

# STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING POLICY

## *Creating a Community of Care*

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# 1. PREAMBLE & SCOPE

Bishop's University ("Bishop's") is committed to ensuring a psychologically healthy, safe, caring and supportive living and learning environment conducive to positive mental health and student thriving. The Bishop's **Student Mental Health and Well-Being Policy: Creating a Community of Care** (the "Policy") is based on best practices including the *National Standard for the Mental Health and Well-Being for Post-Secondary Students* ("The Standard"),<sup>1</sup> the *CACUSS Systemic Framework*,<sup>2</sup> and the *Plan d'action sur la santé mentale étudiante en enseignement supérieur* ("PASME").<sup>3</sup>

This Policy affirms Bishop's commitment to promoting student mental health and well-being by providing a structured framework and following a whole-campus approach. Bishop's recognizes that all members of its community have a role to play in promoting positive student mental health; these responsibilities therefore apply to all members of the community inclusive of faculty, staff, volunteers, management, and students themselves.

In addition, Bishop's recognizes that promoting mental health is more than the treatment of mental illnesses. Objectives laid out in this policy outline a cohesive community approach to student mental health and are intended to respond to promote positive mental health, prevent distress and/or the worsening of symptoms, and create the social and structural conditions for all students to thrive. The policy also outlines the provision of a range of mental health services as well as response to crises.

Finally, this Policy applies to all Bishop's community members, both physically in Sherbrooke, QC, and those who participate remotely. It is also important to acknowledge that Bishop's University and the diverse individuals that make up our community are located on the traditional territory of the Abenaki people (the people of the rising sun). Bishop's continued efforts toward equity, diversity, and inclusion are central to promoting positive student mental health, as is our commitment to Truth & Reconciliation. These commitments are woven throughout the objectives of this Policy.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The following objectives represent broad guidelines for actions taken at Bishop's to appropriately and effectively respond to student distress, promote student well-being, and build an equitable environment that supports positive mental health for the whole Bishop's community.

### 2.1 Provide Evidence-Based Supports & Streamline Crisis Management

A continuum of mental health services to meet a range of mental health needs shall be implemented at Bishop's to match the diversity of student needs and preferences in different moments. Community

members can refer to [Cadre de référence sur la santé mentale étudiante](#) (Quebec's provincial guidelines for student mental health), regarding the implementation of a continuum of support services.<sup>3</sup> In brief, these should include the provision of, or connection to, trauma-informed and evidence-based counselling services, specialist services, peer support services, and self-care tools that are designed to ensure physical, cultural, linguistic, financial, and administrative accessibility for all students. Diverse accessibility is of added importance at Bishop's due to the fact that it is an Anglophone university within a Francophone region with many international students; support services are, therefore, unlikely to be readily available for the majority of students outside of the institution.

In addition to the provision of support services, these services should be widely promoted across the university and processes for accessibility and referral should be clearly communicated. Further, protocols that identify the roles and responsibilities of all community members in the event of a mental health crisis are to be clearly defined and communicated (see Section 3). This will limit confusion, inefficiencies, and the potential for additional distress.

**Example activities:**

- Ensure that broadly accessible mental health support, awareness, promotion and prevention services are in place and that information on these services is widely available;
- Encourage interdisciplinary and inter-network collaborations, where possible. As such, community organizations and digital service providers can be essential partners with respect to diverse service provision;
- Clearly articulate and communicate processes and procedures for mental health service referrals and crisis response.

## **2.2 Implement Campus-Wide Mental Health Awareness, Literacy & Education Initiatives**

Bishop's will implement campaigns and education initiatives to increase community knowledge of mental health, how to care for mental well-being, and how to recognize and respond to mental health concerns. These will include stigma reduction campaigns to reduce shame and fear related to mental health, campus training initiatives across the Bishop's community, and broader mental health awareness campaigns that encourage help-seeking, promote harm reduction, and model the prioritization of mental well-being alongside academic success.

In addition, training specifically for students will be implemented to aid in the development of positive coping skills and self-management strategies. Teaching students how to cope with challenges, manage stress, and build resilience can help decrease concerns such as stress and anxiety but can also better equip students to build positive mental health and prevent the worsening of symptoms.

