

SSMU Mental Health Policy and Plan

2023-2026

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	1
MENTAL HEALTH POLICY	2
1. Executive Summary	2
2. Institutional History	2
2.1. Mental Health at SSMU	2
2.2. The Rossy Wellness Hub and Healthy Living Annex	3
3. The SSMU Vision for Student Wellness on Campus	3
4. SSMU Mental Health Commitments	4
5. SSMU Mental Health Members	5
Mental Health Three Year Plan	7
1. Outreach & Community Collaboration	8
1.2. Action Items:	8
2. Accessibility, Equity, Diversity, & Inclusivity	9
2.1. Action Items:	9
3. Accountability and Transparency	10
3.1. Action Items:	11
4. Advocacy & Policy	11
4.1. Action Items:	12



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MENTAL HEALTH POLICY

1. Executive Summary

The last three years have brought significant changes to the landscape of mental health (MH) on McGill's campus. With the development of the Wellness Hub in July 2019 to a global pandemic, university-student collaboration on mental health services has improved significantly, as well as the quality and capacity of services themselves. Student wellness is a subject that has been propelled to the fore-front of institutional dialogue thanks to strong student advocacy and national recognition that mental health is a fundamental component of student success.

This document explicates the Students' Society of McGill University's approach to student mental health and wellness.. This compiled research informs the four overarching, multifaceted commitments that the Students' Society of McGill University (SSMU) shall work towards in the next three academic years.

2. Institutional History

2.1. Mental Health at SSMU

The SSMU has a decade-long history of dedicated work in promoting and supporting mental health advocacy and resourcing for its Members. In September of 2013, an ad-hoc committee of the Legislative Council was formed dedicated to mental issues and making connections across relevant McGill parties and SSMU. With a mandate to promote a mentally healthy community, the committee formally drafted a policy and plan to guide mental health initiatives and support. In 2014, the [first Mental Health Policy](#) was adopted by the legislative council, with a 5 year plan to follow shortly after. In line with the plan, the [creation of an opt-outable Mental Health Fee](#) dates to 2016 to provide restricted funds dedicated towards creating student staff positions dedicated towards SSMU's mental health initiatives and advocating for improved University run services, to organize student-run mental health initiatives including mental illness awareness week, promoting on-campus mental health resources and community-building events, and towards a Mental Health Fund. The Mental Health Fund continues to be used to fund mental health-related initiatives, projects, and events run by students and student groups. The most recent [Policy and a 3-year Plan](#) were adopted in 2020. With this plan, there has been the creation of the Mental Health Commissioner, Advocacy and Outreach Coordinator roles as well as established committees. The continued guidance from the Plan at SSMU as well as the



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financial support of the Fee have led to an execution of a number of projects and increased advocacy at the admin level. The report detailing all complete action items from the plan can be found in this [progress report](#).

2.2. The Rosy Wellness Hub and Healthy Living Annex

The Rosy Wellness Hub ('the Hub'), began operations in July 2019. The Hub operates with a Collaborative Care approach which aims to create a flexible, holistic model of care informed by mental health research, provide education and support to the community and empower students to be in control of their own wellness. The Hub has a variety of clinicians that provide one-on-one appointments and therapy groups as well as the Healthy Living Annex (HLA), which focuses on health promotion and offers peer support programs. Since its formation the SSMU has played an active role in advocating for student needs and collaborating on projects, including participating in advisory boards, co-design, and event creation.

Strong collaboration and bi-directional communication between students, mental health advocates, student leaders, and the Hub are instrumental in improving clarity, quality, and accessibility of services to the McGill community.

SSMU recognizes that there is a strong history of advocacy towards better care practices at the Student Wellness Hub.

3. The SSMU Vision for Student Wellness on Campus

Toward continued resilience, accountability, and solidarity.

