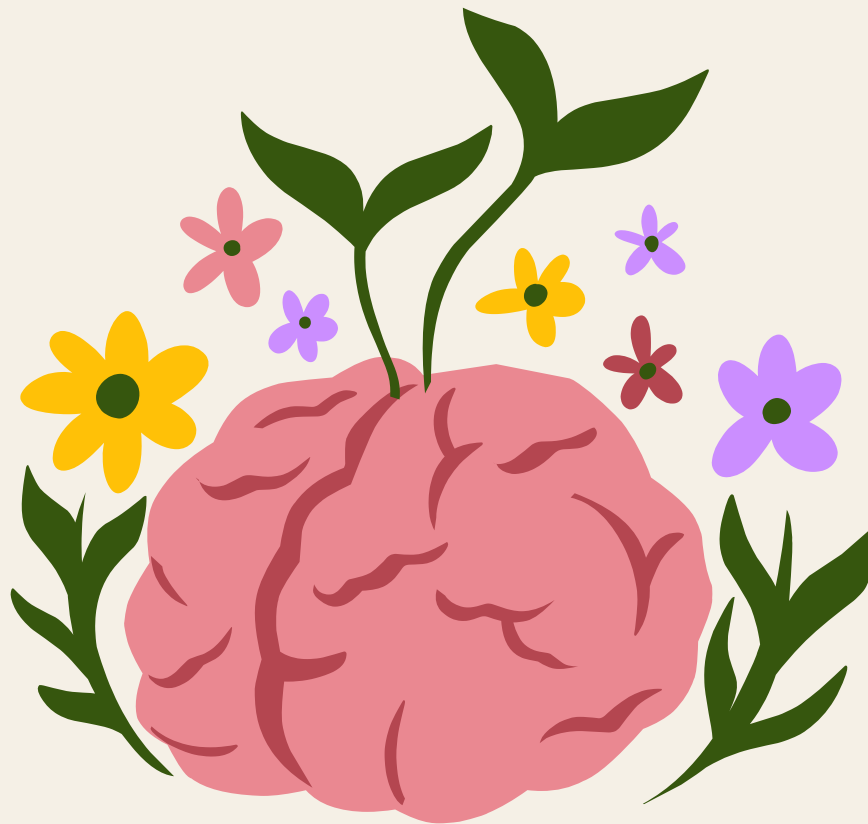




Huron University College Students' Council Standing Policy

Student Wellness Policy Paper



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Ratified 2023-2024

Drafted with consideration of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance Student Health & Wellness policy paper



LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Huron at Western is located on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapeewak and Attawandaron peoples, who have long-standing relationships with the land and region of southwestern Ontario and the City of London. The local First Nation communities of this area include the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation.

In the region, there are eleven First Nation communities and a growing Indigenous urban population. Western University values the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original peoples of Turtle Island (North America).



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Huron University College Students' Council recognises the paramount importance of mental health among post-secondary students. Students often find their well-being compromised by the pressures of academic pursuits, employment commitments, and extracurricular engagements, exacerbated by insufficient financial resources and support. The challenges are further compounded by gaps in accommodations and limited access to mental health care. Without adequate support, students face ongoing struggles that hinder their ability to succeed academically and personally.

This policy paper presents a set of recommendations calling for crucial support from the university administration to ensure a comprehensive and student-driven response to the mental health crisis at Huron University College, aiming to bridge gaps in accommodations and support, ultimately fostering a positive environment for the mental well-being of all students.



KEY TERMS

Psychologist: In Ontario, a psychologist is a professional who holds a certificate of registration with the College of Psychologists of Ontario (College of Psychologists of Ontario n.d.). Psychologists are individuals who have met the educational and training requirements established by the CPO and are authorized to provide psychological services to the public. Psychologists are licensed to provide psychotherapy.

