



# MOTION REGARDING REGARDING REFERENDUM QUESTION ON RENEWAL OF THE MENTAL HEALTH FEE 2021-02-11

Submitted for: 2021-02-11

**Submitted to:** SSMU Legislative Council      **Document no.:** LEG-PUB-MOT-2021-02-11-008

**Moved by:** Maheen Akter  
*Vice-President (Student Life)*      **Current Status:**  FOR APPROVAL  
 APPROVED  
 POSTPONED  
 COMMITTED  
 NOT APPROVED

**Seconded by:** Libby Williamson  
*Arts Representative*

## 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. The [SSMU Mental Health Policy and Plan](#) implicates the Mental Health Committee in taking action on student wellbeing through both outreach and advocacy, and both current and future initiatives rely on the continuation of the Mental Health Fee, which otherwise expires in Winter 2021.

Further, the promise of systemic solutions outlined in the Policy & Plan require the Mental Health Fee to be a predictable source of funding, which cannot currently be guaranteed due to the Fee’s opt-outable nature. 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. Pursuing a project of this scale requires that the non-opt-outable nature of the Fee be established in order to move forward with planning and funding.

## Background and Rationale

By renewing the Mental Health Fee and changing it to a non-opt-outable fee, the SSMU would be able to continue its commitment to mental health



through the roles and initiatives of the Mental Health Committee, and work towards the collaborative implementation of ‘WellnessWorld.’ This funding is essential to the SSMU’s ability to effectively maintain a Mental Health portfolio that can address the mental health needs of students in a multi-pronged and proactive way.

The Mental Health Fee funds the positions of the Mental Health Commissioner, the Mental Health Advocacy Coordinator, and the Mental Health Outreach Coordinator, whose jobs are essential to carrying out the Mental Health Policy and Plan. The Mental Health Fee is also used to fund numerous mental health related projects, both initiated by the Mental Health Committee and by other student groups on campus.

The implementation of WellnessWorld, a portal to ensure students fully benefit from resources and services both on- and off-campus, is an example of one such project. WellnessWorld demonstrates the necessity of a guaranteed pool of funding in order to pursue large-scale projects that are capable of bringing the change students are looking for. It also aligns with the aforementioned Policy and Plan, 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.

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### Alignment with Mission

In addition to the need to renew the Mental Health Fee so as to continue SSMU’s commitment to student wellbeing, the [SSMU Mental Health Policy and Plan \(adopted January 30, 2020\)](#) indicates the need for an increase (postponed to Fall 2021) and a shift to this fee being non-opt-outable in 2021. Specifically, the Plan indicates the development of a centralized, student-driven mental health website to address fragmented information and resources, which requires that the fee be renewed and made non-opt-outable.

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### Consultations Completed

The Mental Health Fee itself is inherently tied to the consultations involved in the 2020-2023 Policy and Plan, which includes support from the Legislative Council itself.

In regards to specific projects that would require the fee to be made non-opt-outable, consultations have ranged from the Vice-President (Finance) to the Student Wellness Hub, IT, and Teaching and Learning Services, as well as to student groups representing specific mental health needs and diverse needs of marginalized populations on campus.



The dialogue continues to evidence 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 a project that would centralize information and clarify paths of access. Furthermore, this is in alignment with ongoing data collected by both the SSMU and Student Services.

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### Risk Factors and Resource Implications

We have separated the questions of renewing the fee and making it non-opt-outable due to the fact that the continuation of the SSMU Mental Health Committee and the respective Policy and Plan is dependent on the fee renewal. Because of this, the option to make the fee non-opt-outable will not jeopardize the likelihood of the fee renewing.

In regards to management of funding and the initiatives entailed, the necessary staffing and processes are already in place and this motion would simply implicate a continuation of these current measures.

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### Sustainability Considerations

In renewing the Mental Health Fee, the implementation of the SSMU Mental Health Policy and Plan can be continued in a sustainable manner with dedicated resources for initiatives and necessary staffing. The initiatives are themselves imperative to creating a sustainable community, in the sense of social sustainability and empowering equity-seeking groups. Shifting the Mental Health Fee to non-opt-outable will further this through enabling large-scale projects that require a predictable amount of funding.

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### Impact of Decision and Next Steps

Upon approval for the Winter 2021 referendum, the Mental Health Commissioner, in collaboration with the Vice-President (Student Life), will spearhead a "Yes" campaign. The Mental Health Outreach Coordinator with the aid of her Outreach Committee will also be dedicated to ensuring that the campaign is successful. This will include consultation with the Mental Health Roundtable and with student groups that have previously been consulted as mental health stakeholders, as well as promotional action over social media.

If the motion to renew this fails, the SSMU's ability to carry out mental health related initiatives, such as Mental Health Action Week, the Mental Health Committee and Mental Illness Awareness Week, and compensate student staff to run them (including the Mental Health Commissioner, the



Mental Health Advocacy Coordinator, and the Mental Health Outreach Coordinator) would be heavily diminished. The Mental Health Fund would also cease to exist as a source of funding for student mental health projects.

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### Motion or Resolution for Approval

Be it resolved that the SSMU Legislative Council approves the following question for the Winter 2021 referendum period:

*Do you agree to renew the 'Mental Health Fee' at \$0.40 per semester (excluding summer), payable by all SSMU members starting Fall 2021 until Winter 2026 (inclusive), with an understanding that a majority 'No' vote would result in the inability to maintain the Mental Health Committee and its initiatives?*

*Do you agree to change the 'Mental Health Fee' from an opt-outable fee to a non-opt-outable fee?*

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 (UNANIMOUS)  
Opposed ()  
Abstain ()

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