This policy acts as a framework of the long-term vision for SSMU's continued dedication to the improvement of mental health resource access, promotion, and institutional accountability. The SSMU recognizes not only the importance of working with the McGill School of Continuing Studies (MACES), the Postgraduate Students' Society (PGSS) and the Macdonald Campus Students' Society (MCSS), but also the crucial input of student groups in order to better represent the unique mental health needs of all McGill students.

This policy will serve as the foundation for future mental health projects from 2023-2026. A progress report of goals and timelines should be produced in the fall and winter semesters by the Mental Health Commissioner and their team to ensure accountability between years and progress made on the long-term goals highlighted in the [Three Year Plan](#).



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This document is intended as a tool in both advocating for students' mental health and/or illness, as well as to further empower student leaders in tackling upstream, cultural realities observed by the McGill student body. Aspects of the environment including heightened academic pressure, toxic academia and competitiveness may manifest itself into symptoms of anxiety, chronic stress and increased risk for developing or worsening mental illnesses, impeding on performance and individual success. The use of this document is to ensure that the SSMU mental health team continues addressing the mental health crises within the McGill community.

Though every student experiences and responds to their mental health in a unique way, SSMU strongly believes there are fundamental realities of the McGill student experience that can be inherently detrimental to student health. The SSMU founding principles mandate that every student has the right to live and study in a safe environment. The SSMU recognizes the impact its student leaders have by representing student rights at the community and institutional levels. In addition, the SSMU shall ensure that the voices of marginalized student groups are elevated in every sphere of mental health service provision and promotion.

In recognition of the 2023-2026 Mental Health Policy's overarching goals to increase accountability, representation, and solidarity in mental health services, our vision is to gather together student groups, community members, stakeholders, faculty, and McGill administration, to create a stronger network of professional and student-driven services that will respect and represent the diversity of needs of McGill's student population.

4. SSMU Mental Health Commitments

The following list is a series of commitments SSMU is making to mental health, following [current SSMU guiding principles](#) and the [National Standard for Mental Health and Well-Being for Post-Secondary Students](#), created by the Mental Health Commission of Canada. Such a standard is used to adapt SSMU's practices using research-based findings, to affirm our commitment to promoting positive student mental health and well-being. SSMU's commitments to mental health are as follows:

4.1. Student-centered: Prioritizing the mental health and well-being of students, including them in the process of developing, implementing, and evaluating the institution's framework. Respecting students as valuable partners, whose opinions are required, valued, and respected as vital expertise. SSMU Mental Health will be adhering to the [Council Transparency Policy](#) as a guide.

4.2. Equity, diversity, and inclusion: The diversity of the post-secondary environment should be respected, celebrated, and promoted, while applying an intersectional lens. This includes ensuring policies, programs, services, and environments are inclusive, accessible, adaptable,



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anti-oppressive and promote cultural safety. SSMU Mental Health will be adhering to the [SSMU Policy on Accessible Education and Academics](#) as a guide.

4.3. Knowledge-informed: The institution's framework should incorporate lived experience, evidence-informed, trauma and violence-informed, practice-informed, and Indigenous ways of knowing. The framework should reflect changing circumstances, emerging trends and issues and be reviewed regularly on measurable and assessable improvement. SSMU Mental Health will be adhering to the [SSMU Policy on Accessible Education and Academics](#) as a guide.

4.4. Health promotion and reducing harm: Institutions should enable people to increase control over, and improve, their health. To reach a state of physical, mental, and social well-being, an individual or group should be supported to identify and realize aspirations, satisfy needs, and change or cope with the environment. Policies and practices should focus on reducing the harmful effects of activities that pose a degree of risk. SSMU Mental Health will be adhering to the [SSMU Harm Reduction Policy](#) as a guide.

4.5. Thriving community and culture of well-being: Acting proactively and intentionally to create empowered, connected, and resilient communities that foster an ethic of care, compassion, collaboration, and community action. A key priority is to encourage transformational learning environments that enable and inspire members of the post-secondary community to become, and continue to be, healthy and engaged community members and leaders both locally and globally. SSMU Mental Health will be adhering to the [SSMU Clubs and Services as SSMU's Highest Priority Policy](#) as a guide.