**Example activities:**

- Mental health literacy training to be provided to managers, faculty, staff and students;

- Stigma reduction campaigns and messaging are regularly implemented;
- Training and tips and self-management competencies, resiliency building, and coping skills development are provided for all students.

## 2.3 Foster a Supportive & Inclusive Campus Environment

Bishop's will ensure that its environment supports all students to flourish while achieving their academic goals. This includes the creation of physical spaces that are welcoming, safe, and physically accessible, as well as the creation of a learning environment that promotes meaningful participation and incorporates trauma-informed, accessible learning principles. In addition, Bishop's will ensure a cultural environment that promotes mental well-being alongside academic success and encourages help-seeking when needed. Messaging should be disseminated that encourages students to make use of campus resources, reinforces their right to accommodations, and promotes the fact that all community members are responsible for creating an environment that supports student mental health.

### Example activities:

- The creation of warm, welcoming, and accessible student spaces for students to gather, socialize, learn, and connect;
- The creation of processes that recognize and mitigate barriers for students with the need for mental health-related accommodations;
- The cultivation of a culture that emphasizes the prioritization of positive mental health alongside the pursuit of academic goals;
- The development and implementation of universal design principles in the classroom, where appropriate and possible.

## 2.4 Promote Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (“EDI”)

Bishop's has made [an EDI commitment](#) to foster an “environment of belonging where individual differences are recognized, embraced, valued, and integrated into all aspects of the University”.<sup>4</sup> This is part of an effort to create an EDI Strategy (for 2023 release) aligned with the Global Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Benchmarks, the Scarborough Charter, and the Bishop's EDI Task Force report from 2021.

In addition to this existing work, EDI is of particular importance to the equitable promotion of student mental health and well-being. Students from marginalized and under-represented backgrounds can face disproportionately high levels of microaggressions, unconscious bias, discrimination, and exclusion in multiple ways during their time at university. These students can also encounter culturally unsafe or inaccessible services, which can limit their ability to equitably seek help and recover in moments of need. These experiences negatively impact mental health and disproportionately occur amongst BIPOC students, international students, and LGBTQ2S+ students. It is crucial that Bishop's continue its EDI work, but add a mental health lens to its efforts in order to reduce mental health inequities and ensure

equitable and inclusive mental health supports for all students. Community members can refer to the [CICMH Equity Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit](#) for examples and guidelines.<sup>5</sup>

**Example activities:**

- The implementation of anti-racism, anti-oppression, and cultural sensitivity training materials for all community members, but particularly mental health service providers;
- The hiring of BIPOC and LGBTQS2+ student support staff, representative of the student population;
- Resources for students, staff and faculty to address systemic barriers and report discrimination;
- The integration of Indigenous wellness practices into existing health services and continued prioritization of Indigenous community engagement and collaboration.

## **2.5 Reinforce Institutional Commitment and Promote a Shared Responsibility for Student Mental Health Across Campus**

As part of Bishop's commitment to the mental health and well-being of its campus community, it also recognizes that this is a shared responsibility and requires buy-in and support at all levels of the institution. To that end, it is the responsibility of the senior administration at Bishop's to ensure that there are processes, procedures, and resources in place to meet the objectives laid out in this Policy. In addition, there should be structures in place that support initiatives that promote diverse student engagement, agency, and participation when it comes to mental health and well-being. Students should be thought of as ongoing and equal partners in the pursuit of the objectives laid out here. Finally, in alignment with Section 2.4, there should be a concerted effort to actively encourage the presence of representatives of populations with diverse needs, backgrounds, and experiences when it comes to decision making at the institutional level.

**Example activities:**

- Assignment of a senior leader who will oversee the implementation and adoption of this policy to ensure that it is being carried out;
- Communications to the broader Bishop's community that student mental health is a shared responsibility, and a call to action for everyone to take on an active role in promoting the well-being of students;
- Create avenues and structures for feedback on how best to address the mental health of the Bishop's community;
- Inclusion of students from diverse identities that represent the Bishop's community in decision-making processes across the institution.