Psychotherapy: Psychotherapy is a form of therapy centred around verbal communication, where Registered Psychotherapists collaborate with individuals, couples, and families in both individual and group settings (College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario). This therapeutic relationship aims to facilitate positive changes in the client's thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and social functioning. People typically turn to psychotherapy when their thoughts, feelings, moods, or behaviours are negatively impacting their daily lives, relationships, and overall enjoyment of life.

Counsellor: The terms "therapy" and "counselling" are used interchangeably, likely due to their similarities (Ontario Psychological Association 2023). However, being a counsellor does not equate to being a psychologist. In Ontario, individuals can become counsellors with a bachelor's or master's degree in mental health, psychology, counselling, or other social services fields, provided they have accumulated sufficient clinical experience under supervision. Despite counsellors sharing some foundational knowledge with psychologists, their field of study may not necessarily be psychology, and they typically haven't undergone the same extensive schooling and clinical training required for registered psychologists.

Psychiatrist: A psychiatrist is a medical doctor capable of prescribing medicines to treat mental illnesses (Ontario Psychological Association 2023). They differ from psychologists in terms of their educational backgrounds and modes of treatment. While psychologists complete their Master's/Doctoral Degrees in psychology, psychiatrists complete MD or their medical degrees. Psychologists cannot prescribe medicines and only provide psychotherapy. Psychiatrists can prescribe medicines.

Social Worker: In Ontario, social workers are regulated by the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers n.d.). To practice as a social worker in Ontario, individuals must be registered with this regulatory body. Social Workers focus on the overall well-being of the individual/community, addressing that their issues may stem from social/environmental causes. They use therapeutic modalities but also connect the individual to resources.

1 College of Psychologists of Ontario. "FAQs." Accessed January 14, 2024. <https://cpo.on.ca/resources/faqs/>

2 College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario, "What is Psychotherapy?" accessed January 14, 2024, <https://www.crpo.ca/find-a-registered-psychotherapist/what-is-psychotherapy/>

3 Ontario Psychological Association. 2023. "What is a Psychologist? What Can They Do?" Accessed January 14, 2024. <https://www.psych.on.ca/public/blog/2023/what-is-a-psychologist-what-can-they-do#:~:text=In%20Ontario%2C%20anyone%20with%20a,enough%20clinical%20work%20under%20supervision>

4 Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers, "About RSWs and RSSWs," accessed January 14, 2024, <https://www.ocswssw.org/public/about-rsws-and-rssws/>



Mental Health: Mental Health is defined as a state of mental well-being, such that an individual can cope with life stresses, perform at work, realize their abilities, and participate in their community (World Health Organization 2022). It is more than the absence of a mental illness.

Mental Illness: A clinically significant disturbance in a person's thinking, emotions, or behaviour (World Health Organization 2022). It may impair an individual's functioning in other areas of life. The two most common mental disorders are anxiety and depression.

5 World Health Organization. 2022. "Mental Disorders." Fact Sheet. Accessed January 14, 2024. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-disorders>



INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, Huron University College Students' Council stands for recognising the paramount importance of Mental Health in shaping lives.

With the growing challenges of university life and adapting to a fast-paced evolving world, Huron University College has witnessed students in need of support. Mental Health has been a concern that affects every area of a student's life, from personal relationships to academic performance. While Huron University College offers support services through the Caskey Gilday Wellness Centre and third-party organizations, it is essential to regularly reevaluate and understand the gravity of additional support students need.

Huron University College Students' Council aims to better understand, evaluate, and advocate for such needs. It is through surveying and data collection that the HUCSC has identified pressing concerns that students have faced due to a gap in the services provided on campus. The gap in additional support and services for psychological assessments, therapeutic interventions and professional expertise is an area that has widely impacted student lives. There have been instances of students' academic trajectories being affected due to the lack of such interventions on campus.

Hence, the HUCSC aims to address these concerns and provide comprehensive, researched recommendations for the betterment of the community. Through this paper, mental health in students' lives can be understood from a first-hand perspective. Furthermore, the needs of the students and possible resolutions can be objectively stated and described.



