National Standard of Canada for Mental Health & Well-being for Post-Secondary Students

ENGAGEMENT SESSION INSIGHTS

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Leading with purpose.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In September 2020, the Mental Health Commission of Canada, in partnership with the Canadian Standards Association, released the National Standard of Canada for Mental Health & Wellbeing for Post-Secondary Students.

This set of flexible, voluntary guidelines to help Canadian post-secondary institutions support the mental health and wellbeing of their students is the first of its kind in the world and provides a set of flexible, voluntary guidelines. The vision of the National Standard is a post-secondary environment that promotes positive mental health and wellbeing which enables student success. In alignment with the U of A's Healthy University Strategic Plan, the Okanagan Charter, and our Culture of Care health and safety strategy, implementation of the standard will influence, shape, and guide the U of A in creating a healthy and safe campus environment.

The purpose of the document is to capture the major themes voiced by students and present student recommendations that we heard during the engagement activities that took place across the University of Alberta. This summary document is an important milestone on the way towards a student mental health and wellbeing action plan. It is a document that records the key findings from engagement activities that have taken place across the University of Alberta since February 2023. A summary of students' direct recommendations for changes and improvements to our campus community is presented at the end of this document in Appendix B.

To date, the University of Alberta's National Standard engagement process has included the following:

1195

students responded to the National Standard Student Survey between February 9 and March 10 2023

10

student group conversations occurred between February and May 2023

Over
80

students registered for 5 World Cafes at North Campus, Campus Saint-Jean, Augustana and virtually

7

tabling events to connect with multiple students at North Campus, Augustana and Campus Saint-Jean

Over
15

faculty and staff conversations have been completed to date

57

students engaged in group conversations focussed on equity-denied student populations

It is noteworthy that a strong majority of responses for the Student Survey were from individuals identifying as heterosexual, female, and of European ancestry.

This document aims to highlight the prevalence of responses coming from these demographics while uplifting the voices of equity-denied individuals who typically experience different and more acute mental health and wellbeing barriers than a general population. In light of only 3% of the student body completing the survey, we recognize the need to continue to engage to ensure our understandings are expanding and evolving while centering diverse voices. Additionally, we have found similar themes and responses in our results that were reflected in the Student Experience Action Plan (SEAP) survey, which received 8,000 responses. We have collaborated closely with the SEAP initiative to align our work in the best interest of students.

EMERGING THEMES

The emerging themes capture students' current realities and experiences at the University of Alberta. Themes are organized according to the six strategic pillars of the National Standard: Supportive, safe, and inclusive post-secondary environment; Literacy, education, and stigma reduction; Accessibility; Early intervention; Mental health supports; and Crisis management and postvention.

KEY LESSONS

Overall, we heard strongly that the availability of resources is critically important to students. Beyond the amount of support available, students emphasized that resources need to be tailored to the needs of unique student groups, particularly for students who are equity-denied or have specific psychological needs. Mental health literacy in being able to navigate resources by students, as well as literacy of staff and instructors to recognize early warning signs of mental health struggles and make appropriate referrals, is identified as an important piece of supporting fulsome mental health and wellbeing. Support modalities beyond one-on-one counselling are identified as opportunities to facilitate student connection, bolster community, and make mental health support more accessible to facilitate wellbeing in multiple ways.

Ensuring that students from all backgrounds and identities are able to access mental health and wellbeing that responds to their unique needs is essential as the University shifts to focus on positive student experiences and a culture of care. Equity-denied focus group participants expressed that accessing services from practitioners who reflected their identities and have knowledge about their needs is essential, and reflects an area for improvement in service design and delivery. Spaces to connect with students of similar identities, including cultural and linguistic backgrounds, was offered by many equity-denied participants as a way to minimize mental health issues, as simply existing in spaces that did not feel designed for them was repeatedly mentioned as a mental health challenge. Overall, ensuring that there are equity-centered supports, services, and practitioners was reflected by students participating in these consultations as critical to support their fulsome mental health and wellbeing.

EQUITY-DENIED STUDENT ENGAGEMENTS

The University of Alberta partnered with *pipikwan pêhtâkwan* Indigenous public relations agency to facilitate a series of tailored dialogues for equity-denied students to share about their experiences with mental health on campus. 57 students participated in 8 different focus group conversations, including:

- Black students circle
- First Nations, Metis and Inuit students circle
- International students circle
- Students with disabilities circle
- 2SLGTBQIA+ students circle
- One in-person circle for any equity-denied student
- Two virtual circles for any equity-denied student

Key themes from these focus groups are highlighted throughout this report. We recognize the importance of centering the experiences of equity-denied students as we work to improve the well-being of all students on campus.

Thank you to all our participants for sharing your voice and story. We understand our responsibility to act on your recommendations, and we invite you to hold us accountable to this moving forward.

PILLAR

01

Supportive, safe, and inclusive environment

National Standard

IMPACT OF ACADEMIC COURSE STRUCTURE
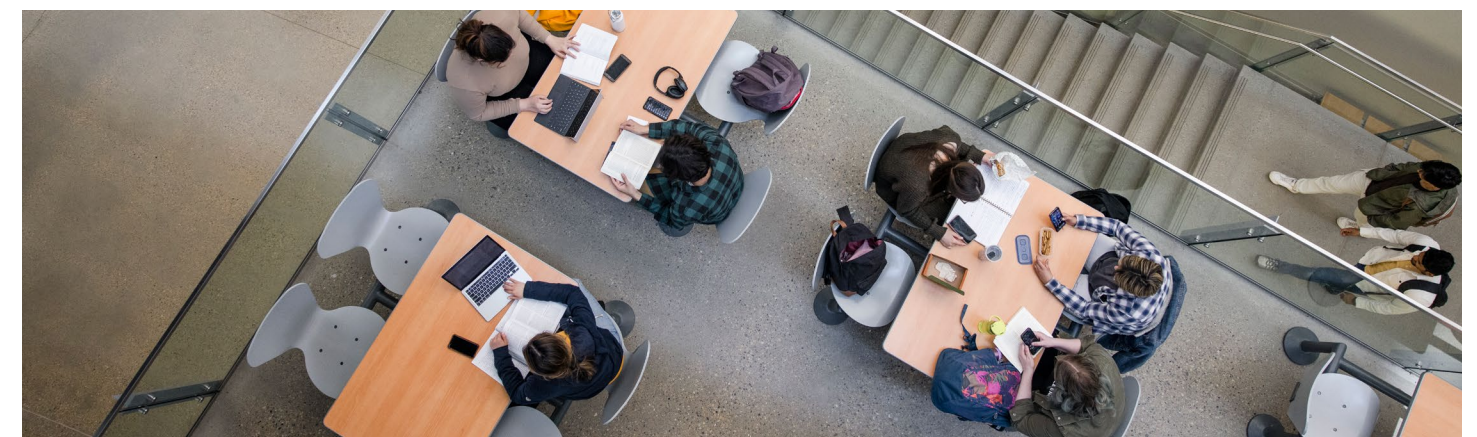
What Students Told Us:

- Academic demands have a substantial impact on student mental wellbeing, compounded for those whose financial aid, scholarships, and awards are contingent on maintaining a certain level of academic performance.

