

Carleton University

# Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy

2015 - 2018

A Guide for Making Carleton University  
a Resilient and Thriving Workplace

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***“Carleton University values organizational excellence and the physical and mental health and well-being of its faculty and staff. It recognizes that individual health practices as well as the social, physical and psychological environment are important factors that collectively contribute to each faculty and staff member’s personal success and positive contribution to the university’s mission. The purpose of this strategy is to support and uphold Carleton’s commitment to ensuring the university is a healthy, safe and supportive place to work for all faculty and staff.”***

\_\_\_\_\_Adapted from Carleton University’s Healthy Workplace Policy \_\_\_\_\_

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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# Contents

Message from the Assistant Vice-President (University Services) .....	5
Why is Carleton University focusing on workplace mental health?.....	7
What is mental health? .....	7
Carleton University’s commitment to a psychologically safe and healthy workplace.....	8
Guiding Principles.....	9
Guiding Principle 1.....	9
Guiding Principle 2.....	10
Guiding Principle 3.....	11
Goals and Objectives .....	12
Goal 1.....	12
Goal 2.....	13
Goal 3.....	14
As Carleton goes forward.....	16

## **Message from the Assistant Vice-President (University Services)**

Dear Members of the Carleton Community,

We are witnessing an unprecedented interest in and growing awareness of the prevalence and impact of mental health issues across our society. With the lifetime incidence of mental health problems of 1 in 5 people, we all know someone who is affected or who has been touched by the mental health challenges of friends, family or colleagues. But with growing awareness, we are also seeing concerted efforts to reduce stigma surrounding mental health problems and to better understand how we can promote psychological health and resilience and lessen the burden of mental health issues.

To this end, organizations and institutions are increasingly recognizing the important and unique roles they play in addressing the psychological welfare of their members - what organizational factors promote mental health and well-being and what policies and practices are needed to support their members when they are experiencing problems.

Over the past five years, Carleton University has taken active steps to address the health and well-being of its students, faculty and staff. In 2009, Carleton launched a university-wide initiative to develop and implement a Student Mental Health Framework, the first of its kind in Canada. This award-winning initiative established mental health as a priority on campus and paved the way for a culture shift, the benefits of which we see today.

In the same year, the university adopted Excellence Canada's Healthy Workplace criteria to promote an ongoing culture of health and well-being – physical and mental - and formally instituted its Healthy Workplace Policy in 2010 to “encourage the health and well-being of all faculty and staff and create a healthy, productive workforce where faculty and staff feel valued, motivated and engaged.” The Healthy Workplace is one of the university's strategic goals and mental health is one of three pillars of the Healthy Workplace 2014-2016 Plan.

But there is much more to be done. In 2013, the Mental Health Commission of Canada released its National Standards for “Psychological health and safety in the workplace - prevention, promotion, and guidance to staged implementation.” This document was commissioned in recognition of the instrumental role that organizations play in

promoting mental health and well-being in the workplace. While voluntary, these standards now provide a blueprint for organizations to review programs and policies and implement best practices to optimize psychological health in the workplace, while mitigating risk for employees and organizations alike.

Based on this national initiative, Carleton is taking further steps to embark on a university-wide **Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy** to systematically assess and enhance mental health programs, policies and initiatives. As we announced in fall 2014, Carleton University is proud to have been chosen to participate in the Mental Health Commission of Canada's National Case Study that will document organizations' journeys in implementing the Standard. The results of this study will serve to inform best practices, as well as provide a basis for further revisions to the Standard.

The university has established a Mental Health Working Group, as well as a Mental Health Advisory Committee with representation from across campus to assist it with the work outlined in this strategy.

I look forward to working with all members of the Carleton Community in this very important work.

Sincerely,

Ed Kane

Assistant Vice-President (University Services) and

Chair, Healthy Workplace Committee and Mental Health Working Group

## Why is Carleton University focusing on workplace mental health?

Carleton University values organizational excellence and recognizes the role that organizational factors can have on the physical and mental health and well-being of its faculty and staff. Faculty and staff are the backbone of the university. A psychologically healthy and safe workplace provides the foundation for faculty and staff to realize their potential and effectively contribute to the university's mission: It further helps ensure that students receive the education, support and services they need to make a meaningful difference in their lives. Unhealthy workplaces can lead to increased rates of absenteeism, disability, turnover and lost productivity. In contrast, a workplace that supports mental health and well-being is experienced as a culture that is respectful and supportive, where faculty and staff:

- Feel recognized for the work they do;
- Enjoy a positive social environment that fosters a sense of belonging and purpose, and allows faculty and staff to fully use their talents and work to their full potential;
- Enjoy an appropriate balance between work and personal life responsibilities;
- Feel secure and enjoy a physically and psychologically safe and healthy work environment and,
- Have access to meaningful opportunities to adopt healthy lifestyle practices and coping skills to manage their lives in healthy, productive ways.

Carleton University is focusing on workplace mental health initiatives to further support and uphold its commitment to ensuring the university is a healthy, safe and supportive place to work for all faculty and staff.