PROCESS DESCRIPTION

The PCR process (Policy Creation and Recommendation) employed by the Huron University College Student Council (HUCSC) for writing policy papers is a systematic and collaborative approach designed to align with the core principles and values that Huron prides itself on while effectively advocating for student interests to the administration.

Here's how this process typically unfolds:

Identifying Principles from Huron's Values: The HUCSC begins by examining the foundational principles that Huron University College upholds. These may include values such as academic excellence, community engagement, inclusivity, and being student centred. These principles serve as the guiding framework for the policy creation process.

Research and Analysis: The HUCSC conducts thorough research on the issue at hand, gathering data, statistics, and insights from relevant sources. This research phase is crucial for understanding the nuances of the problem and its impact on the student body.

Consultation and Collaboration: The HUCSC engages in consultations with various stakeholders within the university community, including students, faculty, staff, and administrators. This collaborative approach ensures that diverse perspectives are considered and that the policy recommendations reflect the collective interests of the student body.

Policy Formulation: Based on the research findings and stakeholder input, the HUCSC formulates policy proposals that address the identified issue. These policies are crafted in alignment with Huron's values and principles, ensuring that they uphold the institution's ethos while advocating for student welfare.

Recommendations Directed Towards Administration: The policy papers prepared by the HUCSC contain clear and actionable recommendations directed towards the university administration. These recommendations are framed in a constructive manner, highlighting the benefits of implementation and addressing any potential concerns or challenges.

Advocacy and Communication: The HUCSC advocates for the proposed policies through various channels, including meetings with university officials, presentations at governing body meetings, and dissemination of information through campus-wide communications. Effective communication strategies are employed to rally support for the recommendations among students and other stakeholders.



RESEARCH SUMMARY

On-Campus Psychologist (OCPsy) Survey

It had been brought to the council's attention through a survey conducted in the summer ($N = 50$) that some students (11%) that having a psychologist on campus would significantly enhance their well-being. Therefore, an On-Campus Psychologist (OCPsy) survey was conducted as a follow-up to assess whether this sentiment was shared by the broader student body.

The survey consisted of eight questions, four were multiple choice and four required short answers (for a full list of questions please see Appendix A). The total number of answers was 237, however, 39 answers were excluded from further analyses. Exclusion criteria were 1) participants declaring they are unfamiliar with the services provided by the Wellness Centre and 2) participants not providing answers for any of the short answer questions. The criteria were selected to ensure the best quality of data - it was agreed that students who are unaware of services currently offered by the Wellness Centre might not be able to provide the most useful feedback as to whether these services sufficiently meet students' needs. Additionally, it was assumed that students who responded to none of the short answer questions only wanted an opportunity to win a giveaway associated with the survey, hence their answers, too were excluded. Therefore, the final sample consisted of 198 participants.

All short answer questions were analysed via the process of thematic analysis as it was found to be the most suitable for the type of data collected (for more information consult Brown & Clarke, 2006). The starting point for the analysis was familiarization with the answers for each question; after which the coding scheme was established jointly by the Associate Vice President of Wellness and the Wellness Coordinator.

The results indicated that 29% of students were not aware of the difference between a social worker and a psychologist, while a comparable number (27%) indicated that the primary difference is the ability to diagnose mental illnesses. Furthermore, 65% of students indicated that they would be more likely to seek help from a psychologist if there was one on campus as opposed to services currently available through the Wellness Centre and off-campus, while the rest (35%) expressed reluctance in seeking help on-campus. Finally, 70% of surveyed students stated that having a psychologist on campus is very important and an overall 91% stated it is at least somewhat important.

