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Mental Health
Commission
of Canada

Commission de
la santé mentale
du Canada

The Standard for Psychological Health and Safety of Post- Secondary Students

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. What is a Standard?

A Standard is an expected level of performance that is considered by an authority, expert or by general consent to be an approved model. A Standard stipulates minimum requirements for the use, safety and/or design of products, processes and services. The Standard for Psychological Health and Safety of Post-Secondary Students would be considered a “process.”

2. What is the scope of the Standard for Psychological Health and Safety of Post-Secondary Students (PSS Standard)?

The Standard will provide a voluntary framework to help institutions establish policies, programs, and processes to support and promote student mental health. Institutions will have the flexibility to tailor it to their own needs and circumstances. It will include benchmarks for institutions to measure success in their journey to align with the PSS Standard. This will be further defined by the Technical Committee as they are informed by the work of the environmental scan, the various engagement activities conducted from coast to coast to coast to inform the draft of the PSS Standard, and the feedback received during the public review period.

3. What are the key project objectives?

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) has the following project objectives:

1. To collaborate with the Canadian Standards Association (CSA Group) to champion the development of a Standard for Psychological Health and Safety of Post-Secondary Students;
2. Engage key project and community stakeholders (stakeholders defined below) to develop a Standard (and related products) that is relevant, evidence-informed, and practical for post-secondary institutions across Canada to effectively support and promote mental health of students;
3. Develop key tools and resources for post-secondary institutions to assist in their journey to align with the Standard;
4. Encourage uptake of the PSS Standard among post-secondary institutions; and
5. Build evidence to showcase the impact of the PSS Standard on students and post-secondary institutions.

4. Who will be impacted by the PSS Standard?

Post-secondary students, colleges, universities, polytechnic institutions, CECEPS, staff/faculty, administration and unions will be directly impacted by the PSS Standard. Indirect impact, related to improved student mental health and student success in post-secondary institutions, will be felt by students' social networks and support environments such as, families, caregivers, faith-based groups, and other community members.

5. Who would implement the PSS Standard?

The PSS Standard will be voluntary and could be considered for uptake by any college, university, institution, polytechnic or CEGEP. This Standard will be based on a collective approach model, which means that a successful implementation of the PSS Standard will require input and feedback from students, staff, faculty, and administrators, etc. It is likely that the PSS Standard implementation process will be led and supported by the designated administrative office in the post-secondary institution most concerned with student success.

6. Will this PSS Standard be taking a “full campus approach” – meaning will it include faculty, staff and students?

The PSS Standard does promote a shared responsibilities approach which includes roles and responsibilities for the whole campus; that said, the focus of the PSS Standard is the student. However, we encourage institutions to consider the [Standard of Canada for Psychological Healthy and Safe in the Workplace](#) (launched 2013 for employers to build psychologically healthy and safe workplaces in Canada for staff and volunteers) to be adopted simultaneously or even in advance of adopting the Standard for Psychological Health and Safety of Post-Secondary Students.

7. Will the PSS Standard be voluntary?

The PSS Standard will be voluntary – unless referenced in legislation or regulation.

8. Who is being engaged and what stakeholders are going to be involved?

We have been working with our partners and leaders within this sector to engage post-secondary institutions across the country. The goal is to be inclusive, accessible to colleges, universities, institutions, CEGEPS, their students, government bodies, associations, families, staff, faculty, unions, support services and organizations.

9. Who is funding this project?

The Mental Health Commission of Canada is leading the project in collaboration with the CSA Group. The project has been generously funded by Bell Let’s Talk, The Rossy Family Foundation, The RBC Foundation and Health Canada.

10. How will this initiative benefit students?

This initiative:

- Will address student mental health at their various stages of their post-secondary careers, their state of well-being and/or mental illness.
- Will promote a collaborative approach to promoting mental health for students by reinforcing the shared responsibilities of students, staff, and faculty.
- May decrease stigma and increase help seeking behavior in students.
- May increase mental health literacy in both students and staff.

11. How will this initiative benefit institutions?

This initiative will:

- Provide a measurable framework to support student mental health.
- Identify and promote shared best practices for campus wellness.
- Support continuous improvement of student services.

12. What difference will the PSS Standard make in student mental health?

Having a Standard for Psychological Health and Safety for Post-Secondary Students will provide institutions with a framework and guidelines reflective of the best practices and supportive of future new practices to support and promote student mental health, thereby promoting student success.

13. What is the difference between a PSS Standard and a Mental Health Strategy?

A Mental Health Strategy provides a roadmap on how to improve current programs, develop new programs and how to address any existing gaps. The PSS Standard will set a national framework and measurements to benchmark a Mental Health Strategy. For example, an institution may identify a gap around accessibility to mental health support. The mental health strategy may then consider and plan on how it will close that gap. The PSS Standard could describe what would be acceptable as a baseline for accessibility to mental health support that could be the measure of success in meeting that particular gap. A PSS Standard would also inform an existing Mental Health Strategy being used in a post-secondary institution to ensure all elements of student mental health are considered.

14. Will the PSS Standard be referenced in legislation, regulation, licensing, and accreditation?

Much like the Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace, the Standard for Psychological Health and Safety of Post-Secondary Students will be voluntary. It is a possibility that the Student Standard could be referenced in future legislation, regulation, licensing and accreditation.