- We also heard that the campus culture can be very competitive and students are expected to "sink or swim."
  - » As a result, students feel guilty for taking a break and cannot prioritize self-care activities.
  - » This is more acute for students with dependents and work obligations.

"

"Mental health awareness is never going to be enough if our academic structure does not account for mental wellness. I've been in classes that are so rigorous that they could account for a semester's worth of work…"

"The University of Alberta feels like a cutthroat hunger games-esque environment… This is due to the competitive atmosphere and poor mental health at the university."

IMPACT OF INSTRUCTORS OR SUPERVISORS ON STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH

- Students told us instructors and supervisors have a profound impact on student experiences broadly, including their mental health. Instructors and supervisors who are approachable, understanding of approved accommodations, and can confidently refer to appropriate supports can improve students' overall wellbeing.

"

"I personally believe the problem isn't a lack of mental health awareness at the U of A, but more the lack of understanding and effort from my professors."

"All of my participation in mental health strategies was due to a professor who made a point of delivering a few lectures dedicated to our mental health, not from events offered by the university."
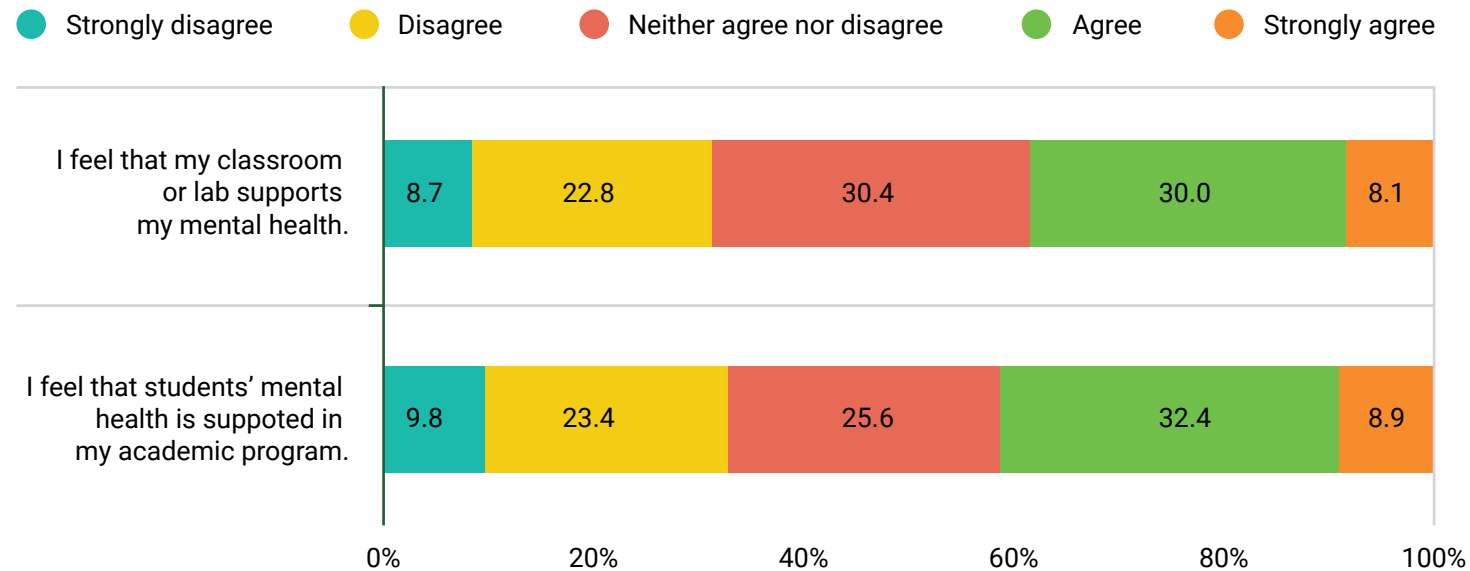
● Strongly disagree   ● Disagree   ● Neither agree nor disagree   ● Agree   ● Strongly agree

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I feel that my classroom or lab supports my mental health.	8.7	22.8	30.4	30.0	8.1
I feel that students' mental health is suppoted in my academic program.	9.8	23.4	25.6	32.4	8.9

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

Table 1- Just over a third of survey respondents indicated that mental health is supported in their academic environments and programs.

IMPACT OF PHYSICAL SPACES ON STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- Students discussed the need for greater accessibility on campus, noting concerns regarding the upkeep of accessibility features (e.g., push-button doors and elevators) and barriers to accessibility posed by snow clearance and building designs.
- Students expressed the importance of improvements to physical infrastructure, including prioritizing cleanliness and spaces with natural elements, to better meet their academic and technological needs, and adapt to a growing student population.

This feedback reinforces the priority identified in the Student Experience Action Plan (SEAP) to support learning participation by maintaining consistent care, cleanliness, and renovation of buildings, furniture, and outdoor space while prioritizing accessibility and functionality.

"

"We could really benefit from more [low] sensory spaces on campus. I have personally struggled with the lack of space for me to escape noise and light while attending classes."

"I absolutely love campus, I have lived on campus my entire university experience and have loved it. I love that there is a gym, too many places to get food, a doctors office, you can book study rooms, there is literally everything I need!"

Students who experience mobility challenges challenges (e.g. physical disabilities and chronic health conditions) expressed difficulty navigating the large University campus and making it on time to class within the ten-minute break.

Legend:
● Strongly disagree   ● Disagree   ● Neither agree nor disagree   ● Agree   ● Strongly agree

Physical Spaces at the University of Alberta...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Are accessible	5.2	12.8	23.4	44.2	14.4
Help me manage my levels of stress	7.4	28.7	33.5	23.0	7.4
Create a positive sense of community	2.8	10.1	28.7	48.0	10.5
Encourage collaboration	2.1	10.7	21.3	54.4	11.5