⁶ Please note that while this percentage may appear low, it came from answers to an open-ended question "What specific support would you wish to have for enhancing your well-being?" which prompted further investigation

Men's Mental Health Conversation Circle

On November 28th, 2023, HUCSC organized a conversation circle on Men's Mental Health in collaboration with the Wellness Centre. The attendees were one facilitator from HUCSC, one student and one counsellor from the Wellness Centre. A portion of the conversation regarded the idea of having a psychologist on campus and the conversational format allowed for in-depth student answers. Therefore, some of the quotes from this portion of the conversation circles are included in the paper to help amplify student voices.

Campus Assessment Tool (CAT)

Huron's chapter of Jack.org has conducted a comprehensive study into the Wellness resources available to Huron students during the school year of 2022-2023, with amendments made in 2023-2024. The full findings can be seen in Appendix B. However, the most important findings that go beyond the scope of the OCPsy include the assessment of the availability of Mental Health Resources for Equity Deserving Groups including Indigenous Students, Racialized Students, and Students with physical accessibility needs. These three groups are disadvantaged as there are no specific resources intended to support them on the Huron campus (although additional resources are available at Western).

Principle:

Promoting comprehensive mental health services on campus is essential to fostering a supportive and conducive environment and an informed mindset for students.

Concern:

Despite the acknowledgement of the importance of mental health services, there appears to be a lack of awareness among students regarding the existing resources offered by the Wellness Centre. This knowledge gap may contribute to the desire for additional services, particularly the presence of a psychologist on campus, as the students may not understand the scope of practice of a social worker. A student expressed the opinion that having access to someone who can diagnose mental health conditions would prove highly beneficial, particularly for individuals suspecting they might have multiple mental health disorders occurring simultaneously.

Recommendation:

To address the knowledge gap, Huron University College should implement targeted awareness campaigns to educate students about the diverse range of mental health services available at the Wellness Centre, regularly and proactively, while assessing the awareness level regularly through surveys to benchmark improvements in awareness. This initiative aims to ensure students make informed decisions about seeking help, fostering a proactive approach to mental well-being.

Principle:

Student understanding of the perceived differences between Wellness Counsellors and psychologists is crucial for tailoring mental health services to meet the diverse needs of students effectively.

Concern:

A significant portion of participants (29%) in the OCPSy survey expressed uncertainty or a lack of knowledge about the distinctions between Wellness Counsellors and psychologists. Additionally, misconceptions regarding the capabilities of each professional were identified.

Recommendation:

Huron University College should make an effort to clarify the roles and capabilities of Wellness Counsellors and Psychologists, through various means including adding information to the website, social media, word of mouth, posters etc. This initiative seeks to empower students with accurate information, enabling them to make informed choices when seeking mental health support.

Principle:

Ensuring convenient options to access wellness services is essential for making students feel comfortable in reaching out for help.

Concern:

While a majority of participants (91%) in the OCPsy survey acknowledged the importance of having a psychologist on campus, a significant number (35%) expressed a reluctance to seek help on campus. Identifying and addressing barriers to accessing on-campus mental health services is crucial for fostering a supportive environment. An excerpt from the conversation circles, provided anonymously, suggests that many men from various backgrounds, including Western, Huron, Kings, and Canada, may be reluctant to openly share their problems.

Recommendation:

Conduct a comprehensive review of the barriers identified by participants who expressed reluctance to seek on-campus mental health services. Spread awareness regarding virtual counselling options, and off-campus wellness partners, as well as focus groups and wellness peer educators.

Principle:

recognising the importance of off-campus mental health resources is essential for providing different support options to students.

Concern:

A considerable number of participants (62%) in the OCPsy survey indicated unawareness of off-campus mental health resources. This lack of awareness may limit students' ability to explore alternative support systems beyond the campus and Wellness Centre. In a segment from the conversation circles, a student mentions hearing fellow students express feelings of intimidation and overwhelm when visiting the Western campus, attributing it to its expansive size.

