

# Report on Student Health Listening Sessions

*September through October, 2019*

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# INTRODUCTION

Student health and wellbeing, which includes clinical care, mental health care, and health promotion and education, is one of our most important shared responsibilities. When students do not feel healthy and do not have access to health care, their wellbeing and academic performance suffer.

In 2016, the University of British Columbia adopted the Okanagan charter with an explicit commitment to embed health and wellness into institutional policy and practices. In this space we hold our most important promise to students and their parents — that we will do everything within our power to make sure students have access to care while enrolled at UBC.

This promise begins with listening. From September 17th through October 21st, 2019, the VPS Office hosted thirteen listening sessions with a focus on the delivery of student health care at UBC. Sessions were hosted in residence halls, the UBC Life building, classrooms and conference rooms. Student organizations were invited to host sessions in their spaces for members of their clubs and organizations.

## PARTICIPANTS

In the end, close to 400 students participated including undergraduate, graduate, international, domestic, Vancouver and Okanagan students. Analysts from Planning and Institutional Research (PAIR) attended every session, took notes and analyzed the data from the focus groups.

## RESULTS

As promised, a summary of the major themes and our plans to address these issues is provided. These challenges are complex, and solutions will require broad consultation. The intent here is to share the broad themes, so we can work together on more detailed solutions.

### Five major themes emerged:

#### ***1. Challenges with distribution and clarity of health-related information***

Students informed us that information about student health care services is not evenly distributed. Students expressed frustration when looking for information related to specific health concerns and found it difficult to navigate the UBC website for accurate information about AMS insurance coverage. As a result, students may occasionally act on inaccurate or outdated information to guide their health care decisions.

Moving forward, we will place a major emphasis on health care information strategies. We realized that most of the health care challenges students described had answers, but those answers were hard to find. We could use your help identifying more effective communication strategies. We do have a comprehensive [website for student health](#) information.

#### ***2. Navigating different health resources and offices***

Students informed us that navigating health care at UBC is not always easy, just as it can be challenging outside the UBC community. Students are frequently referred to multiple offices when seeking care, wait weeks for an appointment and have to repeat their stories to multiple

health care providers. This makes their experience more stressful and harder to find the care they need. Those with mental health issues and chronic illnesses expressed exhaustion from having to repeat traumatic experiences multiple times to different people.

Moving forward, we are working on systems and processes to make the patient-care experience more user friendly. We also have plans for integrated health care facilities that provide a variety of services within one facility.

### **3. Communities of support**

Students found support services — Residence Advisors, Jump Start Leaders, counsellors, professors, academic advisors, wellness education peers, mentors and peers — helpful. This is consistent with findings of the 2018 AMS Academic Experience Survey. Overall, faculty members have been accommodating in the classroom when health care needs impede academic progress. Including health care resources in the syllabus has also been helpful.

A Residence Advisor is often the first individual students engage when health care questions or emergencies emerge in residence. Wellness peers have been reliable sources of information to point students in the right direction. Some students have suggested that people in positions that interact with students (e.g., residence advisors and front desk staff) could also benefit from trauma-informed training as they are often required to deal with delicate topics.

Students expressed concern about privacy; in some cases, they hope information is shared forward to prevent them from having to retell their story, in other cases they do not want their information shared. Moving forward we will strengthen our health care information networks and include trauma-informed training in our professional development. We will clarify expectations around privacy and confidentiality.

### **4. Diversity in healthcare**

Students expressed concern that counsellors and health providers do not reflect the diversity of the University population. Health care diversity is an important topic that we must discuss as a community. We acknowledge there is always room for greater diversity. Moving forward, the diversity of health care providers will be an important topic that receives our full attention.

### **5. Healthcare accessibility**

Students have reported that limited hours of operation and long wait times are among the challenges in accessing health services on campus. Student health services operate from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm, Monday through Saturday and until 8:00 pm on Wednesday. Most of these hours are during peak classroom times and students often have to miss classes to wait in long lines to seek care.

Accidents can happen after operating hours, and students are unclear about how, and where, to seek emergency services after hours. Moving forward we endeavor to remove barriers to accessing health care after hours. Discussions are currently underway to establish an emergency first-aid service for students.

By 2023, UBC will begin construction on an integrated student health care facility that will house

medical, clinical, and health promotion services in the same facility. All of these measures are important steps toward making clinical and mental health care more accessible for UBC students.

## **MOVING FORWARD**

Student Health and Wellbeing is our most important shared responsibility. Our entire community — students, faculty, staff, parents — is needed to make sure we take care of one another. In the coming weeks and months, you will see a renewed emphasis on our efforts to keep students informed about important health information and services. The challenges and opportunities described above and those not included here are not unique to UBC. Health care delivery is a complicated promise that involves many moving parts, some within our control and others beyond our control.

We are committed to working with UBC students, UBC health care professionals and scholars (Faculty of Nursing, Faculty of Medicine, School of Population and Public Health, and School of Kinesiology, Department of Psychology and Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education), and the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority to deliver the most comprehensive and informed student health system possible on a university campus.

I look forward to your engagement as we develop solutions together.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Thank you for sharing your time and thoughts during our listening sessions on student health. I learned so much from what you shared, and I am grateful for the wisdom of your lived experience. Open conversations like these are the best ways to exchange information that will lead to action and ongoing improvement.

Again, thank you for taking the time to voice your concerns. UBC takes student health seriously, and I look forward to working with you to ensure that we are providing the best care possible.

Your comments, ideas, and feedback on this report are welcomed. Please share your ideas at the [Vice-President for Students website](#).