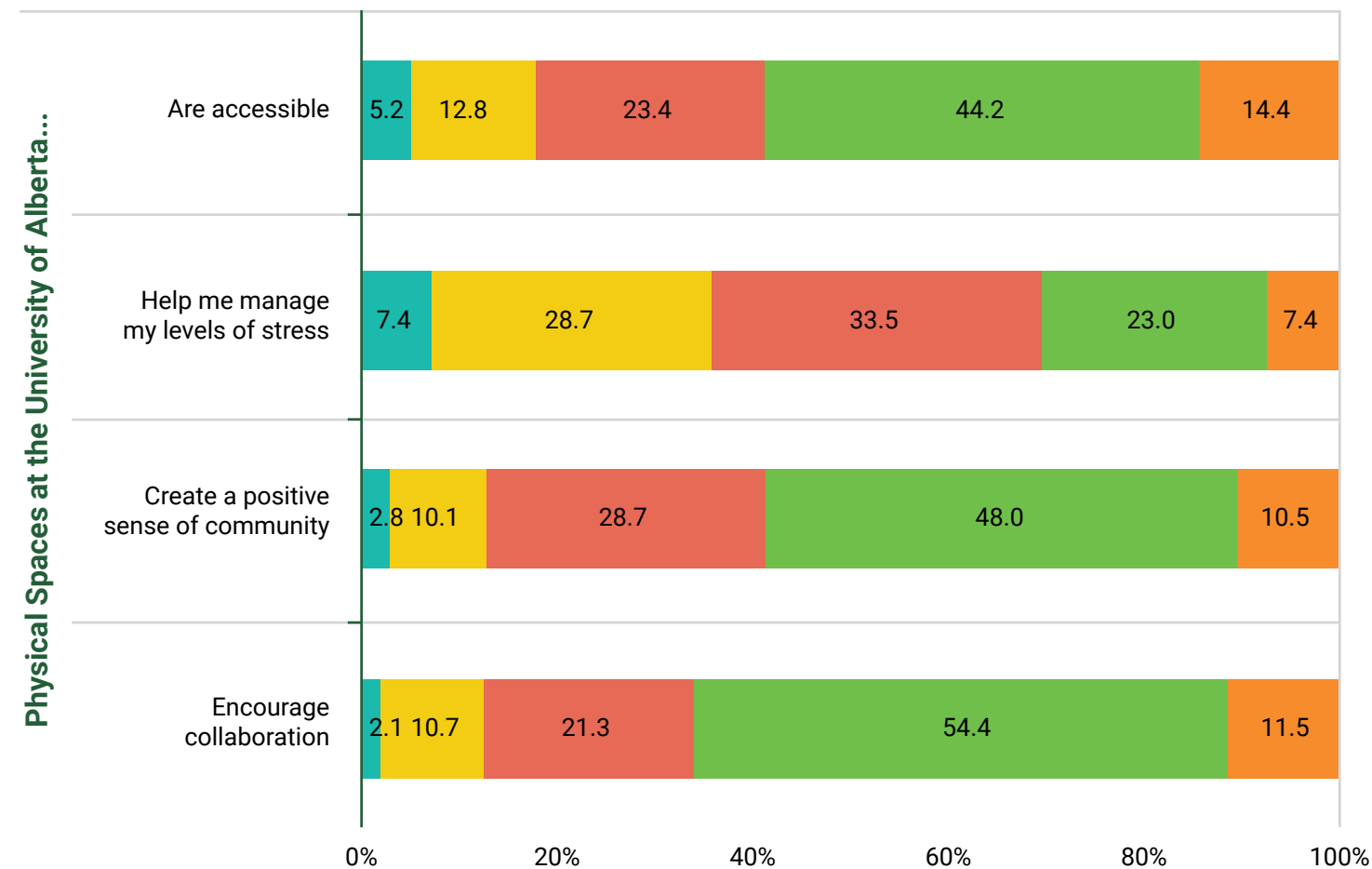(x-axis: 0% — 20% — 40% — 60% — 80% — 100%)

Table 2 - Over half of survey respondents indicated that U of A physical spaces create a sense of community, and encourage collaboration. Over half also reported that U of A spaces are accessible, but it is important to note that this feedback is not specifically from students with disabilities. Answers varied broadly when asked if physical spaces help to manage stress.

SENSE OF COMMUNITY/ CONNECTION TO REDUCE ISOLATION

- Students highlighted the importance of community and social connection in positively supporting their mental health and wellbeing, and our survey showed that many students have found a community at the U of A. Students who did not feel a connection to other students and communities on campus indicated that this affected their mental health and well-being. This is particularly true for equity-denied students, who widely called for more spaces and groups where they could connect for peer support, community connection, and explore intersections of mental health in their communities. Students wanted more opportunities to meet and connect with peers within academic and non-academic settings, such as during classes or through the creation of academic cohorts.

- We heard that facilitating community connection is particularly important for the following groups:
  » 2SLGTBQIA+ students
  » International students
  » First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Students
  » Students with disabilities
  » Students with dependants/ students who parent
  » Mature students
  » Distance students

- The upcoming move of First Peoples' House to a larger facility will provide more space for FNMI students to engage in a holistic way and grow alongside our community.

- The new Family Corner in Rutherford library represents a positive step in providing more inclusive spaces for parents on campus.
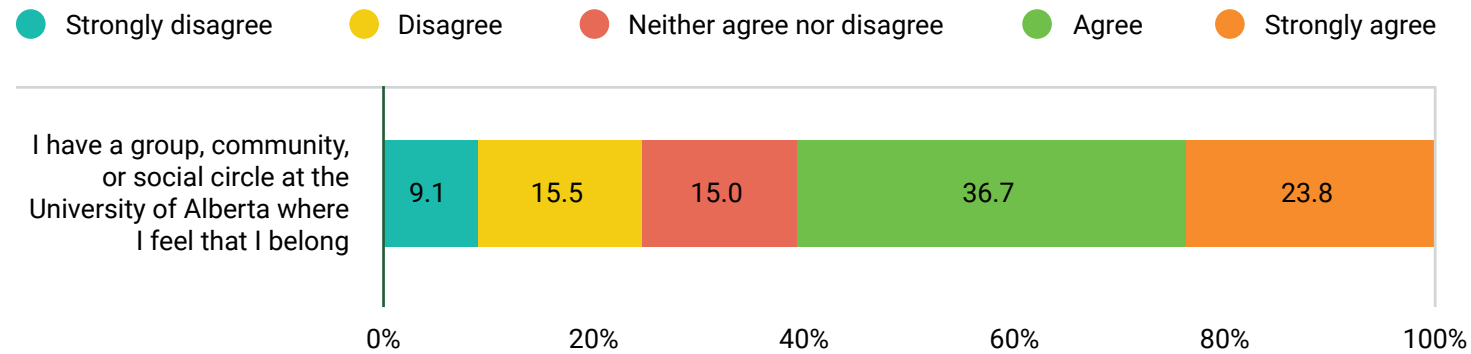
● Strongly disagree   ● Disagree   ● Neither agree nor disagree   ● Agree   ● Strongly agree

| I have a group, community, or social circle at the University of Alberta where I feel that I belong | 9.1 | 15.5 | 15.0 | 36.7 | 23.8 |

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

Table 3 - Over 60% of survey participants reported that they have a community at the U of A where they feel they belong.

"

"It's very difficult for people not in Residence to meet others. A lot of the big university events are designed around groups (antifreeze). It would be nice to have more events where people enter as individuals and meet others."

"I am… a Treaty status woman. I spend too much time seeking a place of belonging. I find I am isolated with no family. I work in isolation. I am at an age where my learning needs differ from younger students."

INCLUSIVE CAMPUS CULTURE

• Some students expressed a concern that there is a perceived lack of anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies within the University that explicitly prohibit discrimination, sexual violence, racism, and transphobia, and highlighted instances of harassment, discrimination, and microaggressions taking place within academic settings. Participants in our equity-denied circles shared a sense of fatigue in navigating a campus where they did not feel included, and continually advocating for their needs.