4.6. Continuous improvement: Making ongoing improvements in commitment, strategy, and process all help to strengthen the institution's and community's capabilities to support the mental health of post-secondary students and adapt to the ever-changing post-secondary environment. SSMU Mental Health will be adhering to the [SSMU Effective Committees Policy](#) as a guide.

SSMU is committed to honouring and respecting the standards of this policy, in order to foster a supportive, collaborative community focused on student well-being and the continuous conversation necessary to address the needs of all students. Pending research findings from the Advocacy Coordinator and updated recommendations from government and SSMU, these guidelines are subject to change

5. SSMU Mental Health Members



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The SSMU Mental Health team is composed of the Mental Health Commissioner, the Mental Health Advocacy Coordinator, and the Mental Health Outreach Coordinator. Each of their roles and responsibilities are listed below, under the direction and supervision of the Vice-President (Student Life).

Mental Health Commissioner: The Mental Health Commissioner acts as the leading connection between administration, services, and students on matters surrounding mental health. They are responsible for progressing policy and culture shifts on campus to address systemic barriers to health access and improve the conditions of student life at McGill. This includes collaborating with other members of SSMU to progress items within the Three Year Plan, and push student interest in the McGill administrative spaces.

The responsibilities of the Mental Health Commissioner include but are not limited to:

- Ensuring the progress of the Three Year Plan and advising SSMU executive members on mental health related matters.
- Manage and maintain the [SSMU mental health budget](#) provided from the [SSMU Mental Health Fee](#)
- Providing support in managing and improving student health insurance as an acting member of the McGill Health Insurance Working Group as well as the SSMU Health & Dental Committee.
- Acting as the primary contact with the Hub in terms of decision making and service creation, including acting as co-chair of the Student Wellness Hub Advisory Board and the Student HLA Co-Design.
- Meeting regularly and collaborating actively with members of upper level administration including the Office of the Dean of Students, the Student Suicide Prevention Framework (SSPF), the Accessibility Subcommittee of Enrolment and Student Affairs Advisory Committee (ESAAC), the Strategic Plan for Academic Wellness, and more.

Mental Health Advocacy Coordinator: The Advocacy Coordinator's acts as a liaison between student voice and systematic change within McGill's institution. The Advocacy Coordinator works to support the Mental Health Commissioner in their collaboration with administrative bodies, as well as connecting with individual student societies, clubs, and organizations. The Advocacy Coordinator's mandate is to support students in communicating their rights and needs and acting as a relay to the Mental Health Commissioner, Outreach Coordinator and required parties.

The responsibilities of the Advocacy Coordinator include but are not limited to:

- Acts as chair of the mental health advocacy committee comprised of student volunteers, creating, and supporting projects pertaining to improving the mental health landscape.
- Acting as a sitting member of the HLA Co-Design process and addressing concerns on campus as they are brought forward by the student body.



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- Acting as a direct point of contact for students through community consultations and supporting the Mental Health Commissioner in discussions with upper-level administration including the Strategic Plan for Academic Wellness
- Produce an annual research update in the summer semester on mental health policy changes and practices at external institutions and within government.[1]
- Manage the content on the [SSMU Mental Health webpage](#)

Mental Health Outreach Coordinator: The Outreach Coordinators's role is to raise awareness of the diverse mental health resources available, as well as provide leadership and support to student groups on campus whose work intersects with mental health. The ultimate goal of the Outreach Coordinator is to increase mental health education and literacy, address the stigma surrounding mental health and illness, and facilitate the connection of students to resources in all situations

The responsibilities of the Outreach Coordinator include but are not limited to: .