## 3. ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

All Bishop's community members play an active role in building an environment that promotes student mental health and well-being. Thus, all community members shall commit to the following roles and responsibilities to support students to thrive during their time at Bishop's.

### 3.1 Bishop's Psychological Wellness Committee ("PWC")

Prior to the release of this Policy, Bishop's has had a PWC; a standing institutional committee on student mental health. This committee includes representatives of senior administrators, faculty, professionals, and mental health support staff, as well as diverse members of the student body. Following release of this Policy, the PWCs mandate will evolve to include:

- Creating Terms of Participation for the PWC and communicating to the broader community;
- Establishing clear milestones to be completed in alignment with this Policy and assign roles to the appropriate parties for implementing actions (either within or outside the committee);
- Reviewing the current Policy annually by July 1 each year to ensure that it is still relevant and up-to-date, making any necessary changes, and collaborating with the EDI office and other campus stakeholders to ensure multiples perspectives are incorporated into each review;
- Making recommendations on policies and procedures to be reviewed or give feedback on those in development to ensure that they are viewed from a mental health lens;
- Ensuring evaluation and reporting of actions taken by Bishop's in line with this Policy and creating a progress report that can be shared broadly with the Bishop's community.

### 3.2 All Bishop's Community Members: All Staff, Faculty, and Students

- Review this Policy and the roles and responsibilities associated with it;
- Participate in the creation and maintenance of a culture that supports positive mental health, equity, diversity and inclusion;
- Promote the elimination of stigma and shame associated with talking about mental health and seeking support;
- Participate in mental health literacy and education training activities;
- Learn about available mental health resources and assist in guiding fellow community members to appropriate services when necessary;
- Create an environment of non-judgment related to mental health help-seeking;
- Commit to caring for one's own mental health and well-being, learning positive coping skills, and seeking help, if needed.

### 3.3 Board of Governors

All items within 3.2 above and:

- Adopt this policy;
- Secure funding and resources required to implement this policy;
- Review this policy each fiscal year in June and revise plans to ensure implementation of commitments.

### 3.4 Directors, Managers & Supervisors

All items within 3.2 above and:

- Create action plans to commit to and outline activities required to ensure implementation of this Policy. These must be inclusive of all objectives outlined above, relevant to each department within the Bishop's community;
- Allocate the human, financial and material resources required to implement the action plan;
- Promote this Policy and ensure that it is accessible to the entire student community;
- Ensure this work aligns with other policies, including, but not limited to, the **Policy for the Prevention of Sexual Violence, Alcohol Policy, Policy Regarding Student Accessibility and Accommodation Services, Prevention of Harassment, Pets on Campus, Emergency Procedure Guidelines, Cannabis Regulations, Student Code of Conduct, Athlete Code of Conduct, and the Policy on the Event of the Death of a Student.**

### 3.5 Faculty

All items within 3.2 above and:

- Learn to recognize the basic signs of mental health struggles among students, while recognizing that the role of a faculty member is not to provide clinical support to students;
- Promote available student support services in classrooms and refer students to appropriate resources as needed;
- Endeavour to use inclusive and recognized pedagogical practices that promote positive mental health and accessible learning (e.g. implementing content advisories when appropriate);
- Respect and empower students' right to mental health accommodations as mandated in Bishops' Accessibility Policy and the Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms;
- Consider the impact on mental health and well-being in course designs, where appropriate.



## 3.6 Students Representative Council & Other Student Leaders

All items within 3.2 above and:

- Prioritize awareness, promotion, prevention, and advocacy activities on mental health;
- Advertise mental health resources available, promote awareness of students' right to accommodations, and act as a source of information on resources for those seeking support;
- Promote a positive school climate, especially in associations (inclusive, safe and caring climate, marked by openness and respect, and where all forms of violence and bullying are prohibited);
- Ensure that the diversity of student voices, including those of people with diverse identities and backgrounds, is represented in group leadership and decision-making.
- Listen to students who come to them with inquiries related to mental health promotion and/or resources on campus and help to connect them with the appropriate resources wherever possible.
- When participating in decision-making as a Student Leader and Representative, ensure you consider potential impacts on student mental health and well-being.