FNMI students expressed that their mental health was challenged by navigating a traditionally colonial institution, and felt the need to advocate continually for themselves. For many, this resulted in ambivalence about continuing their studies.

This highlights the importance of continuing the work outlined in Braiding Past, Present and Future, The University's first Indigenous Strategic Plan.

2SLGBTQIA+ students similarly expressed fatigue with advocating for themselves, in particular to educate campus community members about correct name and pronoun usage.

The University's forthcoming Affirmed Name Project is an important step toward making the Univesity a safer place for these students.
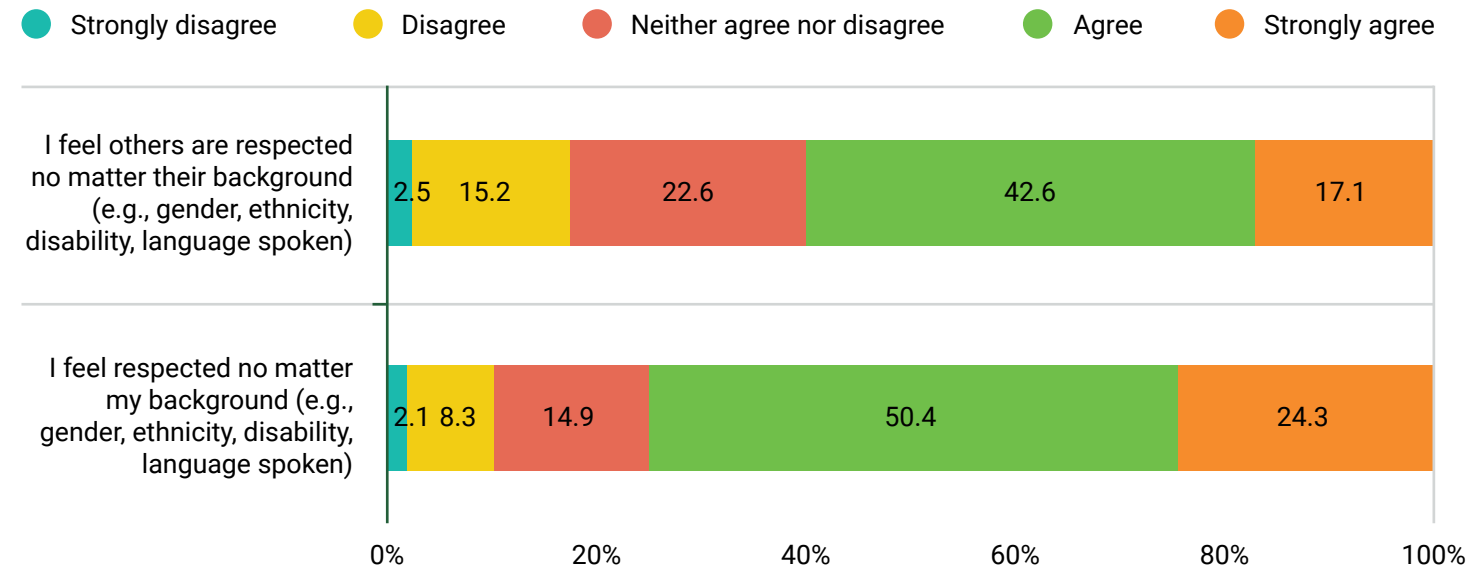
● Strongly disagree   ● Disagree   ● Neither agree nor disagree   ● Agree   ● Strongly agree

I feel others are respected no matter their background (e.g., gender, ethnicity, disability, language spoken)	2.5 15.2	22.6	42.6	17.1
I feel respected no matter my background (e.g., gender, ethnicity, disability, language spoken)	2.1 8.3	14.9	50.4	24.3

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

Table 4 - The majority of survey respondents expressed they feel themselves and others are respected at the university regardless of their background. However, it is important to remember the demographics of survey respondents were majority heterosexual females of European ancestry. In direct engagements with equity-denied communities, students expressed more concerns with respect and inclusivity in academic and non-academic spaces.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Students voiced a collective desire for a greater degree of transparency, enabling them to make well-informed decisions about their education, and an increased ability to opt out of certain fees not relevant to different student populations.

- Students underscored the imperative of ensuring that higher education remains accessible and affordable to all.

PILLAR

02

Mental health literacy, education and stigma reduction

National Standard
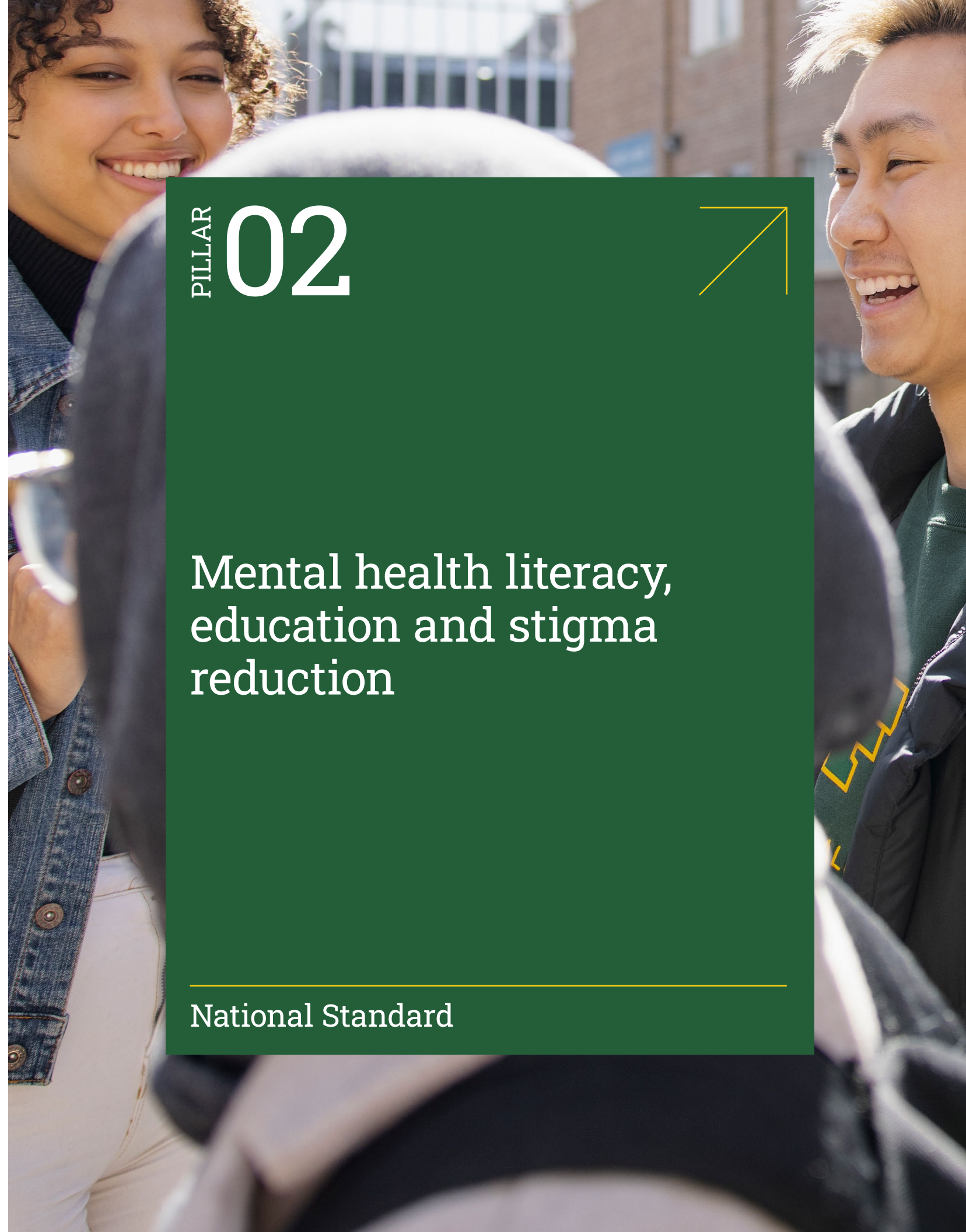
MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY AND EDUCATION