- Chairing the mental health outreach committee comprised of student volunteers on campus in order to run events and outreach initiatives.
- Providing insight on how to increase the reach of external contracts including Keep.meSAFE and other project partners
- Managing and hosting the monthly mental health roundtable and roundtable online discussion forum
- Conducting an annual mental health survey on campus for students in the winter semester.
- Manage SSMU mental health on social media

Mental Health Three Year Plan

From community consultations and work conducted by the mental health team in 2022-2023, the following objectives were identified as priorities for SSMU to address in the coming years. As voted by the Legislative Council, all action items in the following sections are mandated to be addressed and/or maintained within the Policies expiry in 2026 unless another timeline is specified.



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1. Outreach & Community Collaboration

The SSMU will continue to work with passionate student groups, both on and off campus, to implement and improve a diverse array of services that meet the unique needs of every student. The SSMU MH Committees will provide an environment for student groups and campus allies to create functional, streamlined service promotion and educational campaigns in order to minimize overlap and maximize the number of students reached. Additionally, the SSMU shall prioritize service accessibility by increasing collaboration with students who are underrepresented and whose needs may not currently be met by McGill services.

1.1. Mental Health Roundtable

The MH Roundtable is co-chaired and organized by the MH Commissioner and Outreach Coordinator, and is held in-person each month (while the option to attend virtually via zoom is also offered). The roundtable is meant to facilitate active dialogue between the SSMU Mental Health Team and community stakeholders including student services, clubs, and advocacy groups which focus on student mental health. Roundtable discussions vary each month discussing relevant outreach events, policy decisions, student needs, and opportunities for collaboration within the community.

1.2. Action Items:

- 1.2.1. Improve the presence and knowledge of mental health support within student residences through collaboration with residence council and the Hubs' residence Local Wellness Advisor (LWA);
- 1.2.2. Campaign for higher community awareness of the free online therapy tool MySSP offered through Keep.meSAFE by implementing a higher number of student keep.meSAFE ambassadors and the Keep.meSAFE Student Advisory Board;
- 1.2.3. Maintain an active presence on campus to raise awareness of mental health services available and decrease stigma around discussions on mental illness through regular tabling and a presence at Discover McGill day, frosh, and SSMU activities night;
- 1.2.4. Increase the reach and effectiveness of the monthly mental health roundtable discussions by annually reviewing possible new members and implementing an online dedicated space for collaboration between members;
- 1.2.5. Work with Campus Life and Engagement as well as Vice President Student Life to increase the educational material provided to student during orientation and SSMU training for student groups;



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1.2.6. Maintain an active mental health outreach committee comprised of at least 5 students, one of which is an acting member of Legislative Council. Hiring shall begin in September and interviews conducted by members of the SSMU mental health team. This team meets weekly during the academic year and plan events and outreach, and shall be chaired by the mental health Outreach Coordinator;

1.2.7. Implement a new annual student mental health survey conducted by the mental health Outreach Coordinator to better understand the knowledge and access undergraduate students are currently experiencing. The survey will be created in collaboration with the SSMU accessibility commissioner and the Wellness Hub, and conducted in the winter semester. A presentation of findings will be included in the winter semester progress report written by the Mental Health Commissioner and available on the [SSMU Mental Health website](#);

1.2.8. Host and collaborating with student groups and the Hub to create two comprehensive mental health weeks comprising of workshops, events, tabling, and more. Mental Illness Awareness Week in the fall semester will focus on education around mental illness and promoting services available. Well Week in the winter semester will focus on increasing awareness of mental health and wellness as priorities for the student body.

2. Accessibility, Equity, Diversity, & Inclusivity

This policy emphasizes the commitment to advocate the needs of students who may be under-represented and marginalized by services. The SSMU will prioritize improvements in the inclusivity and accessibility of health services and insurance for all McGill students; increased specialization of care for marginalized student populations; and the strengthening of health accommodations for students.

