

Mental health housecalls new student strategy at University of Guelph

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Students in residence at the University of Guelph shouldn't be surprised if the president of the school knocks on their door starting Monday.

That's because president Franco Vaccarino along with other administrators, faculty members and counsellors will be making house calls to check on the mental well-being of students.

- [Guelph university execs check door-to-door on student mental health](#)
- [University of Guelph takes hard look at student mental health](#)

It's a follow-up to a program the university ran in the winter semester earlier this year [after reports four students died by suicide](#) at the school.

Patrick Kelly oversees the housecalls program. He told CBC it received a positive response in the winter by those knocking on doors and the students.

"We had some students who had faculty visit and they said, 'it's nice to know that I'm one of 300 in that lecture, but that individual made time to come through so now I know that they're approachable and they care about me and it's not just their job that they're doing, that they are taking some of their own time to come visit,'" Kelly told CBC News.

'They were actually interested'

He said there were a couple of great stories that came out of the winter term door knocking. One was that Vaccarino sat down with a student and jammed on a guitar for a while. In another visit, a professor just happened upon a group of his own students working on a project for his class. The professor sat down with the students and they just talked.

Second-year biomedical sciences student Sara Pianta received one of those door knocks and said although at first she felt intimidated, she ended up having a long and helpful conversation.

- **Mental health petition creator 'really glad' at UW response**

"After talking to them and seeing they were actually interested in my student experience, it was something that really stuck with me," Pianta was quoted in a release from the school. "I was surprised that not only were they coming around, but they were genuinely inquiring about our experience."

Talk to 2,000 students

Kelly said the first six weeks of the school year can be a tumultuous time for students, particularly those in first year. For many, they're leaving home for the first time, living on their own, setting their own schedules and may experience peer pressure that was different than high school.

For many students, it can be overwhelming.

- **More counsellors needed to address mental health on campus, student advocate says**

Research shows "the first six weeks in terms of transition, that's important that if we can do the outreach and if students can make connections with professionals outside the classroom then they're more likely to have a better transition, feel more connected to the university," he said.

The housecalls program will run Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, Oct. 2-3-4. Kelly said they have 85 volunteers who will knock on roughly 700 doors each night and expect to talk to more than 2,000 students.