- Students in our engagements recognized the value of mental health literacy in supporting themselves and others. Students who had attended a mental health training or event on campus expressed positive feedback, and recognized the importance of these resources for themselves and others.

- Mental health literacy extends to staff and instructors to be able to recognize early signs of struggle in students to facilitate connection to supports when possible. Students repeatedly emphasized the importance of mental health training for instructors, staff, and all members of the campus community.

- Students expressed the importance of resource navigation and clear descriptions of services to help them identify the best services for their needs. Some students shared feedback that online information about University mental health services was confusing or overwhelming, and that they were unsure where to go for help.

- Students requested more orientation days and transition programming so there is adequate time to learn about services. This was especially highlighted by international students, graduate students, and Indigenous students.

- When asked who in their life could support their mental health, only 10.66% of survey respondents answered with University services, and 6.7% Faculty, whereas 62.4% would turn to family, chosen family, or friends.

> "I think there are a good amount of wellness resources and support training offered on campus and I do hope there is more awareness and promotion of these free group and individual services."

> "The mental health awareness events have been extremely informative, displaying the hard work of all the brilliant minds that came together to create these special moments for the students."

In our international student circle, 90% of participants reported a disconnect between the way the University of Alberta communicates about mental health, and their cultural understandings of wellness. Participants felt they needed a safe inclusive space to learn about mental health.
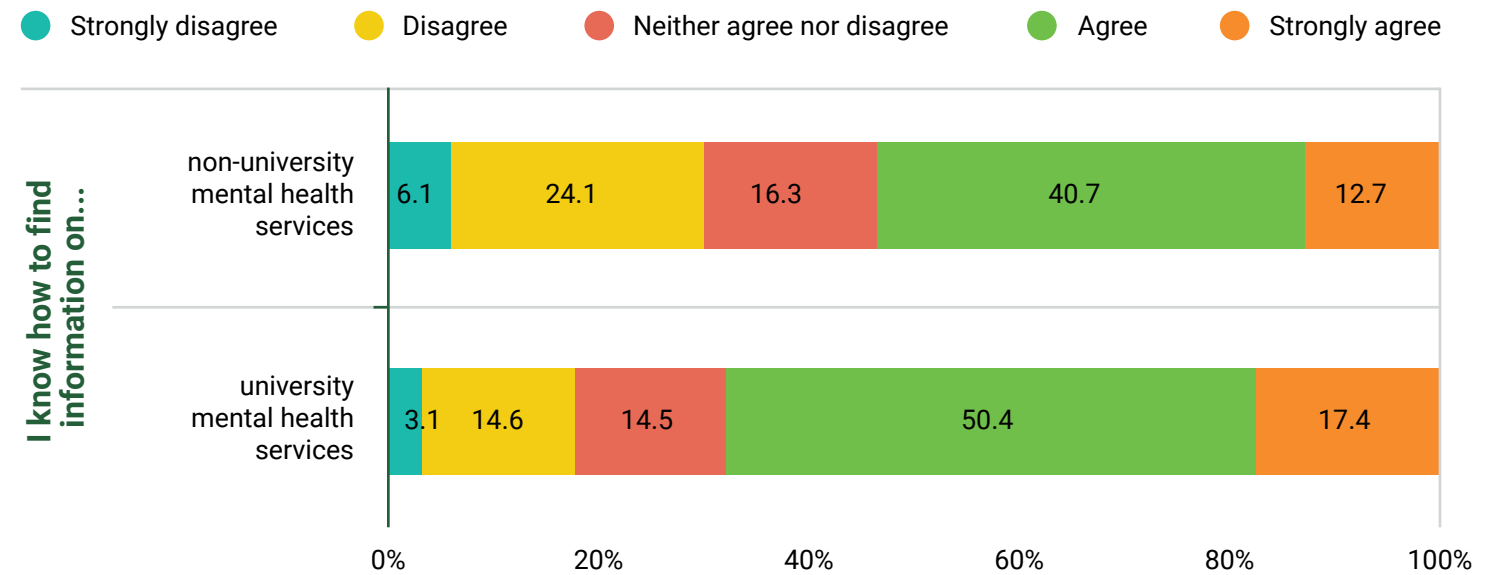

● Strongly disagree   ● Disagree   ● Neither agree nor disagree   ● Agree   ● Strongly agree

I know how to find information on...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
non-university mental health services	6.1	24.1	16.3	40.7	12.7
university mental health services	3.1	14.6	14.5	50.4	17.4

Table 5 - Over half of survey respondents said they know where to find information about university and non-university mental health services. However, qualitative feedback indicated that information about services is not always user-friendly.

> "Mental health literacy is one of those things that is extremely easy to either dismiss... or be so debilitating that the major issue feels like being aware of the resources when you need them"

STIGMA

- Students believe that the stigma around mental health is prominent enough that the university should address it directly at the start of the academic year through orientation, and in programming throughout the student life cycle.

- Even when students believed that mental health supports were accessible, they were being held back by worries of being stigmatized for asking for help.

Cultural and familial differences in the perception of mental health supports were also identified as a barrier for some, particularly in equity-denied consults with International students and Black students.

Ableism and disability stigma was also identified as a concern. Students in our equity-denied circles expressed feeling stigmatized by University staff, instructors, and family for seeking academic accommodations.

> "It's so stigmatized to reach out and it's always talked about as a waste of time and money to access services so I would say some sort of de-stigmatization has to happen first."

