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Improving post-secondary students' mental health

Government is investing \$25.8 million over three years to protect and improve mental health resources for post-secondary students across Alberta.



From L to R: Ian Lee (chair of Alberta Students' Executive Council), Clare Hickie (undergraduate student, University of Calgary), Danielle Stewart-Smith, (HealthyCampusAlberta Coordinator), Brandy Payne (Associate Minister of Health, Elizabeth Cannon (president and vice-chancellor, University of Calgary), and Marlin Schmidt (Minister of Advanced Education)

Alberta's post-secondary students have asked for a more sustainable and equitable approach to mental health. This year, the government will begin implementing seven much-needed approaches outlined under Next Steps to Improve Post-Secondary Mental Health.

The province's post-secondary institutions will get direct, stable, and long-term funding to improve health promotion on campuses, and students will have access to better 24-hour phone and online counselling supports. Specific grant allocations to institutions will be announced in the fall.

According to the 2016 National College Health Assessment survey conducted by 10 post-secondary institutions in the province, more than 90 per cent of Alberta's students polled reported feeling overwhelmed, and more than 13 per cent seriously considered suicide.

“We have heard first-hand how important mental health programs are to students – which is why, for the first time, government is providing equitable funding to all public institutions. Creating healthy campuses and promoting positive mental health at Alberta’s post-secondary institutions better prepares students to deal with everyday stresses, sets students up for future success, and builds a more resilient community.”

- Marlin Schmidt, Minister of Advanced Education

This year alone, the province will provide \$8.9 million in funding to institutions for supports on campus and to other provincewide initiatives, including Indigenous grants, 24-hour supports and the Healthy Campus Alberta Community of Practice.

This new approach, based on the recommendations by the Advisory Panel on Post-Secondary Mental Health, addresses student concerns and is consistent with the government’s vision of a community-based health-care system. It also supports a more coordinated, integrated approach by service providers, a priority identified in the provincial government’s 2015 Valuing Mental Health Review. As the province moves into a new phase of student mental health supports, this approach will ensure consistent services and a continuum of care for students so they can build long-term relationships with professionals within their community.

“Obtaining a post-secondary education can be a stressful, anxious time and we want to make it easier for students to get the mental health services they need. This includes building greater mental health and substance use supports on campus, as well as helping connect students with family doctors and counsellors regardless of where they live.”

- Brandy Payne, Associate Minister of Health

“Mental well-being is vital to students’ success. When our students feel supported by a strong network, they are empowered to strive for their goals with focus and clarity. They are also motivated to encourage others and contribute to a community of caring on our campus and beyond.”

- Elizabeth Cannon, president and vice-chancellor, University of Calgary

"Improving post-secondary mental health requires a commitment from us all, to reach beyond our individual campuses and roles and collaborate toward the common vision of creating caring campus communities. This funding will help collaboration across all campuses so post-secondary institutions can share resources, develop training and explore best practices."

- Danielle Stewart-Smith, Healthy Campus Alberta Coordinator

"The investment of long-term, sustainable funding for student mental health is a vital step forward to ensuring all students can attain success while maintaining their health and wellness and feel supported and valued as members of their institution and its community. This funding will help students like me who have struggled with their mental health during their time at school and need support to realize their academic, personal and professional potential."

- Clare Hickie, undergraduate student, University of Calgary

"ASEC is encouraged that their voice has been heard in regards to the need for strong and consistent support of mental health programs on Alberta campuses. This equitable funding will serve students across the province who previously could not access mental health supports."

- Ian Lee, chair of Alberta Students' Executive Council

Seven next steps

- Providing funding to post-secondary institutions for greater health promotion and mental health supports.
- Defining the roles of post-secondary and public health systems in improving post-secondary student mental health.

- Ensuring mental health supports are coordinated within the larger regional health systems.
- Providing a one-time, two-year grant opportunity to support Indigenous post-secondary students' mental health.
- Funding the Healthy Campus Alberta Community of Practice to enhance system coordination, consistency and continual improvement.
- Improving access to 24-hour universal supports throughout the province.
- Reviewing student aid to ensure policies support students who are experiencing mental health problems.

By improving post-secondary mental health resources and freezing tuition and fees, government is creating the right conditions to help students succeed in school, get good jobs and help grow Alberta's economy.

Related information

[Advisory Panel on Post-Secondary Mental Health Recommendations](#)

[Next Steps to Improve Post-Secondary Student Mental Health Fact Sheet](#)

[Valuing Mental Health](#)

[University of Calgary Wellness Summit](#)

[National College Health Assessment](#)

Media inquiries

☐ [Benjamin Lof](#)

☐ [587-985-3591](#)

Press Secretary, Advanced Education


☐ [Laura Ehrkamp](#)

☐ [780-721-9795](#)

Press Secretary, Health

Contact us 

 **310-0000**

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