

## **STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH POLICY**

Approving Authority: Academic Coordinating Committee

Policy Owner: Vice President, Students

Policy Lead: Dean of Students

Effective Date: 2025/01/29

Revision Date: N/A

### **POLICY STATEMENT**

Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning (Conestoga) is committed to cultivating a supportive teaching, learning, living, and working environment that addresses the health and wellness needs of students.

Aspiring to the ideals of the Okanagan Charter, Conestoga's goals are to embed consideration of student mental health across all aspects of campus culture, including services, teaching practices, administration, and commitment to high-quality academic programs.

This policy frames Conestoga's commitment to this goal as it relates to students and ensures the College remains compliant with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act and related directives from the Minister.

An annual report will be provided to the Board of Governors on the implementation and effectiveness of this policy. The report will describe the programs, services and supports provided to students.

### **SCOPE**

This policy applies to all activities at Conestoga that have an impact on students' Mental Health.

### **DEFINITIONS**

**Culturally Safe:** This is an approach that considers how social and historical contexts, as well as structural and interpersonal power imbalances, shape health and healthcare experiences. It is created through an environment that is emotionally, psychologically, physically, socially, and spiritually safe for people; where there is no challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are, of what they experienced, and what they need.

**Educational Programming:** Encompasses learning aligned with a defined curriculum and outcomes, with the goals of knowledge and skill acquisition, meeting academic

standards, and fulfilling accreditation requirements. These services can include both academic and co-curricular activities.

**Intersecting Identities:** Highlights how individuals may experience multiple forms of oppression based on different aspects of their identities. Addressing these interconnected struggles is essential to promoting equity and mitigating harms that negatively impact mental health.

**Mental Health:** This is a state of well-being in which individuals can realize their potential, manage normal life stresses, learn and work productively, and contribute to their communities. Ontario's Health Promotion Guideline (2018) and the National Standard for Canada on Mental Health and Well-being for Post-secondary Students (2020) provide important guidance on understanding the broad definition of this concept.

**Mental Health Awareness:** Involves activities designed to increase understanding and opportunities for assistance related to psychological and emotional well-being. These efforts include education, events, and outreach initiatives.

**Mental Health Conditions:** Clinically significant difficulties that affect an individual's thoughts, emotions, or behaviors; often influencing how they perceive the world, interact with others, and navigate daily life. These conditions can vary in severity and duration and may benefit from support, therapy, or medical care to promote well-being and recovery.

**Stigma:** Refers to the negative attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes directed toward individuals or groups based on characteristics such as health conditions, identities, or behaviors.

## **POLICY**

1. Conestoga provides equitable, culturally safe, holistic mental health supports to students in three broad categories, with a principal focus on being both proactive and responsive to a broad range of needs:
  - 1.1. Primary support focuses on keeping mental health concerns from forming. The College prioritizes activities such as orientation programs, educational services and events that promote overall well-being to assist with all students' mental health. This includes recognizing a number of mental health awareness days.
  - 1.2. Secondary support is focused on early intervention when a student is starting to struggle with their mental health. The College provides support services to help guide students to the right resources and make sure they can access the help they need to feel better. This includes fostering a culture of caring, reducing stigma and barriers to accessing support as well as specific assistance for students in distress.
  - 1.3. Tertiary support focuses on engaging students who have faced or are facing significant challenges. Conestoga's goal is to provide individualized resources to improve well-being and help students successfully engage with their academics.