## 3.7 Full Student Population

All items within 3.2 above and:

- Prioritize your mental health alongside your pursuit of your academic goals and seek support when needed;
- Offer support to a peer if you notice that they may be struggling with their mental health by showing concern and directing them to available resources, as appropriate;
- Recognize that a student without clinical training is not an appropriate mental health resource and should not be providing mental health support or advice to students who are struggling;
- Alert **Bishop's Security Department** and/or **call 911** in the event of a mental health emergency. No Bishop's student should respond to these situations alone.

# 4. ADOPTION, EVALUATION & REPORTING

## 4.1 Policy Evaluation and Review Mechanisms

This policy will be reviewed annually by July 1 of each year by the PWC, or, more frequently, if necessary, when changes are required (see 3.1 above). As part of the review process, the PWC will do its best to collect data relevant to the various components of this Policy, which can be used to inform changes to this Policy.

Areas for evaluation could include, but are not limited to,

- The number of students that participated on committees or other work in decisions that affect them and the mental health and well-being of students;
- The inclusion of the student community in the mental health activities put on by Bishop's in a way that reflects the composition and diversity of this community;
- The evaluation of different psychosocial factors (e.g. the degree of food insecurity on campus, financial insecurity, presence of social support, etc.);<sup>1</sup>
- Consideration of any new evidence-based documents that should be incorporated into this Policy, in addition to the ones already outlined;
- The implementation and results of various community surveys related to mental health knowledge, perceptions, and well-being, as well as the level of participation across Bishop's;
- Respect for the principles of EDI in the institution's policies and programs;
- The degree of collaboration with external partners (health and social services network, community organizations), to meet the needs of the diverse Bishop's community.

The data collected makes it possible to assess the implementation of the Policy, to continually improve upon the actions taken as a result of this Policy, and to make necessary changes. As outlined above, it is the role of the PWC to widely disseminate results obtained to all members of the Bishop's community.

## **4.2 Distribution of the policy**

Bishop's will publicise this Policy widely, using multiple channels, to reach the broadest audience possible. Bishop's will also disseminate updates as the Policy is reviewed, or as changes are made.

## **4.3 Date of Entry**

This Policy comes into effect upon adoption by the Board of Governors.

## 5. DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are from best practice documents related to student mental health or were determined through community conversations to collaboratively shape the understanding of key concepts. Definitions should be reviewed alongside a full policy review and revised as required.

**Accessible mental health services:** Services that recognize the diverse needs of all Bishop's students, striving to eliminate barriers related to race, ethnicity, age, income, administrative status, physical ability, gender, sexuality, geographic location, or health status in service delivery.

**BIPOC students:** Students that identify as Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Colour.

**Bishop's community:** All students, staff, faculty, management, and volunteers who study or work at Bishop's University, either remotely or in person.

**Coping skills:** The methods a person uses to deal with stressful situations. These may help a person face a situation, take action, and be flexible and persistent in solving problems.

**Dual continuum of mental health and wellbeing:** Mental health promotion can be conceived of on a dual continuum model (see Figure 1 below). The intent of promoting mental health in line with this model is to target all members of the population, both with and without the presence of mental illness symptoms and support all individuals to build more positive mental health.<sup>1</sup>

**Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI):** EDI is an umbrella term for all the work contributing to equity and inclusion. It intersects with and may include various kinds of social justice work, including anti-racism, decolonization, and Reconciliation. For more information on EDI work at Bishop's, see [link](#).

**Flourishing:** “A state where individuals combine a high level of subjective well-being with an optimal level of psychological and social functioning”.<sup>6</sup>

**Harm reduction:** An approach to health promotion that focuses on reducing the negative consequences of behaviours that could pose a risk to one’s health rather than needing the behaviour to stop.<sup>1</sup>

**Languishing:** “A state where low levels of subjective well-being are combined with low levels of psychological and social well-being”.<sup>6</sup>

**LGBTQ2S+ Students:** Students who identify as having sexual orientations and gender identities that are not heterosexual or cisgender. LGBTQ2S+ is an acronym that stands for that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, Two-Spirit.