Legend: ● Strongly disagree   ● Disagree   ● Neither agree nor disagree   ● Agree   ● Strongly agree

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I feel confident in my ability to manage my mental health	7.4	21.9	21.0	39.3	10.5
I can detect the warning signs of mental health distress in myself	1.9	6.3	10.6	60.2	21.1
I know how to help others in mental health distress	3.8	21.2	23.7	42.0	9.3

Table 6 - In questions related to managing their own mental health or supporting others, roughly half of survey respondents expressed confidence in managing their own mental health and supporting others. 81.3% agreed or strongly agreed that they could detect the warning signs of stress in themselves.
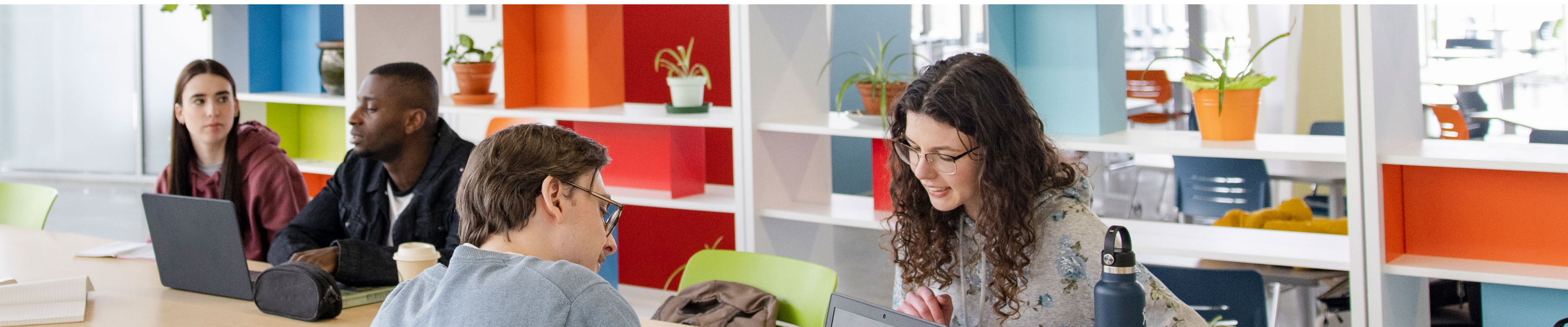
PILLAR

03

Accessibility

National Standard

AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES

- Academic accommodations were highlighted as a pinch point for multiple students with disabilities. In multiple campus engagements, we heard from students who had navigated the process of registering their disability with the Academic Success Centre. Flexibility, speed of access, and availability of these services were reported to be barriers for students. This is particularly true for students beginning midway through the school year and international students. Students often expressed confusion about starting or completing the process of registering for accommodations and requested more support with the process.

- In particular, students with disabilities reflected that getting accommodations was labour-intensive and that the understaffing of that office led to negative experiences.

- The financial burden of a psychological assessment for accommodations was highlighted as a critical barrier to receiving appropriate supports.

- Students expressed a strong desire for mandatory faculty and staff education on accessibility and accommodation supports, including improved mental health literacy for staff and instructors. Students often shared experiences of being questioned by instructors and feeling like they needed to advocate for their Accessibility needs, and requested more assistance from the University in handling these situations.

- Other students advocated for a universal design approach where modifications to course delivery, assessment, and engagement would be automatically implemented within classroom settings to benefit students with various learning styles.

- Students expressed the university could also do more to raise awareness of the support available through Accessibility Resources for those who might need them. International students identified additional barriers with becoming aware of accommodations services, understanding how to access them, and how to know if they might qualify.

❝❝

"Application for accommodations is a really onerous process and has been a significant barrier for me in pursuing registration as someone with neurodivergence."

"Accommodations office is also overburdened … they need much more support staff and to reduce wait times and to be much stronger at advocating for their students."

Collectively, this feedback underscores the importance of the University's new Student Accessibility Enhancement Project, which aims to encourage institution-wide changes to provide more effective accommodation and accessibility supports for medical and non-medical protected grounds.

PILLAR

04

Early
Intervention

National Standard

- Students recognized the importance of getting support early when they begin to struggle with mental health and identified that they may need help recognizing these warning signs. This includes broad education for campus community members, particularly peers, as students reflected frequently that support from peers, loved ones, or instructors helped improve access to early intervention supports.

- Students broadly identified that seeking help from within the University community is not their default when the first signs of mental health crises are identified, instead leaning on family, friends, or existing support networks.

BARRIERS TO EARLY INTERVENTION

- The availability of services to proactively address mental health issues was identified by students, particularly supports that can attend to the unique needs of equity-denied individuals and groups. The lack of perceived availability of prompt service led more students to seek off-campus care, making visible gaps in insurance coverage. Students felt services were particularly overextended during peak periods of stress, like exam times, when services may be needed most.

- The mechanisms for accessing services were repeatedly mentioned as a barrier. For example, students expressed that making a phone call for a counselling appointment is onerous, especially at times of high stress. Students appreciated online options for booking appointments and flexible modalities for accessing services.

- Students, particularly from equity-denied groups, identified service modalities beyond one-on-one counselling as essential to ensuring effective and trauma-informed care to improve the effectiveness of early interventions (e.g peer support, support groups, social programming).

PILLAR

05

Mental health supports

National Standard

AVAILABILITY OF CARE

- University of Alberta students expressed concerns with the availability of mental health supports both on and off campus, including options beyond one-on-one counselling such as groups and peer support.

- Students expressed frustration with not being able to receive prompt service when they reached out to counselling services.

- Students recommended that the University make more drop-in supports available without an appointment, especially during high-stress periods like final exams.

Collectively, this feedback underscores the importance of the University's new Student Accessibility Enhancement Project, which aims to encourage institution-wide changes to provide more effective accommodation and accessibility supports for medical and non-medical protected grounds.

"

"I've felt very supported while studying here, and I'm enormously grateful to the University of Alberta and the people running and operating these mental health support programs."

"The mental health supports offered here (counselling services) are excellent. However, it stresses me out further to know that they are limited in the number of sessions that I can attend. Afterwards I will have to find a new therapist and restart the process of counselling."

QUALITY & INCLUSIVENESS OF CARE

- Some students expressed that the university still has a long way to go in ensuring that campus mental health services are culturally sensitive and informed by equity, diversity and inclusion.

- We heard that campus providers are sometimes perceived to take a one-size-fits-all, Western approach to mental health and that few options exist for other therapeutic orientations and holistic care.

- Students called for more diverse service providers so that they had the option to work with someone who shared their cultural background and language.

- We also heard a need for more specialized supports for particular populations, particularly 2SLGBTQ+ students, mature and parenting students, neurodiverse individuals and support groups tailored to particular mental health conditions (e.g. psychosis, depression, bipolar disorder).

These student comments align closely with the university's current work to further expand the representation of its therapists by recruiting clinicians with diverse racial backgrounds and lived experiences.

FNMI student participants identified many common experiences of grief, loss, and intergenerational trauma, which they felt were not understood or prioritized by mental health services when they sought support.

Students expressed some confusion on the confidentiality of mental health services and the limits of confidentiality. International students in particular expressed that more clarification was needed on the limits to confidentiality, as practices may vary in their home countries.

