



VANCOUVER COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Mental Health and Well-being Framework



2022-2026



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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge that Vancouver Community College is located on the traditional and unceded territories of the x^wməθk^wəy̓ əm (Musqueam), S^kw^x wú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilw̓ ətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples who have been stewards of this land from time immemorial.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear VCC community,

For much of history, mental health has been tragically misunderstood, but I believe our growing knowledge, awareness, and compassion has great potential to save lives and strengthen communities. This Mental Health and Well-being Framework puts such progress into action at VCC.

Supporting mental health and well-being is closely tied to VCC's commitments to justice, equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization (JEDI-d), all of which play major roles in our long-term strategic plan for the college. VCC strives to innovate, engage, and excel for years to come, and this hinges on us caring for and supporting each other well.

No-one is meant to endure mental-health challenges alone. Whether you have a diagnosed mental illness or an addiction, or are experiencing grief, depression, anxiety, burnout, or even "everyday stress," you deserve to find help easily and without stigma.

Wholly and meaningfully supporting mental health and well-being at VCC will take time, effort, systemic changes, and many conversations. However, I take heart in the fact that this framework is based on quality research and customized to our unique VCC community.

I applaud VCC's Mental Health and Well-being Steering Committee and the representatives from SUVCC, CUPE and the FA for their timely and thoughtful work on this project, as well as the community members who offered over 1,500 responses to surveys and dialogues.

As we shape the future of VCC together, I urge you all to join me in continuing to learn about mental health and building a community that leaves no-one behind.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A Patel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ajay Patel
President and CEO
Vancouver Community College

ENDORSEMENT



Dear VCC community,

This framework represents such an important milestone on VCC's ongoing journey to create community conditions deeply conducive to mental health and well-being.

From the outset, the framework is articulated in specific and careful ways designed to set the intent and mission underpinning a collective vision of VCC as a mentally healthy community. Each of these elements were co-developed in partnership with the VCC community members, helping to ensure that the framework is as responsive as possible to the community it intends to serve.

Each of the commitments described in the framework, ranging from the overall approach to consideration of support services, creates such a strong opportunity for meaningful movement towards a preferred vision of campus mental health at Vancouver Community College.

In keeping with foundational documents like the 2015 **Okanagan Charter: An international charter for health-promoting universities and colleges**, this framework avoids over-emphasizing distressed individual community members as the only site for intervention. Rather, the framework clearly articulates the imperative for mobilizing systemic, environmental, and community-centred change all in service of mental health for all. This will help to ensure the most comprehensive of responses as the campus breathes life into the framework.

The Vancouver Community College Mental Health and Well-being Framework holds promise for a transformative approach to promoting individual and collective community mental health and well-being. The notions of influencing the conditions that affect well-being, collaborating across boundaries and differences, and democratizing who can assist when someone is in distress all inspire a new starting place for such an important endeavour.

Congratulations to the VCC Community and everyone who helped contribute to this important document! The implementation of the intent, mission, and commitments of this framework will generate momentum and change and I'm looking forward to hearing more as your efforts progress.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jonny Morris'. The signature is stylized and written over a horizontal line.

Jonny Morris
Chief Executive Officer
Canadian Mental Health Association BC Division



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The need for post-secondary institutions like ours to cultivate an environment that supports mental health and well-being has already been recognized for decades. Research has emphasized the value of a campus community that is purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring and celebrative.

This Mental Health and Well-being Framework is meant to guide Vancouver Community College's (VCC) efforts in promoting mental health for the next five years (2022-2026). It was guided by VCC's Mental Health and Well-being Steering Committee, whose members were brought together from across the college.

This framework is the result of an extensive consultation process and website audit, involving focus groups, community dialogues, and a campus-wide survey that engaged a wide range of VCC students and employees, including staff, faculty, and administrators ("our community").

This framework was informed by the needs and priorities of the VCC community along with sound theory and recognized best practices in campus mental health. Over the next five years, VCC's Mental Health and Well-being Steering Committee will lead us in implementing this framework and monitoring VCC's progress.

Through the consultation process, six commitments emerged in our ongoing quest to be a mentally healthy community. Each of our commitments involves a number of complementary ideals to which we aspire across our college.



ORIENTATION

Throughout this framework, we refer to health, mental health, and well-being. We understand these key concepts in a more affirmative, appreciative, and inclusive sense than is often found in common use.

Health is holistic and inclusive well-being (physical, mental, social, cultural, spiritual, ecological, economic) that is much more than the absence of illness or injury. Health applies both to individuals and the wider communities they comprise.