15. How will the PSS Standard ensure that students have the support they need, when needed?

The PSS Standard itself cannot ensure that students have the support they need, when needed. This can only be achieved through sustained efforts by institutions, service providers and the students themselves. What the PSS Standard offers is a framework that ensures that institutions know what is expected at a minimum to support the psychological health and safety of their students.

16. Is this PSS Standard ONLY for students with mental illness?

The PSS Standard applies to all post-secondary students, including students who are living with a mental illness, as well as those who have not yet experienced a mental illness, or those in recovery or currently experiencing optimal mental health. This PSS Standard will also be applicable to students throughout their entire time at a post-secondary institution. In addition, this PSS Standard will also be applicable to post-secondary students on or off campus/distant learners, international and domestic students, students living with disabilities, etc.

17. Are you researching all the mental illnesses?

We will not be researching mental illness. The focus of the PSS Standard is what can be done to support and promote student mental health and to encourage student success.

18. How are post-secondary students being defined?

Post-secondary students will be defined as individuals enrolled in a post-secondary educational institution. These could include emerging adults between the ages of 16 and 25, older students and returning students as the baseline group and will be further defined as:

- transition into post-secondary phases (first year),
- progress through the post-secondary tenure (intermediate year)
- transition beyond the post-secondary experience (graduate)
(graduate student with ages that will typically range higher than the baseline group)

19. How will post-secondary students be represented during this initiative?

Post-secondary students will have representation through student organizations participating in the Executive Advisory Committee, the Technical Committee, through community dialogues, student surveys and focus groups.

20. Will faculty and staff need to become mental health “professionals” for students?

No, they will not – the PSS Standard will provide faculty and staff with tools, support and resources to promote and encourage psychological health and safety on campus.

21. We already have programs and support services at our institution – how is duplication avoided?

An Environmental Scoping Review was conducted in 2018. (FAQ 23). From this review we learned about some of the many outstanding programs and promising practices that currently exist and reference them within the PSS Standard. Any potential gaps will be identified, and recommendations made. If you are aware of exemplary practices, programs, and supports available at your institution, please share with us at studentstandard@mentalhealthcommission.ca.

22. When will the PSS Standard be made available / accessible and how?

The PSS Standard will be made available by early 2020. It will be accessible to anyone by download through the [CSA Group website](#). The PSS Standard will be available free of charge for the first five years (from the time of launch) in both official languages to download.

23. Will the PSS Standard be available in both official languages?

Yes.

24. How is the PSS Standard being developed?

The steps include:

- An Executive Advisory Committee, a Project Team and a Technical Committee were formed to provide oversight, planning and to develop the PSS Standard.
- An environmental scoping review has been completed to define the current state of post- secondary students experience and post-secondary institutional experiences relative to psychological health and safety. This has included identifying new and emerging strategies and best practices both nationally and internationally. [To read the summary please click here.](#)
- A series of dialogues from coast to coast to coast were conducted and various public engagement activities were held to secure feedback.
- The results of the environmental scoping review and the dialogues was included into a working document (a Seed Document) which continues to provide guidance to the Technical Committee in developing the PSS Standard
- The Technical Committee are developing the Standard using a consensus-based approach during six (two day) meetings over a six-month period, supplemented by formal communication between meetings.
- A draft version of the PSS Standard in both official languages will be made available by fall 2019 for public input. All interested Canadians and other interested parties are invited to review and comment.
- The final version of the PSS Standard is expected to be published in early 2020.

25. What is the “Environmental Scoping Review”?

A research team, under the guidance of Dr. Heather Stuart, Queen’s University, conducted a literature review and examined best practices currently within post-secondary institutions currently. This information was provided to the Technical Committee that is responsible for developing the PSS Standard.

26. What is the “Technical Committee”?

The Technical Committee is the team of approximately 30-35 diverse experts and stakeholders in the field consisting of students, family, administrators, faculty, staff, union leaders from colleges, universities, institutes and CEGEPS. They are responsible to develop and write the PSS Standard. Each expert or stakeholder is now a member of the CSA Group.

27. How are you going to measure the success of this initiative?

Measurement of success will initially include uptake and implementation of the PSS Standard. During the process of the PSS Standard development specific measures of student health, safety and wellness will be defined by the Technical Committee.

28. If an institution wants to get involved, what support and resources can be expected from the project?

The MHCC webpage will be consistently updated with relevant project information and timely ways to get involved. The information and tools consistently available on the MHCC website include:

- Participate in the Public Review of the Standard – expected fall 2019
- Posters with information about the project – printable or to share on internal websites
- Contact email to ask questions or share ideas

29. How can I get involved?

You can get involved by emailing the Mental Health Commission of Canada at studentstandard@mentalhealthcommission.ca

30. How do I get more information?

Go to the Mental Health Commission of Canada webpage:
<https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/post-secondary-students-standard>



Mental Health Commission of Canada

Suite 1210, 350 Albert Street
Ottawa, ON K1R 1A4

Tel: 613.683.3755
Fax: 613.798.2989

mhccinfo@mentalhealthcommission.ca
www.mentalhealthcommission.ca

[@MHCC_](https://twitter.com/MHCC_) [f/theMHCC](https://www.facebook.com/theMHCC) [▶/1MHCC](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1MHCC) [@theMHCC](https://www.instagram.com/theMHCC)
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