**Mental Health:** Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well, and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to

make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right. And it is crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development.<sup>7</sup>

**Mental Health Emergency:** Any situation that puts a person at risk of harming themselves or others. This may also include situations that put them at risk of being unable to care for themselves.

**Mental Health Literacy:** Mental health literacy includes the ability to recognize psychological stress as well as specific disorders, attitudes that facilitate recognition, and knowledge and beliefs about a) self-help interventions, b) risk factors and causes of mental illness, c) professional help services, and d) how to seek mental health information.

**Positive Mental Health:** Positive mental health focuses on the positive mental aspects of a human being and their potential for growth, such as strengths and abilities, happiness, qualities such as responsibility, courage, creativity, and perseverance, as well as the material and social resources that promote or support them. A person with a high level of positive mental health is said to have thriving mental health, and a person with a low level is said to have languishing mental health.<sup>8</sup>

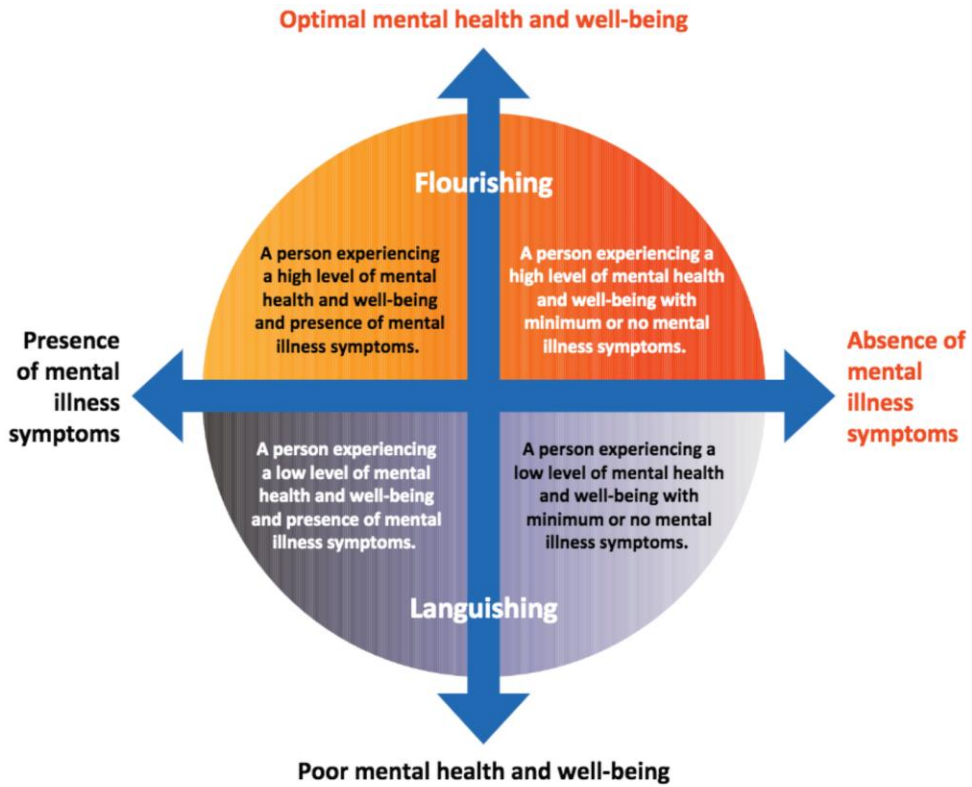
**Students Representative Council (SRC):** “The Bishop’s University Students Representative Council, SRC for short, is a non-profit student-run organization whose mandate is to represent and amplify the voices of students, not only at The University but also at the provincial and national level.”<sup>9</sup>

**Stigma:** Stigma includes feelings of embarrassment about seeking help or fear of discrimination due to mental illness. It can be shaped through individual comments or discriminatory actions and, more broadly, by societal factors such as exclusionary policies and social beliefs.

**Student Community:** All persons who pursue, on a full-time or part-time basis, a course of study within the university.

**Resilience:** The process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioural flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands.

**Figure 1:** From Canadian Standards Association. (2020). Mental Health and Wellbeing for Post Secondary Students.



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