## What is mental health?

According to the World Health Organization, ***“Mental health is a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her own community.”*** As such, ***“Mental health is not merely the absence of mental illness; it is an essential resource for daily living, and the foundation for effective functioning from cradle to grave, enabling people to experience life as***

*meaningful and to be creative, productive members of society.”* (World Health Organization, 2006).

The Carleton University **Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy** is founded on an understanding of mental health that acknowledges the multiple factors that impact mental health and in turn, the impact that mental health has on personal well-being, relationships and the broader community. Carleton University recognizes the benefits that a positive and supportive workplace can have personally on its faculty and staff, and collectively as a learning and research institution. It is about “the way we work” and how we can ensure that our faculty and staff have the most enabling environment to pursue excellence and contribute in meaningful ways.

## **Carleton University’s commitment to a psychologically safe and healthy workplace**

Over the years Carleton, through its many departments, faculties and units, has invested in policies and initiatives to support workplace health and safety. It has launched targeted initiatives promoting healthy living and positive mental health. Faculty and staff benefits support individuals and families in times of need when mental health issues arise, while faculty and staff surveys help monitor the status of health and safety. Feedback and input has been, and will continue to be, gathered to inform programming and respond to faculty and staff concerns. Such efforts have led to results and Carleton can be proud of its high ratings of job satisfaction, engagement and commitment to the university (Duxbury, 2013).

This **Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy** is the next exciting and challenging step in taking a systematic and co-ordinated look at the mental health status of our workplace and using that information to create an integrated approach to enhancing policies, programs and initiatives that promote the mental health and well-being of our faculty and staff. This strategy is founded on three Guiding Principles.

# Guiding Principles

## Guiding Principle 1

### **Both the Institution and the Individual Play Key Roles in Promoting and Maintaining Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being**

Workplace mental health and well-being can be impacted by factors related to both the individual and the institution. Accordingly, practices, policies and programs of the university need to take this into account when decisions are made and when initiatives to promote and support workplace mental health and well-being are developed and implemented. Workplace mental health and well-being are the joint responsibility of members of the university community and of the institution as a whole, in its administrative and leadership roles.

- Workplace mental health strategies are designed with the understanding that organizational factors can impact the mental health and well-being of individuals and teams, and that faculty and staff mental health can impact organizational effectiveness.
- As a result, workplace mental health and well-being is considered a shared responsibility among management, faculty and staff. Each plays a role in contributing to the development and implementation of practices and programs that support mental health, encourage resilience and help members of the university to reach their potential as contributors to the mission of the university. Senior leadership, faculty and staff collaborate to find solutions to problems when they occur.
- The university has a responsibility to identify factors that could have a negative impact on faculty and staff mental health and well-being, as well as a responsibility to address problems when they are identified.
- Similarly, each person has responsibility towards his/her own health and behaviour and recognizes the impact that her/his health and behaviour may have on others.

## **Guiding Principle 2**

### **Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being is Based on a Culture of Respect, Trust, Honesty and Fairness**

A culture of mutual respect, trust and fair treatment provides the foundation for a work-life that honours human needs and rights. It encourages the responsible and compassionate treatment of others, while ensuring that people are treated fairly. It underscores the contribution that each and every person makes to the well-being of fellow colleagues and the overall health and reputation of the institution. It requires that everyone “walks the talk” in contributing to an environment in which ideas can flourish and people can thrive.

- The workplace is based on mutually respectful relationships at Carleton, among its senior leaders, faculty, staff and students. Workplace mental health programs and initiatives strive to foster a workplace culture that is respectful, and characterized by trust, honesty and fairness.
- Senior management’s leadership and commitment to workplace mental health and well-being is clear, visible and ongoing. Not only are legal requirements for a safe and healthy workplace adhered to but the potential impact on workplace mental health and well-being is taken into account when organizational decisions are taken.
- The confidentiality of sensitive information is maintained. Guidelines are provided and disseminated so that managers and supervisors have the knowledge and skills to support this practice. As well, activities associated with workplace mental health planning, data collection and evaluation are conducted in a psychologically safe, confidential and ethical manner.

### **Guiding Principle 3**

#### **Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being Initiatives are based on Best Practices and are Regularly Reviewed and Evaluated in order to Sustain a Supportive Culture and Relevant Programming**

The success of the **Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy** depends on the commitment, engagement and energy of all levels within the university. The university community needs to know and feel that the **Workplace Mental Health and Well-being Strategy** is about the “way we work together,” solve problems, celebrate successes and thrive as individuals and as a community.

This requires structure and resources, active participation and collaboration of faculty, staff and management. It requires evidence that things are happening and making a difference. Faculty and staff need to see the relevance of policies and programs. Management, faculty and staff need the knowledge and skills to effectively support a positive mental health culture and to address issues that may pose risks.

Thus, the sustainability, relevance and impact of the **Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy** will depend on best practices, planning that is based on management, faculty and staff needs, and ongoing review, evaluation, discussion and action.

- Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being programming is based on faculty and staff needs as determined by regular needs assessments.
- Programs and initiatives are based on evidence and current best practices. Consultation with experts and through communities of practice is a regular activity.
- There is a primary focus on mental health and well-being awareness and promotion as well as the development of knowledge and skills for all persons in management and supervisory positions. There is access to meaningful opportunities for all faculty and staff to adopt healthy lifestyle practices and coping skills to manage their lives in healthy productive ways.
- The outcomes and impact of workplace mental health programs and strategies are regularly evaluated and findings are reported, shared and action is taken.

## Goals and Objectives

***Mental health...is about fostering the development of positive mental health by supporting individual resilience, creating supportive environments and addressing the influence of the broader determinants of mental health within the workplace.*** Adapted from, *Improving the Health of Canadians: Exploring Positive Mental Health, Summary Report* - CIHI, 2009

**The Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy** focuses on:

1. The **protection** of our faculty and staff – ensuring that faculty and staff has a psychologically safe environment within which to work and pursue their career goals;
2. The **prevention** of mental health problems – ensuring that the workplace reduces risk for developing or increasing mental health problems, and
3. The **promotion** of mental health and well-being - ensuring that faculty, staff and management has opportunities to learn about and develop mentally healthy approaches to work and personal life.

**To these ends, Carleton University will:**

### **Goal 1: Enhance Mental Health Awareness and Minimize Stigma**

#### **Objectives**

- Enhance awareness of the many causes of mental health problems and the factors that support well-being and resilience.
- Minimize stigma around mental health problems that can act as barriers to individuals feeling valued, contributing fully to Carleton University's mission and to seeking help when needed.

#### **Actions**

- Promote campus-wide awareness of Carleton University's Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy.
- Promote campus-wide awareness of Carleton University's policies that address mental health in the workplace and of the resources that are available to support faculty and staff who may be experiencing mental health problems.

## **Year 1 Priorities**

- Develop a communications plan to enhance awareness and minimize stigma using a variety of media and approaches designed for specific groups.
- Widely disseminate information about the specific resources and benefits available to members of the university.
- Create a website for workplace mental health resources and information.
- Participate in Thrive Week, a national mental health promotion event for colleges and universities.

## **Goal 2: Ensure that Faculty and Staff have the Knowledge, Skills and Tools to Support a Positive Mental Health Culture and Work Environment**

### **Objectives**

- Promote, develop and/or revise organizational policies that impact workplace mental health and safety.
- Provide specific education and training programs based on identified needs to enhance skills and knowledge to minimize risk to mental health and to promote health and well-being.
- Support initiatives that focus on fostering a workplace culture that is respectful and characterized by trust, honesty and fairness.

### **Actions**

- Conduct regular faculty and staff surveys to measure and assess organizational mental health and safety.
- Conduct needs assessments around knowledge and skill-enhancing programs for faculty and staff.
- Conduct a policy review and identify gaps/needs for new or revised policies.
- Develop and implement education and training strategies for specific groups and/or positions based on the results of the needs assessment.
- Make recommendations for and implement new workplace mental health programs based on organizational reviews.

## **Year 1 Priorities**

- Conduct a baseline assessment of organizational mental health and well-being at Carleton University using a standardized tool.
- Conduct follow-up focus groups as appropriate to gain additional information in order to make recommendations for policies and programming.
- Conduct an environmental scan of available resources and training programs that could be incorporated into the Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being priorities.
- Disseminate results and recommendations.

## **Goal 3: Ensure the Sustainability and Ongoing Quality of the University's Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy**

### **Objectives**

- Senior Management takes an active leadership role in the support of the Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy.
- Dedicated resources are allocated to support the strategy.
- The Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy is embedded in the culture, processes and practices across the university.
- Recommendations are based on identified needs and best practices.

### **Actions**

- There is a dedicated team with a specific mandate for the Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy.
- Needs assessments and program evaluations are regularly conducted to identify gaps and emerging issues and to guide policy and programming recommendations.
- The university participates in Excellence Canada's Mental Health@Work certification program to evaluate and recognize the strategy's activities and quality.
- There is ongoing consultation with experts and participation in workplace mental health and well-being communities of practice.
- There is regular reporting to senior management, faculty and staff.

## **Year 1 Priorities**

- Establish a cross-functional Mental Health and Well-Being Advisory Committee with Terms of Reference to act in an advisory capacity.
- Establish a cross-functional Working Group for program decision-making and implementation.
- Develop, launch, and disseminate the Carleton University Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy.
- Participate in the Mental Health Commission of Canada's Case Study.
- Apply for Level 1 Excellence Canada's Mental Health@Work certification program.

## **As Carleton goes forward**

The guiding principles, goals and objectives outlined in this **Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy** have been developed through the wise insights and guidance of a cross-section of Carleton's management, faculty and staff. It is our hope and intention that this strategy will continue to serve our community in its collective efforts to provide, support and enhance a supportive and respectful workplace for all to work, thrive and contribute in meaningful ways.