



MOTION REGARDING INCREASE AND SCOPE OF THE MENTAL HEALTH FEE 2020-10-08

Submitted for: 2020-10-08

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Moved by:	Maheen Akter <i>Vice-President (Student Life)</i>	Current Status:	<input type="checkbox"/> FOR APPROVAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> APPROVED <input type="checkbox"/> POSTPONED <input type="checkbox"/> COMMITTED <input type="checkbox"/> NOT APPROVED
Seconded by:	Libby Williamson <i>AUS VP External</i>		

Issue

Facing both a rigorous postsecondary education and global uncertainty, McGill students continue to need –and lack– adequate access to mental health resources and services. In alignment with ongoing calls for a “Mental Health MyCourses”, an online wellness portal would bridge the academic and wellness dimensions of student life, centralize resources, and clarify pathways of accessing support—especially for equity-seeking populations and those with unique needs and wants.

By increasing the Mental Health Fee from \$0.40 to \$1.66, the SSMU would be able to implement ‘WellnessWorld’ as a software-as-a-service through a 3-year contract to address ongoing student needs and concerns. A portal of this type is vital to ensure students fully benefit from the services and resources provided by the SSMU, Student Services, and the larger community.

Background and Rationale

Ongoing feedback has reported a student desire for a “Mental Health MyCourses”. A team from uOttawa has developed a digital solution of this type, and the opportunity now exists to implement a customized version of “WellnessWorld” for SSMU students, financed through an increase in the Mental Health Fee. WellnessWorld is a digital portal to support students in navigating and accessing wellness resources, and in engaging in the campus community. Through a user-friendly, data-driven interface, WellnessWorld simplifies the process of finding on-campus, online, and



off-campus resources, events, and content, based on students' unique needs and wants.

SSMU Mental Health began collaborating with WellnessWorld in May, spending the summer consulting with student groups while WellnessWorld's technical team developed and launched the platform at uOttawa. The aim of bringing this student-driven solution to McGill is to implement a mode of engagement that overcomes today's saturated systems, fragmented information, and unclear pathways. **Not only will this by-students, for-students portal maximize student buy-in and engagement, it will also address four key gaps identified through consultations:**

- Bridging academics and wellness
- Fostering a social component to wellness
- Streamlining resource navigation
- Connecting with intersectional, identity-matching support options

Upon implementation, WellnessWorld would be hyperlinked through MyCourses, linking students' shared academic experience with a portal that:

- Directs students to services and resources based on their unique needs and wants
- Features curated and original mental health and fitness content
- Centralizes community events and makes content shareable so students can integrate wellness in their interpersonal connections
- Provides anonymized and actionable data so McGill can optimize existing systems

Rather than replacing or duplicating existing systems, this solution brings cohesion between the siloed resources whose efficacy is being undercut by tumultuous navigation and a lack of literacy and therefore engagement, while also adding further value through student-centric content.

WellnessWorld will expand on services currently available by enabling easy connection to the diverse service providers that students still report lacking access to. Intersectional services, trusted online information, self-help resources, and peer-to-peer support are all highlighted by the Mental Health Commission of Canada as being key to student wellbeing, and are all integral offerings of WellnessWorld. Similarly, low help-seeking behaviour continues to be identified among university students, and will be addressed by the literacy and anti-stigma benefits of the portal, enabling more students to reap the benefits of existing services like the Peer Support Centre, keep.meSAFE, and more.



Alignment with Mission

The implementation of an online wellness portal aligns with the [SSMU Mental Health Policy & Plan \(adopted January 30, 2020\)](#), which outlines the SSMU's commitment to promoting resources and increasing accessibility, as well as data-driven advocacy and institutional accountability, especially in regards to equity-seeking groups. Specifically, the Plan indicates the development in 2020 of a centralized, student-driven mental health website to address fragmented information and resources, as well as indicating the need for an increase in the Mental Health Fee in Fall 2020 and a shift to this fee being non-opt-outable by Fall 2021.

Consultations Completed

In addition to ongoing consultation with the Vice-President (Finance) regarding budget and implementation, the Mental Health Commissioner has led consultations with the Student Wellness Hub, IT, and Teaching and Learning Services in order to ensure an online wellness portal would be feasible and successful. Further, qualitative interviews have been held with over ten student groups ranging from the Union for Gender Empowerment, to the Black Students' Network, to Queer McGill, to hearing perspectives from Varsity Athletes and the SSMU Equity Commissioner, and many other voices representing vital student populations. The dialogue evidenced that navigating the mental health system, engaging in the community, and finding resources that match one's unique needs remains a challenge. All groups expressed interest in something that would centralize information and clarify paths of access. This is in alignment with ongoing data collected by both the SSMU and Student Services.

Risk Factors and Resource Implications

The risk of unsuccessful implementation and uptake of this online wellness portal is limited due to the software-as-a-service model that WellnessWorld will follow. The contract with WellnessWorld will reflect a commitment to ongoing monitoring, updates, and iterations based on student needs and feedback.

Further, the existing role of Mental Health Commissioner serves as an established contact point and project lead whose staffing is already funded. Incoming Commissioners and SSMU Executives will be adequately trained on making the most out of WellnessWorld with their administrative software permissions, ensuring confidence in using the system and uploading/modifying programming, events, and resources.



Sustainability Considerations

The introduction of an online wellness portal means that, regardless of physical infrastructures or students' locations, a solution will be available to the current issues of fragmented information and dispersed resources and services. Without expending further resources, WellnessWorld will be able to adapt to systemic changes and campus environments (e.g. an online semester). Furthermore, WellnessWorld is accessible to equity-seeking groups and those struggling with inclusion, and directly addresses this ongoing problem by providing paths to best-fitting, identity-matching resources.

Impact of Decision and Next Steps

Upon approval for the Fall 2020 referendum, the Mental Health Commissioner, in collaboration with the Vice-President (Student Life), will spearhead a "Yes" campaign. This will include consultation with the Mental Health Roundtable and with consulted student groups, as well as promotional action over social media.

If the motion is approved, the Mental Health Commissioner, in collaboration with the Vice-President (Student Life) and the Vice-President (Finance), will commence in the implementation process in order to launch WellnessWorld as a software-as-a-service in January 2021.

Motion or Resolution for Approval

Be it resolved that the SSMU Legislative Council approves the following question for the Fall 2020 referendum period:

Do you agree to renew the 'Mental Health Fee', payable by all SSMU members starting Winter 2021 until Fall 2023 (inclusive), with an understanding that a majority 'No' vote may result in the inability to implement this project?

Do you agree to increase this fee by \$1.26 from \$0.40 to \$1.66 per student per semester?

Be it further resolved that the SSMU Legislative Council adopts the actionable aspects of this question and that any grammatical or legal changes necessary do not need the re-approval of the Legislative Council.



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**Results of the
Vote**

In favour (17)
Opposed (5)
Abstain (0)

APPROVED



Appendix A : Relevant Appendix

APPROVED