Mental health involves thriving rather than just surviving, flourishing instead of languishing, whether mental illness is present or not. As mentally healthy individuals, we are able to exercise our capacities, deal with life's pressures, function in a productive way, and benefit our communities. As a mentally healthy community, we will build and draw on our collective capacity, respond positively to the challenges and opportunities of public life, work collaboratively toward productive outcomes, and promote dignity and equity among our members.

Promoting mental health is about helping individuals and communities to better manage mental health and the factors that influence it. For us at VCC, this means fostering personal resilience among our members and shaping a natural and social environment that is favorable for everyone. Our efforts will attach high value to personal agency, wholesome relationships, diverse cultures, equal opportunities, and fairness. Accordingly, our promotion of mental health at VCC will:

- involve equipping our community members to influence the conditions that affect our well-being (including our structures and systems) rather than simply trying to function under such conditions;
- be a shared collaborative endeavour with our respective roles and expertise complementing each other rather than engaging in fragmented and competing efforts;
- involve adopting initiatives through a participatory, consensus-based process that elicits invested ownership rather than constrained decision-making and adherence;
- prompt us to assist one another in a routine way rather than viewing care as a duty only for professionals who provide specialized help;
- lead us, in situations where further assistance is needed, to enable each other to better attend to our own health and advance our shared well-being.



INTENT

To identify what a mentally healthy campus community looks like for VCC and to inspire us in collective pursuit of this vision

The consultation process for this Mental Health and Well-being Framework made it clear that VCC members want to see our community enjoy mental health through a culture marked by:

- understanding, kindness, and compassion;
- strong connectedness and mutual support;
- regard for personal agency, diversity, and social justice.

The Commitments section of the framework further describes this vision. The need for higher education to contribute to enhancing the health of citizens and communities is also recognized by the 2015 **Okanagan Charter: an international charter for health-promoting universities and colleges**. Promoting well-being within the college community not only helps our students complete their programs and earn credentials, but it also equips students and employees to improve lives beyond our campuses and is inherent in VCC's focus on experiential learning.



MISSION

To help our learning community think, speak, and act in appropriate and constructive ways regarding mental health

The consultation process for this Mental Health and Well-being Framework confirmed that VCC members want to see our campus community promote mental health and well-being by:

Building capacity and enhancing literacy

- Developing knowledge, skills, systems, and leadership to encourage cohesion on our mental health commitments
- Enhancing our infrastructure to support mental health projects and partnerships
- Empowering our members by elevating engagement, strengthening our connections, and utilizing our resources
- Extending our ability to understand and influence factors that impact our individual and collective well-being


Engaging in routine dialogue to foster empathy and normalize discourse

- Relating to each other as fellow humans through speaking but also truly listening
- Leaving conversations with a better understanding and appreciation of others, their experiences, and the different perspectives that make up our community
- Building trust that enables us to deliberate and strive for consensus while respecting our differences and our interdependence
- Recognizing and acknowledging common vulnerabilities in order to foster considerate discourse and shared responsibility for well-being

Collaborating, respecting difference, and working towards consensus

- Gratefully drawing on our rich social and cultural diversity to incorporate different experiences, frames of reference, insights, and concerns
- Building bonds within and bridges across departments and schools to benefit from a wide range of interdisciplinary expertise and gain complementary perspectives
- Cultivating a team spirit across our institution based on respect, competence, contribution, and accountability
- Providing exemplary leadership by modelling nurturing, transparent relationships, sharing power, and offering support

This mission recognizes that capacity building is not just a means to our goal of shared mental health; it is an integral part of it. Dialogue calls us to practice empathy and encourages us to offer support. Fully representative participation helps build a caring community whose members are assured we all matter and belong and are invested in both receiving and giving support.



“Health promotion requires a positive, proactive approach, moving ‘beyond a focus on individual behaviour towards a wide range of social and environmental interventions’ that create and enhance health in settings, organizations and systems, and address health determinants.”

– 2015, OKANAGAN CHARTER: AN INTERNATIONAL CHARTER FOR HEALTH PROMOTING UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES



COMMITMENTS

Through the consultation process, six commitments emerged in our ongoing quest to be a mentally healthy community. These commitments pertain to several interrelated aspects of our life and work at VCC.

