose, J., Ladner, A., McCart, A., McLean, M., Barker, B. Canada's Student Mental Health Network: A Collaborative Knowledge Exchange Initiative. Conference session presented at: Collaborations for Change: Connecting Research and Practice in Post-Secondary Mental Health; 2023 Aug 16-17
13. Chagger, J. The Pardesi Project: Using South Asian Punjabi Short Films to Raise Awareness about Mental Health Challenges among International Students. Conference session presented at:

Collaborations for Change: Connecting Research and Practice in Post-Secondary Mental Health;
2023 Aug 16-17

Appendix: Conference Program

Synchronous Conference Sessions

Thursday August 16, 2023

11:00 AM – 11:15 AM

Welcome & Traditional Blessing

Presenter(s): Elder Alvin Kube, Sauleau First Nation

11:15 – 12:00 PM

Keynote: Black and Boldly Belonging: Daring to Occupy Powerful Spaces

Presenter(s): Dr. Chika Stacy Oriuwa

12:00 – 1:30 PM

Elder Panel

Elders: Elder Mae Bickley, Elder Betty Carr-Braint, Elder Jean Wasegijig, Elder Roberta Price (Moderator)

1:30 – 1:45 PM

Break Mindfulness Session on Listening and Being Present

Presenter(s): Justin Burkett, MN, RN

1:45 – 2:30 PM

Evaluation of Perception of Mental Health Care Among Students Using Campus-Based Services: A Collaborative Approach

Presenter(s): Sarah Brennenstuhl, Sandra Yuen

A Collaborative Pilot Initiative to Improve Mental Health in Post-Secondary Institutions

Presenter(s): Jesse Hayman

The Shift Project: A Data Informed Approach to Supporting Equity-Deserving Student Mental Health Through Changing Campus Culture

Presenter(s): Taryn McKenna

Canada's Student Mental Health Network: A Collaborative Knowledge Translation Initiative

Presenter(s): Amy Ecclestone, Brooke Linden, Jessica Rose, Alina Ladner, Amber McCart, Matthew McLean, Bryanna Barker

Improving Indigenous Student Wellbeing at Postsecondary Institutions

Presenter(s): Melanie Grier

2:30 – 3:00 PM

Collaborative Approaches and Recommendations on Addressing Suicides at Post-Secondary Campuses

Presenter(s): Aaron So, Ana Ramirez Pineda, Harveen Saini

Food for Mood: Practical Advice on How to Improve Your Diet

Presenter(s): Elnaz Vaghef Mehrabani, Gerry F. Giesbrecht

An Immersive Virtual Reality Experience for Self-Management of Stress and Anxiety – Research in Progress

Presenter(s): Maddie Venables, Jeffrey Puncher

Measuring Wellbeing in Postsecondary Students: Relationship Between Coping, Self-Efficacy, Self-Compassion, Perceived Time Use, and Stress

Presenter(s): Lisa Mah, Meadow Schroeder

Building an EMPOWERed Classroom: A 2-Part Workshop to Increase Mental Health Literacy and Psychological Indices in University Course Instructors

Presenter(s): Delaney Johnson

3:00 – 3:45 PM

Champions for Mental Health - Identifying, Celebrating, and Inspiring Educators for Impact

Presenter(s): Erin Burns, Cathleen O'Brien

Best Practices Guide in Action: Strengthening Post-Secondary Mental Health Program Evaluation and Knowledge Exchange

Presenter(s): Sandra Yuen, Jennifer Thanhauser, Brooke Linden

Supports for Mental Health in Academic Libraries

Presenter(s): Alexandra Alisaukas, Rhiannon Jones

Sexologists in Practice at McGill's Student Wellness Hub

Presenter(s): Bilun Naz Boke, Julie Marceau, Maga Li Monteilhet-Labossiere, Normal O'Brien

The Implementation of the National Standard by Mid-2023: What We Know

Presenter(s): Amy Fogarty, Sarah Ferguson

Movement for Mental Health: Supporting Student Mental Health Through Program Assessment and Redevelopment

Presenter(s): Michelle Chimenti, Patti Paccagnan, Jackie Cooney

4:00 – 4:45 PM

Recovery College: Empowering Students on their Mental Health Recovery in Post-Secondary Environment