2.1. Action Items:

2.1.1. Complete the 2022-2023 project of implementing a 72 exemption form that can be used in place of a medical note for in-course assessments worth less than 30% of the overall grade by working actively within ESAAC;

2.1.2. Advocate and work towards increased insurance coverage for gender affirming care with student insurance providers through the Health Insurance Working Group and the SSMU Health & Dental Committee. Work with administrative members of the hub to ensure availability of 2SLGBTQI+ specific resources remain available;



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2.1.3. Negotiate increased financial assistance and/or coverage for students to access psychotherapists and psychiatrists, particularly in order to receive neurodivergency diagnosis;

2.1.4. Advise and support the goals and guiding principles outlined in SSMU's [Harm Reduction Policy](#) and [Accessibility Policy](#) through active participation in HLA Co-Design and other advisory spaces;

2.1.5. Maintain active participation in the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Consultation Committee, and support members with health and wellness aspects of the policy as it is being created and implemented;

2.1.6. Require all student groups on campus be offered a seat at the mental health roundtable to address issues within their communities, and have available follow-up consultations with the Mental Health Advocacy Coordinator;

2.1.7. Maintain active participation on the ESAAC subcommittee of Accessibility and advocate for more flexible medical accommodations, particularly pertaining to medical documentation;

2.1.8. Meet with relevant SSMU commissioners bi-annually to align mental health priorities in different communities, including the Anti-Violence Coordinator, the Accessibility Commissioner, the Indigenous Affairs Commissioner, the Black Affairs Commissioner, and the Equity Commissioner;

2.1.9. Provide an annual minimum of \$5,000 in allocated funding to the SSMU [Mental Health Fund](#) which supports student and community initiatives, by reducing the financial barriers different groups may face when working on mental health actions. The Fund will be distributed through the Funding Committee's application and review process. However, the Mental Health Commissioner will review all applications for eligibility.

3. Accountability and Transparency

Due to the rapid, typically annual turn-over of student leadership, strong collaboration between each year's Mental Health Commissioner, SSMU Vice-President Student Life, the Hub, and upper level administration is critical to ensuring the follow-through of long-term goals. This policy represents a commitment to accountability by including concrete steps and detailed timelines that will facilitate the achievement of goals that may require multiple years to complete.



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3.1. Action Items:

3.1.1. Mental Health Commissioner, Coordinators and all other members of the Mental Health team are required to write detailed exit reports prior to the completion of their contract, detailing completed, ongoing and in-planning goals, objectives, and responsibilities of their respective role.

3.1.2. All incoming members are required to thoroughly review the Policy and Plan as well as their predecessor's exit report.

3.1.3. All progress reports, presentations, resources, motions, and funding will be made available to the public on the SSMU Mental Health Webpage.

3.1.4. Detailed minutes documenting discussions in each committee and mental health roundtable meeting shall be taken and recorded.

3.1.5. Employees of the mental health team will remain active throughout the entire year, including over the summer and in September (during which institutional accountability and communication is known to decrease).

3.1.6. Semesterly presentations will be given to legislative council on the actions taken by the mental health team and any initiatives or services that have changed by the Mental Health Commissioner; once in the fall, and once in the winter. Space and time will be offered to councillors for further questions or any discussions needed.

3.1.7. Annual progress report of P&P including research findings from community survey and advocacy research will be presented to the Legislative Council and added to the SSMU Mental Health Webpage. This report will be created by the Mental Health Commissioner with the help of the Advocacy Coordinator and Vice President Student Life.

3.1.8. Statistics about Hub usage and capacity must be completed and available to the Mental Health Commissioner following the quarterly report given by the Hub at the Student Wellness Hub advisory board meeting. These statistics will also be discussed in tangent with the Director of the Student Wellness Hub at the monthly mental health roundtable meeting following the quarterly report and used for objective planning.

4. Advocacy & Policy

Ultimately, by striving to better understand the unique experiences of student sub-populations, the SSMU can help to ameliorate the experiences of students who feel isolated and/or marginalized.