- 1. Overall Approach** We seek to promote health (including mental health) with an overarching focus on well-being and relate to our community's needs in a consistent, holistic, integrated, proactive, and culturally attentive way.
- 2. Organizational Systems** We seek to have diverse perspectives on well-being (including mental health) shape our institutional structures and operational practices.
- 3. Work and Learning Environment** We seek to have well-being (including mental health) influence our decisions around design and allocations of physical space as well as our provisions for work and leisure time.
- 4. Community Connectedness** We seek to strengthen positive relational and social connections among our members within and across departments and cultivate a culture of belonging, engagement, mutual support, and shared responsibility.
- 5. Educational Endeavour** We seek to develop well-being literacy (including mental health) as an essential component of our educational mandate and equip our staff and students to make contributions to the health of the campus community and the broader public.
- 6. Support Services** We seek to provide our community with safe and culturally responsive mental health resources both routinely and in times of urgent need. We also seek to raise awareness of these resources and to make them as convenient, direct, encouraging, and restorative as possible.



OVERALL APPROACH

We seek to promote health (including mental health) with an overarching focus on well-being and relate to our community's needs in a consistent, holistic, integrated, proactive, and culturally attentive way.

- VCC appreciates that various dimensions of health (e.g., physical, mental, emotional, social, spiritual, ecological, economic) are intertwined and deserve equal respect and concurrent attention.
- VCC recognizes that individual and collective health are interdependent and that improvement of one contributes to improvement of the other.
- VCC understands that health is related to various contextual factors and environmental influences that require improvement.
- VCC endeavors to enable our members to exercise agency, autonomy, and accountability in working towards personal and shared well-being.
- VCC talks about mental health challenges in common and normalized ways and supports struggling members with the same regard as those with physical health challenges.

ORGANIZATIONAL SYSTEMS

We seek to have diverse perspectives on well-being (including mental health) shape our institutional structures and operational practices.

- VCC expressly includes mental health and well-being in our vision, values, mission statements, work philosophy, personnel development, communication practices, and provision of services.
- VCC's governance and administrative structures reflect our diverse community, demonstrate openness, uphold social justice and impartiality, and pursue decolonization.
- VCC's academic structures appreciate and celebrate our diversity, encourage inclusion, enable equity and respect, and incorporate indigenous ways of knowing, teaching and learning.
- VCC's operational practices embody principles of mutual respect and responsibility.
- VCC's policies ensure representation and are attentive to the impacts on minorities or disadvantaged groups.
- VCC honours the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and responds to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action addressing the historical exclusion of Indigenous people in education.
- VCC respects the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and supports action to address climate change and its adverse impacts including harmful effects on mental health.



“In essence, we should be preparing students for the work of the world, not just for the world of work.”

– J. PORRITT, 2012. UNIVERSITIES MUST LEAD THE WAY ON THE SUSTAINABILITY AGENDA



WORK AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

We seek to have well-being (including mental health) influence our decisions around design and allocations of physical space as well as our provisions for work and leisure time.

- VCC provides safe and attractive spaces in which to meet, relax, and engage in recreational / leisure activity or gather for cultural purposes.
- VCC offers work and study spaces that support physical and mental health.
- VCC encourages and ensures meaningful breaks during the work or school day.
- VCC encourages and enables employees and students to adopt a healthy work-leisure balance.

“If the frogs in a pond started behaving strangely, our first reaction would not be to punish them or even to treat them. Instinctively, we'd wonder what was going on in the pond.”

– DAN REIST, UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA





COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS

We seek to strengthen positive relational and social connections among our members within and across departments and cultivate a culture of belonging, engagement, mutual support, and shared responsibility.

- VCC fosters connectedness in a wide variety of formal and informal ways in the workplace, classroom, and campus community.
- VCC promotes and practices dialogue that involves our members in decision-making and community building.
- VCC prioritizes clear, respectful communication by notifying our members of developments and opportunities, providing mechanisms for routine feedback, and responding promptly to inquiries and requests.
- VCC encourages meaningful, regular check-in sessions for our employees and students.
- VCC provides opportunities for community story-sharing and celebration.
- VCC seeks to emphasize “community” in its name, contributing to our neighbourhoods by forming strong connections and partnerships with diverse bodies including Indigenous groups/nations.

EDUCATIONAL ENDEAVOUR

We seek to develop well-being literacy (including mental health) as an essential component of our educational mandate and equip our staff and students to make contributions to the health of the campus community and the broader public.