2. Conestoga's primary focus is on providing Educational Programming, which means it may not be equipped to offer treatment for severe mental health conditions. Where the necessary resources or expertise are not available in-house, the College will work collaboratively with community agencies and local healthcare providers to support students.
3. The main point of access for comprehensive information about mental health supports and initiatives at Conestoga is through the Student Success [Portal](#) which is centrally accessible to students, faculty and employees.
4. The College acknowledges the importance of providing culturally safe and responsive support for mental health.
  - 4.1. Students have diverse needs, experiences, and worldviews including intersecting identities that impact their experiences of mental health and access to services. The College is committed to working on integrating consideration for these perspectives in the design and delivery of mental health initiatives.
  - 4.2. The staff in Student Health & Wellness provide support from an anti-oppressive, trauma-informed approach and represent diverse identities and backgrounds. These services are committed to effectively and sensitively supporting the diverse student population.
  - 4.3. Conestoga recognizes the importance of maintaining ongoing relationships with the community beyond the College, such as faith leaders, Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and Elders, and mental health service providers as part of building a robust network of supports for students' mental health.
5. Conestoga provides a variety of mental health programs and services that are available to all registered students.
  - 5.1. Prevention programs and non-clinical support, such as service navigation and case management, are available to all students.
  - 5.2. Counselling Services are available to all students and, as needed, will facilitate connections to other community resources.
  - 5.3. The services of the Medical Clinic are available to students who do not have access to a primary healthcare provider in Ontario and to care that is consistent with the practice standards of the clinical staff.
  - 5.4. Indigenous Elders and the Indigenous Student Wellness Advisor are available to students who require supports that are integrated with Indigenous ways of knowing and cultural practices.
  - 5.5. To reduce stigma, the College may provide programs and services designed to meet the unique needs of specific groups of students, such as those from a particular background or identity group or who have a particular type of diagnosis.
6. The College commits to making professional development opportunities available to all employees on topics relating to supporting students with mental health concerns.

## Privacy

7. Conestoga collects mental health information received from students seeking the services of the Medical Clinic and Counselling Services in keeping with the Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA). The application of this Act is detailed in the College's Protection of Personal Health Information Policy.
8. Information pertaining to students' mental health collected by any other department, service, or employee acting on behalf of the College is governed by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA). The application of this Act is detailed in the College's Protection of Privacy Policy.
9. The purpose of collecting mental health information from students is to render programs and services and maintain the safety of those to whom it pertains.
  - 9.1. Permitted uses of the information includes:
    - Providing direct services such as, but not limited to, counseling, case management, and academic accommodation,
    - Obtaining payment through funding provided by the provincial government,
    - Planning, administering and managing internal operations,
    - Conducting risk management and quality improvement activities,
    - Compiling statistics,
    - Responding to complaints and appeals,
    - Retaining and destroying records in accordance with the law,
    - Complying with legal and regulatory requirements, and
    - Fulfilling other purposes permitted or required by applicable law.
  - 9.2. The College will not disclose students' mental health information to parents, families, friends, or other third parties supporters without consent.
    - 9.2.1. Consent is understood to be implied if a student invites a supporter into an appointment, though verbal confirmation will typically be obtained from the student.
    - 9.2.2. Supporters may not consent on a student's behalf to any course of action by College personnel or to the disclosure of personal information.
    - 9.2.3. A student may revoke consent at any time by making a request in writing. Consent will not be considered valid beyond 12 months from when it is granted unless reaffirmed in writing.
    - 9.2.4. The College may disclose mental health information to third parties as needed when there are reasonable grounds for concerns about safety. The information that is disclosed will be limited to that which is required to engage appropriate help.

10. Students with questions, concerns, or wishing to review records containing their personal information may contact the department that collected the data or [privacy@conestogac.on.ca](mailto:privacy@conestogac.on.ca).

## RELEVANT LEGISLATION AND RELATED DOCUMENTS

- [Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act](#)
- [Mental Health Promotion Guideline, 2018](#), Ministry of Health & Long-Term Care
- [Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act](#)
- [National Standard of Canada: Mental Health and Well-being for Post-Secondary Students](#)
- [Okanagan Charter](#)
- [Ontario Human Rights Code](#)
- [Personal Health Information Protection Act](#)
- [Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action](#)
- [Protection of Personal Health Information Policy](#)
- College's [Protection of Privacy Policy](#)

## REVISION LOG

2025/01/29

Academic Coordinating Committee - Approved