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Building on Commitment 1, the SSMU must recognize that mental health services at McGill do not equally cater to the lived experiences of marginalized student groups. Further, the burden of mental distress disproportionately affects the same individuals that services are frequently underrepresented. As such, the SSMU Mental Health Commissioner and their team must be allies for student groups and advocate for personalized mental and physical health care that reaches the students who may need it most.

SSMU's Mental Health team also recognizes the necessity for consistency of policy between provincial, municipal and SSMU's mental health policies.

4.1. Action Items:

4.1.1. Maintain an active mental health advocacy committee of at least 5 students, one of which is an acting member of the Legislative Council. Hiring shall begin in September and interviews conducted by members of the SSMU mental health team. This team meets weekly during the academic year and works with community members on initiatives that improve mental health support on campus, and shall be chaired by the Advocacy Coordinator

4.1.2. Annually review and research the new policies and procedures created both within SSMU and McGill Administration, as well as within the provincial and federal governments. Upon review of such research, the Advocacy Coordinator shall create a report based on their findings by August of the summer semester, which will be used to inform in the fall annual Policy and Plan progress report. The outline and requirements of said support will be outlined in the Advocacy Coordinator's exit report for the following year.

4.1.3. All reports will be made available to the public through the SSMU Website.

4.1.4. Each year in the summer semester, review the SSMU mental health budget to ensure the funding is sufficient and sustainable with inflation. In 2025, establish and plan a new proposal for the SSMU mental health Fee Levee, which is set to expire in 2026. This will be done by the Mental Health Commissioner with support from Vice President Student Life and Vice President Finance

4.1.5. Supporting and advising Vice President External on advocating for and supporting other universities and organizations when lobbying for improvements to larger healthcare institution policies in alignment with the [SSMU Internal Regulations of Representation and Advocacy](#). This includes regular communication about changing policies and collaboration on the research conducted by the Advocacy Coordinator.

4.1.6. Supporting and advising Vice President University Affairs on academic wellness. This includes the Mental Health Commissioner and Advocacy Coordinator acting as members of the



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Academic Wellness Task force, which shall meet monthly with members of upper McGill administration to address the Academic Wellness Dashboard. This dashboard contains necessary initiatives and policy changes that will improve mental health in academia, and shall be continuously updated with new prospective improvements.

4.1.7. The Mental Health Commissioner shall maintain an active role in the creation of the Student Suicide Prevention Framework and will hold members of the Office of the Dean of Students and other administration accountable for its completion and successful implementation in the coming years. The Mental Health Commissioner shall also be charged with ensuring the community consultation process of the Framework is accessible and representative of the student body. The Advocacy Coordinator, Mental Health Commissioner and administration will plan meetings at the commencement of the new school year, to ensure continuity of the SSPF's progress.

4.1.8. The Mental Health Commissioner and Advocacy Coordinator will collaborate with the Wellness Hub during the creation of the McGill Mental Health Policy to ensure it is student-centered and equitable. This shall involve regular consultation and follow up during its creation.

4.1.9. The Advocacy Coordinator will assist the Mental Health commissioner in advocating for student perspective in the creation of an in-house *Mental Health Resources Navigation Tool*. The incoming Mental Health Advocacy Coordinator will be updated on its progress at the commencement of their contract, through the exit report and will meet with the Hub administrators within the first two months of their employment. Throughout the development of the Navigation tool, the Advocacy Coordinator will attend consultation meetings with the Wellness Hub and the Office of the Dean of Students and meet with community members regularly once the product has been made to assess community interest.

4.1.10. Following the 2023 commencement of the Online Booking Tool, headed by the Wellness Hub, the Advocacy Coordinator will attend weekly co-design meetings, to ensure the design matches student perspective. Reflections, notes and meeting minutes will be recorded and available through the Website to the public and Mental Health team.

4.1.11. As part of the Academic Wellness Dashboard (AWD), the Advocacy Coordinator will assist the Academic Wellness Taskforce in their completion of goals outlined in the AWD. More to come regarding the *Red Folder for Faculty* following updates with the current Taskforce in early March.