Recommendation:

Establish collaborations with local mental health organizations and community resources to expand students' awareness of off-campus mental health services, such as Good2talk, and CMHA.. Implement outreach programs and information sessions to bridge the gap between on-campus and off-campus mental health support.

Principle:

Understanding and educating students regarding the qualifications, specialities, and services of a campus psychologist to meet student preferences is essential for enhancing the effectiveness of mental health services.

Concern:

A substantial number of participants (56%) in the OCPSy survey expressed neutral attitudes or lack of knowledge regarding their preferences for the qualifications and specialities of a campus psychologist. This lack of clarity may hinder the development of targeted mental health services.

Recommendation:

Conduct surveys as needed and focus group discussions with the community safety office to understand evolving student perceptions regarding the qualifications, specialities, and services of a campus mental health professional. Use this information to bridge the gap between what the campus can provide and how the students can benefit from their expertise and scope of practice.

Principle:

Ensuring that access to mental health resources is on par with Huron's equity and inclusion standards.

Concern:

The lack of specific mental health resources tailored to meet the needs of equity-deserving groups, including Indigenous Students, Racialized Students, and Students with physical accessibility needs, on the Huron campus poses a significant barrier to their well-being and academic success. This deficiency exacerbates disparities and marginalization experienced by these groups within the university community.

Recommendation:

To address this concern, Huron University must implement a comprehensive strategy focused on enhancing mental health resources specifically tailored to meet the diverse needs of equity-deserving groups on campus, being signed on to initiatives such as the BlackNorth Initiative and having made several DEI-related promises in its strategic plan. This strategy should involve collaborative efforts between mental health professionals, equity and inclusion advocates, and representatives from these marginalized communities to ensure that resources are not only accessible but also culturally competent and inclusive. Additionally, proactive outreach initiatives should be established to actively engage with these groups and identify their unique mental health needs. By prioritizing equity in mental health resource allocation and implementation, Huron can foster a campus environment where all students feel supported, valued, and empowered to succeed academically and personally.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Student Wellness Policy Paper presented by Huron University College Student Council marks a pivotal step towards understanding and addressing the multifaceted nature of student well-being. Grounded in a commitment to the mental health of our student body, this policy paper has underscored the necessity of enhancing and diversifying mental health services on campus, illuminated the pressing need for increased awareness and education regarding existing resources, and proposed strategic recommendations to bridge gaps and eliminate barriers to access.

As we move forward, it is imperative that Huron University College not only continues to evaluate and adapt its mental health services in response to the evolving needs of its students but also ensures that these services are accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the diverse experiences of our student community. By implementing the recommendations within this paper, Huron University College will affirm its dedication to fostering an environment that supports mental health as a cornerstone of academic and personal success. The policy's initiatives, including targeted awareness campaigns, and collaboration with off-campus resources, will serve as foundational elements in creating a more supportive mental landscape for all students.

We urge the university administration to take decisive action based on the findings and recommendations of this paper. By doing so, Huron University College will not only enhance the student experience but also set a standard for post-secondary institutions in prioritizing mental health as a critical aspect of student life. Let us move forward with a shared vision of resilience, understanding, and empathy, ensuring that every student has the support they need to thrive.



REFERENCES

1. College of Psychologists of Ontario. "FAQs – CPO Public." Accessed January 14, 2024. <https://cpo.on.ca/resources/faqs/>
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4. Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers, "About RSWs and RSSWs," accessed January 14, 2024, <https://www.ocswssw.org/public/about-rsws-and-rssws/>
5. World Health Organization. 2022. "Mental Disorders." World Health Organization. June 8, 2022. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-disorders>