- VCC incorporates well-being (including mental health) in our statements of academic goals and in our institutional learning objectives.
- VCC infuses well-being (including mental health) into curriculums across disciplines, professional development programs, teaching and learning workshops, course management, and assessment processes for staff and students.
- VCC takes a decolonizing perspective on collective health and well-being and recognizes the meaning of our place on unceded traditional Indigenous territory.
- VCC nurtures a sense of mutual responsibility for our ecosystem and cares about its relation to mental health and well-being.
- VCC cultivates mental health literacy in our informal and casual conversations.
- VCC equips employees and students to navigate the challenges of post-secondary life, thereby decreasing mental health emergencies.
- VCC provides training opportunities for students and employees to develop cultural appreciation and sensitivity, build communication skills, and learn team building and conflict resolution techniques.
- VCC educates students and employees to recognize when individuals may be signaling for help, how to inquire with sensitivity, and provide immediate assistance or refer them to further support.



“Higher education has a unique opportunity and responsibility to provide transformative education.”

– 2015, OKANAGAN CHARTER: AN INTERNATIONAL CHARTER FOR HEALTH PROMOTING UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES



SUPPORT SERVICES

We seek to provide our community with safe and culturally responsive mental health resources both routinely and in times of urgent need. We also seek to raise awareness of these resources and to make them as convenient, direct, smooth, encouraging, and restorative as possible.

- VCC makes appropriate self-support resources clearly available in a variety of ways including a dedicated webpage with helpful links and other awareness materials and campaigns.
- VCC strives to make professional trauma informed counselling services promptly and readily accessible to our students and employees.
- VCC provides our students and employees with caring mental health assistance and accommodations to support them to remain on or return to campus, as part of our Academic Policies and Collective Agreements.
- VCC encourages and facilitates access to more intensive and culturally sensitive mental health care and services for our community members.

“Health is created and lived by people within the settings of their everyday life; where they learn, work, play and love.”

– WHO, 1986. OTTAWA CHARTER FOR HEALTH PROMOTION



IMPLEMENTATION

Activating the Mental Health and Well-being Framework will take planning and implementation efforts on the part of the entire college community. While this is a shared responsibility, our Mental Health and Well-being Steering Committee will take a principal role in driving and supporting these efforts by working collaboratively with departments and existing committees throughout the college. The Steering Committee will also direct its focus towards:

- establishing new working groups that will set specific objectives to ensure progress;
- strengthening communication and integration with other key college-wide planning initiatives (e.g., Indigenization, EDI, Campus Master Plan) in ways that emphasize collective and coordinated action.

Promoting mental health is “the process of enhancing the capacities of individuals and communities to take control over their lives and improve their mental health. Mental health promotion uses strategies that foster supportive environments and individual resilience, while showing respect for culture, equity, social justice, interconnections and personal dignity.”

– JOUBERT & RAEBURN, 1998



EVALUATION

It is critically important for us to assess the impact and value of this framework and its implementation in ways appropriate for the health promotion endeavour it is. This means checking for progress in fulfilling our mission and in meeting our declared commitments. It involves monitoring processes for consistent application of the framework's values and principles in our everyday practice at VCC. It will require our use of both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide various measures of activation and influence. Our assessment should be alert to the ways in which our vision is being pursued and realized, and thus be responsive to what our campus members show and say about how its implementation affects them. Evaluation will, therefore, include:

- identifying and attending to indicators at both an individual and collective level;
- tracking relevant markers of reach and effects (e.g., outputs in #s of events held, participants involved, policies affected, resources developed, services accessed);
- inquiring in ways that capture and describe impact in participants' actual experience, from their own expression of what involvement has meant and been worth to them;
- engaging in dialogue around questions that emerge from the collected material as to how well the initiative is serving the diverse needs of our campus community.



APPENDIX

EXTERNAL MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

APPENDIX – EXTERNAL MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

RESOURCES FOR UNDERSTANDING AND FACILITATING DIALOGUE

Dialogue can bring people together and bridge divides. The goal of dialogue is to leave the conversation with a better understanding of a topic as well as different perspectives and experiences that contribute to deeper understanding.

- Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research (CISUR).

HEALTH PROMOTION PRINCIPLES, STRATEGIES, AND PROCESSES

Various strategic documents lay out health promotion principles, processes, and strategies that may be useful to further mental health in our campus community and beyond.

- A Comprehensive Approach to Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention for Colleges and Universities: Insights from the JED Campus Program [PDF]
- A Guide to Campus Mental Health Action Planning [PDF]
- Capacity to Connect: Supporting Students' Mental Health and Wellness
- Framework for Evaluating Mental Health and Wellness Education and Training Resources
- Okanagan Charter: An international charter for health promoting universities and colleges
- Post-secondary Student Mental Health: Guide to a Systemic Approach [PDF]
- The National Standard for Mental Health and Well-Being for Post-Secondary Students

POST-SECONDARY MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES (ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN)

An environmental scan of current mental health resources was conducted of 25 post-secondary institutions throughout British Columbia. The scan included visitation of all 25 post-secondary school websites, specifically webpages that included topics and keywords such as mental health, counselling, student well-being, health, and wellness, etc. VCC may wish to draw inspiration from the following types of resources and supports.