Legend

● Strongly disagree   ● Disagree   ● Neither agree nor disagree   ● Agree   ● Strongly agree

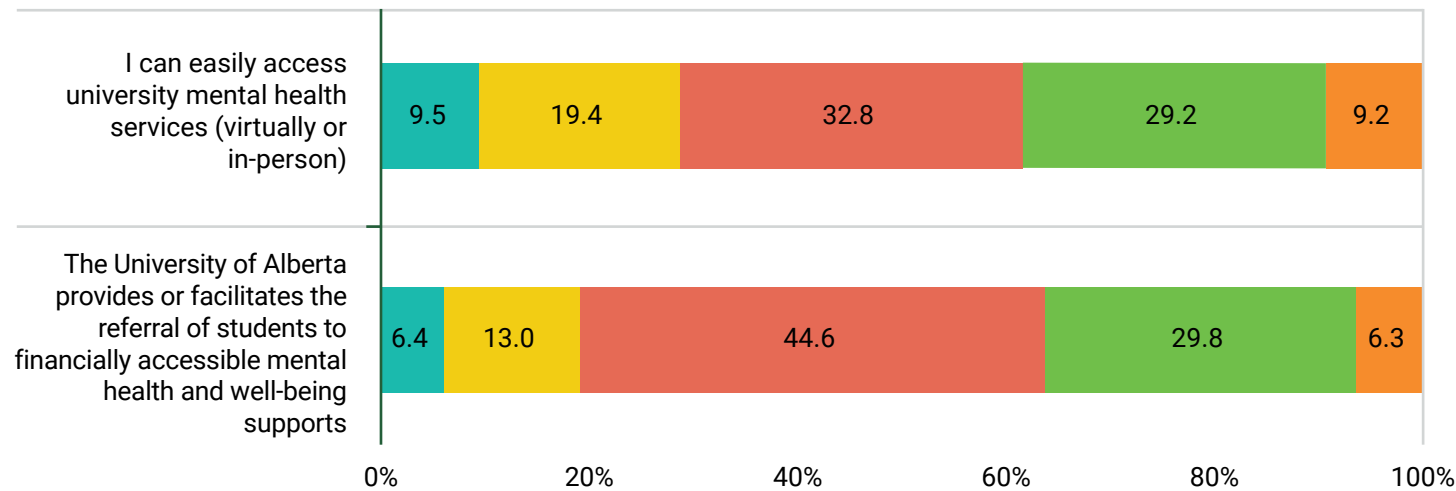| Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I can easily access university mental health services (virtually or in-person)	9.5	19.4	32.8	29.2	9.2
The University of Alberta provides or facilitates the referral of students to financially accessible mental health and well-being supports	6.4	13.0	44.6	29.8	6.3

Table 7 - 32.8% of survey respondents neither agreed nor disagreed when asked if they could easily access university mental health services. 44.6% neither agreed or disagreed when asked if the U of A facilitates referrals to financially accessible services. Collectively, these results suggest that many students are unsure about how easily they can access affordable mental health services through the university.

❝

"(I'd like to see) representation on the staff from people who intimately know the culture… a group of trained specialists with experience and understanding of specific cultures to support international students."

"I'd like counseling services in my mother tongue."

"I feel as though there is awareness on self-care but not as much for mental illnesses like depression, ADHD, anxiety, etc."

PILLAR
06
↗

Crisis Management and postvention

National Standard

The Role of Alberta Protective Services (UAPS)/911 in Crisis Intervention

- Overall, students raised questions regarding the University's role in crisis intervention. Students expressed more willingness to seek care from urgent medical clinics, emergency medical services, or external services such as Talk Suicide Canada.

- Students expressed concerns regarding the involvement of uniformed or armed officers in crisis management. While some students appreciated an increased presence of UAPS (University of Alberta Protective Services), students did not perceive UAPS to be an adequate crisis management service for mental health concerns on their own, particularly if the response time was lengthy.

These student comments align closely with the university's current work to further expand the representation of its therapists by recruiting clinicians with diverse racial backgrounds and lived experiences.

"

"In addition to UAPS/911, look at a multidisciplinary crisis team that can respond to diverse incidents on campus (e.g. sexual assault).

UAPS or 911 is not what most students are going to be wanting to call in a mental health crisis... Please have something that doesn't involve people who are armed."

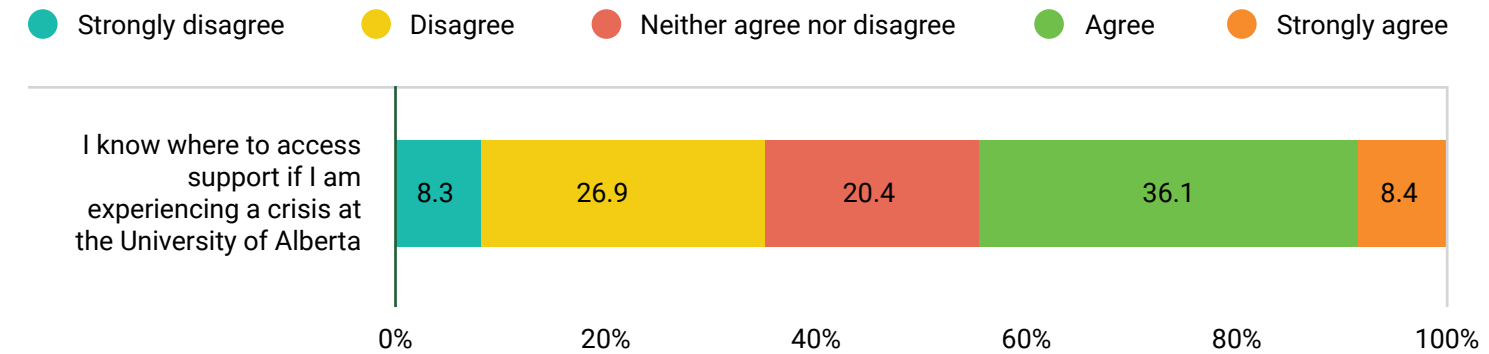"I never really considered the University a place I would go to in a crisis situation."

● Strongly disagree   ● Disagree   ● Neither agree nor disagree   ● Agree   ● Strongly agree

| I know where to access support if I am experiencing a crisis at the University of Alberta | 8.3 | 26.9 | 20.4 | 36.1 | 8.4 |

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

Table 8 - The majority of survey respondents were not sure or did not know where to access support if experiencing a crisis at the U of A.

