



CANADIAN ALLIANCE OF STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS ALLIANCE CANADIENNE DES ASSOCIATIONS ÉTUDIANTES

Executive Summary: A Roadmap For Federal Action on Student Mental Health

Mental health is a growing concern for all Canadians. To date, it is estimated that approximately 20% of Canadians will experience some sort of mental illness in their lifetime¹. It also remains a pressing issue for students across Canadian campuses as institutions continue to signal a rise in the number of mental health cases.

The Canadian Alliance of Student Associations has put forward a policy paper that explores the role the federal government plays with respect to mental health policy in the post-secondary education (PSE) sector, as well as mental illness detection, prevention, and intervention for post-secondary students in Canada. More specifically, CASA examines ways in which the federal government can implement a sustainable mental health policy in the post-secondary education sector by addressing five areas of concern:

- 1) The lack of cohesion and collaboration at the Pan-Canadian level
- 2) Stigma associated with mental illness
- 3) Insufficiencies in national data collection on mental health
- 4) Lack of funding in the sector
- 5) The lack of financial support for affected Canada student loan recipients

CASA supports a post-secondary system that is accessible, affordable, innovative and of the highest quality.

Policy solutions to improve student mental health

Mental health is a fundamental component of overall health. As mental health issues and illness continue to affect post-secondary students across the nation, fostering mental health through good public policy remains truly important.

1. Establishing a pan-Canadian approach aimed for post-secondary institutions
 - CASA advocate that the Public Health Agency of Canada review the current Strengthened Integrated Pan-Canadian Healthy Living Strategy Framework and make mental illness detection prevention, and intervention for youth in post-secondary an imminent priority.
 - CASA recommends that the federal government facilitate a mental health forum at the pan-Canadian level, aimed at developing multi-dimensional policy frameworks to address mental health issues in the PSE sector in a strategic and systematic manner.
 - *Establishing an intersectoral cooperation is critical because addressing health issues goes far beyond the mandate of one sector alone. Establishing a pan-Canadian approach to mental health for PSE students in Canada can effectively tackle some of the most pressing issues.*

¹ Mental Health Commission of Canada. *Making the Case for Investing in Mental Health in Canada*. 2013.

Accessible Online: http://strategy.mentalhealthcommission.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Case_for_Investment_Mar2013_ENG.pdf, p.2.

2. Improving mental health services on campus by tackling stigma
 - CASA advocate that the federal government, through the Mental Health Commission of Canada, actively pursue campaigns on Canadian campuses aimed at decreasing the stigma associated with individuals suffering from mental health issues, by allotting the MHCC a dedicated funding stream in the amount of no less than \$4.5 million per year for the remainder of their mandate.
 - *Research shows that anti-stigma campaigns successfully increase awareness and decrease discrimination against people suffering from mental health.² This is an excellent opportunity for the government to take action, to ensure that all post-secondary students in need of mental health services feel comfortable accessing the resources available to them.*
3. Improving mental health data through comprehensive measurement tools and common indicators
 - CASA advocate that Health Canada and Statistics Canada identify the areas lacking information with respect to mental health issues in youth, specifically at the post-secondary level, and they actively gather data on the demand for various mental health services and delivery systems on campuses nationwide.
 - CASA recommends the federal government undertake an extensive study at the national level to better understand the effects of mental illness on students, to produce data that will be used to guide future initiatives, and to better determine the focus and results of targeted efforts.
 - *The lack of information with regards to mental health in the PSE sector is another area of concern especially on specific groups and cohorts in the population, namely Indigenous peoples, military, and youth.³ In order to improve the mental health of young Canadians, the federal government needs to place greater emphasis on acquiring proper information, as a first step toward the creating and implementation of good social policy.*
4. Increasing investments and support in mental health
 - CASA advocate that the federal government, provinces, and institutions collaborate in order to evaluate how federal support can best improve outcomes.
 - CASA recommend that funding allocation be based on research and strategic planning.
 - CASA advocate that the federal government commit to increasing mental health investments in accordance with the MHCC's funding proposal outlined in the national mental health strategy *Changing Directions, Changing Lives*.
 - *Though much attention has been drawn to the issue of mental health over the past decade than ever before, the sector was long neglected and underfunded, creating an important build up of unaddressed mental health problems across the board. Mental illness is still a problem, requiring more attention, more policy action, and an ever-growing amount of financing. Resources in the field are still very limited, and improvements are necessary.*
5. Reduce financial barriers for youth by better supporting current and future students that suffer from mental health
 - CASA recommends the federal government increase the value of Canada Student Grants to account for inflation from the time the grants were introduced in 2009, increase the proportion of non-repayable grants in the financial aid package with growth tied to no less than the rate of inflation, and make the Canada Student Grant accessible to graduate students, and creating a grant for graduate students with high financial need.

² Whalen, David. *The Stigma Associated with Mental Illness..Op.Cit.*, note 85.

³ Mental Health Commission of Canada. *Issue : Data. Op. Cit.*, note 98.

- CASA recommends that the CLSP create a separate stream within the Repayment Assistance Plan for students suffering from mental illness and that are unable to follow the regular repayment plan.
- CASA recommends that the CSLP create more robust outreach initiatives in order to ensure that all Canadian loan recipients be made aware of the existence of this program.
- *Financial obstacles make students even more vulnerable to mental health problems and illness, and may deter others from entering PSE. Financially supporting Canada student loan applicants is a clear area whereby the federal government can make a considerable impact for affected students and graduates, as well as youth that have had to take a break from studying or were forced to drop out of PSE due to mental illness. This can be done by increasing the proportions of non-repayable grants and supporting loan recipients through RAP.*

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