Presenter(s): Brooklyn Bastarache, Elsa Kiosses

Integrating Co-Design to Create Contextually Relevant Mental Health Literacy Programs on Campus

Presenter(s): Emma Bruce, Marina Boutros Salama, Dr Catharine Munn, Muhammad Farooq, Leonardo Ologundudu

Implementation and Use of the National Standard for the Mental Health and Well-Being for Post-Secondary Students Across Canada

Presenter(s): Elizabeth Cawley, Sarah Mughal

Colonialism on Campus: Using Anti-Oppressive Practices to Reduce Barriers to Positive Student Mental Health

Presenter(s): Cecilia Amoakohene

La santé mentale étudiante en enseignement supérieur au Québec : unir nos forces pour développer des connaissances scientifiques et favoriser leur mobilisation et utilisation

Presenter(s): Julie Lane, Catherine Roy-Boulangier

The Pardesi Project: Using South Asian Punjabi Short Films to Raise Awareness about Mental Health Challenges among International Students

Presenter(s): Jasmeet Chagger

4:45 – 5:45 PM

Indigenous Counsellor Panel / Closing Remarks

Presenter(s): Nancy Harn, Roger John, Seapieces Marsland

Friday August 17, 2023

10:25 AM – 10:55 AM

Networking: Ask Us Anything!

11:00- 11:20 AM

Welcome & Traditional Blessing

Elder Alvin Kube, Sauleau First Nation

11:20- 12:00 PM

Supporting Inclusive Student Engagement in Campus Mental Health - A Presentation from the Mental Health Commission of Canada

Presenter(s): Amy Fogarty, Sarah Ferguson, Kevin Friese, Chelsea Butler, Gurleen Kaur, Jordan Zacher

12:00- 12:15 PM

Break | Mindfulness Session on the Importance of Taking Breaks

Presenter(s): Justin Burkett

12:15- 1:00 PM

Co-Creating Peer Support Interventions for Crisis and Suicide with Post-Secondary Students

Presenter(s): Gina Dimitropoulos, Paige Loughheed, Julia Hews-Girard

Our National Standard Journey: Audit Recommendations in Action

Presenter(s): Jenna Strydonck

Equity, Diversity, and Accessibility in Student Mental Health Research in the Post-Secondary Setting

Presenter(s): Amanda Uliaszek, Maya Ahia, Maya Amestoy

Implementing a Coordinated Canadian Post-Secondary Measurement System: An Update on the Canadian Campus Well-Being Survey/ Bien-être sur les Campus Canadiens (CCWS)

Presenter(s): Guy Faulkner, Matthew Fagan, Caroline Wu

Do e-Mental Health Tools Help Students or Not?

Presenter(s): Darren Stevens

1:15 – 2:00 PM

Sharing Our Experiences of the Collaborative Co-creation of a Suicide Stigma Reduction Program: An Advisory Group Perspective

Presenter(s): Brittany Lindsay, Arianna Gibson, Emily Bernier, Gemma Reynolds, Monique Chen, Faith Belarmino

Post-Secondary Students' Perceptions of Resilience: "Doing it Differently"

Presenter(s): Jennifer Thannhauser, Gina Dimitropoulos, Keith Dobson, Madison Heintz, David Nordstokke, Thomas Qiao, Alex Riggin, Andrew Szeto

Towards Procedural Transparency: Building Student Access to Critical Mental Health Knowledge

Presenter(s): Jan Defehr

Post-Secondary Student Mental Health Research: A Global Collaboration and Partnership

Presenter(s): Kristin Cleverley, Orly Lipsitz

Our Journey in Addressing the Mental Well-Being of Students of the Global Majority Through Peer Collaborations

Presenter(s): Rita Hanoski, Seapieces Marsland

Where Do We Go from Here? Understanding the Current Landscape of Counselling Centers

Presenter(s): Lynn Braun

2:15- 3:30 PM

Kairos Blanket Exercise Information Session

Presenter(s): Shona Lee Sparrow

3:30 – 4:30 PM

Student Panel / Closing Remarks

Presenter(s): Matt Larsen, Smriti Jha, Angelin Thipahar, Tia De Groot, Brittany Lindsay (Moderator), Elder Alvin Kube, Saulteau First Nation