APPENDIX A -
STUDENT SURVEY DEMOGRAPHIC

	Count	Count
Affiliated Campus		
North Campus	924	77.3%
Campus Saint-Jean	50	4.2%
Augustana	192	16.1%
Calgary Centre	12	1.0%
I do not know	17	1.4%
Residential Status		
Canadian Citizen (from AB)	847	70.9%
Canadian Citizen (out of province)	134	11.2%
Permanent Resident	40	3.4%
International Student	166	13.7%
Visiting Scholar	2	0.2%
Landed Immigrant Status	5	0.4%
Unsure/NA	3	0.3%
Degree		
Undergraduate Degree	941	79.8.7%
Graduate Degree	139	11.6%
Professional Program	90	7.5%
Not seeking a degree	3	0.3%

	Count	Count
Gender Identity		
Male	279	23.3%
Female	848	71.0%
Transgender Man	4	0.3%
Transgender Female	5	0.4%
Non-binary	63	5.3%
Other	13	1.1%
Prefer not to disclose	20	1.7%
Sexual Orientation		
Asexual	49	4.1%
Bisexual	135	11.3%
Demisexual	24	2.0%
Gay	19	1.6%
Heterosexual	758	63.4%
Lesbian	35	2.9%
Pansexual	36	3.0%
Queer	31	2.6%
Questioning	41	3.4%
Other	14	1.2%
Prefer not to disclose	53	4.4%
Ethnicity		
African or African Ancestry	70	5.9%
Australian Aborigine, Maori, or Pacific Islander	8	0.7%
East or South-East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Filipino, Thai)	176	14.7%
European or European Ancestry (including French-Canadian and English-Canadian)	589	49.3%
Indigenous, First Nations, Inuit, or Métis	46	3.9%
Latino, Hispanic, Latin American or South American	30	2.5%
Middle Eastern / West Asian (e.g. Arab, Persian, Afghan)	45	3.8%
South Asian (e.g. Pakistani, Tamil, Bengali)	128	10.7%
West Indies or Caribbean	4	0.3%
Mixed ethnicity	83	7.0%
Other	16	1.3%

APPENDIX B -
STUDENT RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents a summary of the most popular suggestions and recommendations students proposed throughout our engagement sessions. Students expressed these as tangible solutions for how the University could do better to improve student mental health. The list below is a high-level overview of the requests we heard from students repeatedly. While many logistical details must be considered to implement improvements successfully, these suggestions represent a starting point for discussion with faculty, service providers, and students, and are being considered to inform our forthcoming Student Mental Health Action Plan.

Supportive, safe and inclusive postsecondary environment

Improve accessibility and functionality of physical space	• Renovate, upgrade, and redesign physical spaces on campus to improve building accessibility and enhance comfort, cleanliness, and functionality. • Incorporate universal design principles in spaces and buildings to ensure the access and autonomy of all individuals. • Implement coordinated communications system for reporting and responding to/resolving accessibility barriers, create clearer two-way system for mapping, reporting and communicating access barriers on campus • Create a ongoing, coordinated approach to auditing, mapping, and improving access

Physical space that supports equity, diversity, and inclusion	• Create spaces that are welcoming and inclusive for people of all intersectionalities, including:
	   » fitness spaces for women and gender diverse individuals,
	   » gender-neutral washrooms,
	   » prayer/meditation spaces,
	   » calming low-sensory-rooms,
	   » spaces for students who parent

Increase sense of community and connection to reduce isolation	• Increase events and other opportunities for students to connect outside of academic environments (e.g., social events, physical recreation, activities in residences, and dry events as alternatives to bars and clubs) • Increase events and opportunities for students to connect within their learning environment (e.g., promote academic cohorts in all programs, department-specific events, and inter-faculty/departmental events to connect with students from other disciplines)

Mental health impacts of Instructors	• Review and formalize accountability for instructors, and provide support for students with concerns • Utilize the SPOT survey to evaluate instructor support of student mental health and provision of accessibility support (including accommodations) in learning environments.
Mental health integrated into academic structure	• Courses/programs designed with mental health, accessibility, inclusivity, cultural sensitivity, and neurodivergence in mind • Offer a combination of meaningful online, hybrid, and in person opportunities which include social learning. • Provide recorded lectures and accessible online resources to support different learning styles, access needs, and necessary absences.. • More flexible and accommodating course design and integration of mental health with academics • Expand universal design for learning strategies in program/course curricula to reduce the need for formal accommodations.

Mental Health Literacy, Education and Stigma Reduction

Active outreach for services and resources available	• Expand ambassadors coming to class to explain mental health resources available on campus • Instructors and staff share information about resources and services in learning environments
More advertising and awareness of services and resources available	• Create one central webpage with all resources available (even if offered by different providers) that is posted on eClass and BearTracks • Create short videos or podcasts explaining services available at the U of A • Widespread advertising of events and services; use of Ualberta app to notify of events; proactive outreach approaching students to inform them of services); included in Welcome Day/Orientation
Enhance referral mechanisms and navigation services	• Provide a navigator service as a "starting point" to talk to a person and be referred down the right path • More supports and navigation services (including referrals) integrated within the learning environment (e.g., from academic advisors)

Accessibility

Improve instructor awareness/ responsibility for accessibility and accommodations	• Required training for instructors on accommodations to ensure they are aware of responsibilities and understand accommodation-related privacy requirements. • Establish mandatory training for instructors and staff regarding medical and non-medical barriers to academic participation, and about accessibility and inclusion strategies applicable for all campus environments.
Create a mechanism for providing feedback to faculty and staff supporting accommodations	• Clarify options for submitting feedback or complaints about accommodation and accessibility services, and effectively communicate these options to students. • Re-establish student accessibility evaluation program • Incorporate accessibility into SPOT instructor evaluations
Increase funding and resources for accommodation and accessibility services	• Increase the number of accessibility advisors alongside enrolment growth • Improve and expand the technological solutions available to students approved for accommodations, as well as the technological solutions available to all students registered at the University. • Re-establish note-taking supports for students with disabilities
Integrate perspectives of people with disabilities in campus culture	• Regularly consult people with disabilities for improvements • Raise awareness and educate the campus population about perspectives on disability. Advocacy and education on campus around disability culture.

Early intervention

Implement a screening tool and early warning system for mental health concerns	• Offer consensual, anonymous, mental health evaluation tools, at specified intervals, that steer students to helpful resources based on their responses, and the option to opt-in to being contacted by trained staff. • Identify and train wellness advocates within all units and faculties who can support consenting students in accessing services.
Expand drop-in and immediate access services	• Wait times are a barrier to early intervention
Increase training options for staff and students to learn how to support others	• More options for training times (eg Community Helpers, How to Have a Supportive Conversation) on evenings and weekends.

Mental Health Supports

Multicultural and multilingual mental health supports	• Increase cultural diversity of mental health providers at the University and implement multilingual resources. Improve intercultural competency of all providers.
Expand mental health support groups to meet student need	• Group therapy for specific concerns and diagnoses • Support groups for neurodiverse individuals and people with disabilities • Peer support groups for students.

Crisis Management and Postvention

Mental health professionals as crisis responders	• Implement a multidisciplinary crisis team to respond to mental health emergencies and other incidents like sexual assault, as an alternative to UAPS.
Walk-in counseling options	• Increase availability of mental health therapy where no appointment is needed.

National Standard of Canada for Mental Health & Wellbeing for Post-Secondary Students

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