APPENDIX A

Full list of questions for the OCPsy Survey

1. Are you aware of the counselling services provided by the Wellness Centre on campus? (Yes/No)
2. What, if any, differences do you perceive between the services provided by a Wellness Counsellor (master-level social worker) and those provided by a psychologist? (Open-ended)
3. Would you be more likely to seek help from a psychologist on campus as opposed to off-campus resources or services currently offered by the Wellness Centre? (Yes/No/Unsure)
4. On a scale of 1 to 7, how important do you think it is to have a psychologist on campus? (1 being not important at all, and 7 being extremely important)
5. Are you aware of any mental health resources available to you off-campus or through Western Health Services? If yes, please specify which ones. (Open-ended)
6. Do you have any suggestions or preferences regarding the qualifications, specialities, or specific services you would like a campus psychologist to have, if so, please elaborate on what these would be. (Open-ended)
7. Would you be willing to pay a small additional fee in your tuition for access to the services of a psychologist on campus? (Yes/No/Unsure)
8. Is there anything else related to your experiences with mental health while at Huron that you would like to share with us? (Open-ended, optional)

Note. Once the survey was completed participants were presented with a debriefing text which explained the differences and competencies of both social workers and psychologists.



APPENDIX B

Campus Assessment Tool (CAT) Results

Jack.org - Huron University College
Campus Assessment Tool 2022-23

Introduction

The Campus Assessment Tool (CAT) is a youth-led participatory research project created to support the advocacy work of student-run Jack Chapters. Through a combination of tools that measure mental health services and utilization outcomes, the CAT evaluates how post-secondary institutions work to serve, protect, and promote student mental health. Students collect information online and then gather more in-depth information through conversations with counselling and student services' staff members.

Study Site

The Campus Assessment Tool at Huron University at Western University was completed by Katelyn Matsumoto and Sophie Bouquillon for the 2022-23 academic year. The student population of the University is approximately 1500 students.

Counselling Services Overview

- Staffing: 1 Staff/ 750 Students
- Walk-in: Yes
- Phone: Yes
- Group: Yes
- Video: Yes
- Text: Yes
- Wait times (follow-up): 10 days
- Wait times (intake): 2-4 days

The adequate staffing and menu of counselling options, both in person and virtually, are strengths of the University. The array of options and barrier-free access model, combined with adequate counselling staff-to-student ratios, means that students can access on-campus counselling with relative ease. With these strengths in mind, there is further work to be done to increase accessibility and reduce wait times.

Alternative Care Options - Using A Stepped Care Model

The university offers several mental health care options beyond general 1:1 counselling, including self-guided resources, structured wellness activities, and workshops. Therapy Assistance Online (TAO) is a unique support option offering interactive activities focused on specific strategies and skills. The Wellness team is active in the TAY (Transition Age Youth Working Group), enhancing the stepped care model. They also provide support to survivors through a GBSV Educator and Counsellor.

Mental Health Resources for Equity-Deserving Groups

- Indigenous Students: Yes
- Transgender Students: Yes



- Students with accessibility needs: No*
- 2SLGBTQ+ Students: Yes
- Students struggling with substance use: Yes
- Racialized Students: Yes
- Students who have experienced gender/sexual-based violence: Yes
- Students with severe mental illness: Yes
- Students with Refugee Status: No*

*Main wellness house not accessible for individuals with mobility devices; however, services can be accessed in accessible locations on campus. Supports for BIPOC students are available through Western services.

Educational Resources and Promotional Initiatives

Mental health training and education are offered to campus members, including SafeTALK and More Feet on the Ground. Huron communicates available support through various means, but there is a need for clearer information on accessing resources.

Institutional Planning and Policy

- Early Alert System: YES
- Mental Health Strategy: YES
- Suicide Response: YES

Huron has HEART (Huron Early Alert Response Team) for additional support and trains staff and faculty on suicide prevention. They are developing a full mental health/wellness strategy and actively improving student mental health efforts in line with the National Standard of Canada for Mental Health and Well-Being for Post-Secondary Students.

Next Steps

The Jack.org Huron chapter plans to continue working closely with the Huron Wellness team, student leaders, and faculty to integrate wellness into academics, promoting mental health, and reducing barriers to accessing support.



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