- **Counselling for underrepresented groups**

A majority of post-secondary schools offer counselling to students and staff (often through separate services). A few institutions accommodate the counselling needs of particular sub-communities (e.g., Simon Fraser University's services for Indigenous, international, or Black students). Campuses who do not offer specifically tailored counselling services may offer external links to community resources. Providing diverse counselling services can reduce barriers to access for students seeking help.

APPENDIX – EXTERNAL MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

• Self-help Resources

A common feature for many post-secondary schools is a self-help page that lists many mental health resources. These pages typically adopt a holistic approach, listing different resources for physical, emotional, intellectual, social, spiritual, environmental, and occupational health. These resources may also be offered in different languages. Some common resources include:

- 24 hour Indian Residential Schools Crisis Line
- Anxiety BC
- Anxiety Canada
- Bounce Back
- Crisis Centres
- First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line
- Foundry BC
- HeadsUpGuys
- Healing in Colour
- HealthLink BC
- HeretoHelp
- Indian Residential School Survivors Society (IRSSS)
- Kelty Mental Health
- Kids Help Phone
- Kuu-us Crisis Line
- MindHealth BC
- Mood Disorders Association of BC
- Open Mind BC
- Wellness Together Canada
- Y Mind: YMCA Mental Wellness Programs

Many schools also reference self-help apps that practice mindfulness, meditation, mental health check-ins, learning coping skills, and more. Common apps mentioned are:

- Booster Buddy App
- Calm
- Daylio
- Happify
- Headspace
- Healthy Minds
- Insight Timer
- MindDoc: Your Companion
- MindShift CBT
- MoodMission
- MyLife
- Sanvello
- The Safe Place

• Peer Mentorship

Peer mentors or volunteers may also contribute to campus mental health by hosting outreach events and sharing health information on different mental health topics. Well-trained peer volunteers (sometimes referred to from an Indigenous perspective as “cousins”) may offer activities, one-on-one supports, or provide referrals or information about resources. Other peer wellness approaches may offer non-judgmental listening and teaching of new skills for healthier coping. Examples include:

- Peer Wellness Program at Kwantlen Polytechnic University
- Peer Wellness Sessions at Langara College
- Health Peers Program at Simon Fraser University

APPENDIX – EXTERNAL MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

For international students, a “buddy” program is often available to pair new international students with current domestic students to help ease their transitions. Such peer-led programs may offer a form of social connection and reduce gaps in knowledge of available supports. For example:

- International Buddy Program at the Justice Institute of British Columbia.

- **Mental Health Promotion Events**

Mental health-focused campus events can create opportunities for social connection while promoting mental health education. Events (such as THRIVE week) can highlight different mental health supports on campus and offer targeted learning. Similarly, campuses can promote mental health and well-being by providing a wide variety of workshops. Such workshops may focus on building resilience, managing stress, mindfulness, self-care, sleep, and eating habits.



CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

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Healthy Minds | Healthy Campuses (HM|HC) is a province-wide community of practice that engages post-secondary institutions in a mandate of promoting mental health and healthier relationships with substances on campus. VCC enlisted the consulting services of the HM|HC Support Team to help develop the Mental Health and Well-being Framework. The contributing authors for this project are Bakht Anwar, Mahboubeh Asgari, Tim Dyck, and Sonia Heer.

Mental Health & Well-being Steering Committee:

Nona Coles (VCCFA)
Kate Gates (Counselling)
Eddy Gooch (Student)
Reba Noel (EDI)
Ariele North (Project Administrator)
Phoebe Patigdas (VCCSU)
Caralee Maloney (Employee Exp. Delegate)
Clayton Munro, Co-Chair (Student & Enrolment Services)
Vivian Munroe (CUPE 4627)
Elaine Pedersen, Co-Chair (People Services)
Jacqueline Shehadeh / Darko Bubica (OH&S)
Hemvir Singh (Student)
Elder Jean Wasegijig (Elder in Residence)
Jo-Ellen Zakoor (Administrator, Dean Health Sciences)

Mental health involves thriving rather than just surviving, flourishing instead of languishing whether mental illness is also present or not. For individuals it is a state in which the person “realizes his or her abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”

– HERRMAN, SAXENA & MOODIE, 2005



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