



24 May 2017

Dear Students,

Herein lies our Student Services response to concerns expressed by representatives of SSMU and PGSS in an open letter and petition dated March 31, 2017 addressing student mental health at McGill University. Thank you so much for this very important feedback. As the new executive director of Student Services (January 2017), I want to assure you that supporting an optimal health and wellness environment that enables all students to flourish is my priority and I consider your voices as critical to this endeavor.

I wish to point out that the scope of my response is limited to the concerns around student mental health as addressed by Health Services, Mental Health Services, Counselling Services and to a lesser extent, Office for Students with Disabilities.

Background

As you are aware, universities and colleges across the continent have seen a sharp increase in demand for mental health counselling and treatment, and McGill is no different. The number of students accessing mental health and counselling services has dramatically increased by 57% in three years. During this time, Student Services has increased clinical capacity by over four FTE's which puts us on par with similar sized universities in terms of student services human resources.

Compounding the challenge of increasing demand for services is student confusion at McGill over entry points to three physically and operationally distinct services located on different levels of the Brown Student Services building (Health, Mental Health, and Counselling). In this current environment, and with the current dramatic increase in demand, we recognize that a new, more efficient model for serving students is critically needed.

Current Actions to Improve Access to Student Mental Health Services

The McGill Health and Wellness Strategy is currently under development with over 80 student, faculty and staff members on the advisory committee. Generously funded by the Rossy Family Foundation, the Strategy is a systemic approach to mental health. The Strategy will be tabled with Senate in the Fall of 2017 with implementation to follow in Winter 2018.

Student Services is also currently proactively addressing the issue of timely access to mental health services. We recognize that there are still access barriers and we are working on the following initiatives to improve services. We are currently:

- Gathering feed-back from students on our services, including the new Collaborative Care model. An end-of-year survey has been run for Counselling and Mental Health, as well as Health Services and the Office for Students with Disabilities. This is officially on the calendar



of surveys: <http://www.mcgill.ca/studentlifeandlearning/feedback-surveys/student-surveys>. Results will be shared with students, faculty and staff through Committee on Student Services (CSS, a sub-committee of Senate) and used to continue improving our mental health services.

- Gathering feedback on the Collaborative Care model through one-on-one check-ins with our clinicians. Feedback from students and clinicians will result in recommendations to better tailor the Collaborative Care model to the McGill student experience.
- Consulting with the Dean of Students, Faculties and Residence to develop more formal and coordinated responses to students in crises.
- Centralizing communications and outreach in student services that includes:
 - Hiring a communications and outreach specialist within the executive office to coordinate communications, outreach and marketing from all eleven Student Services units and including Macdonald campus.
 - Integrating our websites on mental health in a way that properly represents our one-intake model, making it easier for students to understand the services offered and how to access them. The website will act as a hub that combines information from Health Services, Mental Health and Counselling, and the Office for Students with Disabilities and will reflect the new Collaborative Care model. The website will also be a central location for the mapping of campus resources for students, including peer supports. We will soft launch the website in summer 2017 and seek feedback from students to better refine the site for fall 2017.
- Reviewing the terms of reference for the Committee on Student Services (CSS) to enable the committee to proactively and constructively advise on the direction of Student Services. This will include a recommendation by the executive director to create a Student Mental Health Advisory Group to inform future directions on student mental health within Student Services. The new terms of reference will require approval by Senate.
- Beginning the process of re-inventing Student Services to better serve the health and wellness needs of McGill students. This collaborative process will culminate with a new vision and strategic direction by May 2018 with a focus on mental health, access, and inclusion along the broad spectrum of awareness, education, prevention and harm reduction, to accessible mental health services and crisis management.

Expansion of Student Disability Services

33% of students registered with the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) also access mental health services. With the \$930,000 reinvestment of McGill into Student Services, we are developing a Psychoeducational Assessment and Learning component within OSD that will enable us to better serve the needs of students with disabilities without requiring them to unnecessarily access multiple units for support. This new initiative will begin in the fall 2017.

Student Health and Wellness Hub

Based on our research and consultation with peer institutions, in order to respond effectively and efficiently to student mental health needs, frontline services must be harmonized into a single access point. This will enable:



- expanded intake capacity;
- increased access to front-line specialists in both medical and mental health care;
- expanded wellness options including student consultations with a dietician, and appointments with health promotion peer educators;
- the expansion of the Collaborative Care model with the embedded Client Care Clinician role that connects students to internal and external resources that can help them achieve and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Student Services recently received \$900,000 from the Rossy Family Foundation to create a one point of entry for all students accessing health or mental health services tentatively called the *Student Health and Wellness Hub*.

The proposed *Student Health and Wellness Hub's* main objective is to provide students with timely and centralized access to the appropriate level of health and wellness care. It addresses student confusion about having to self-diagnose and choose between three silo-ed services with separate physical entry points and client management/records systems.

The Health and Wellness Hub will enable the critically needed harmonization of

1. services, training and approaches to provide services to students at the appropriate level of intervention;
2. technologies, techniques and procedures including online appointment booking and electronic medical records system;
3. the physical space including shared frontline services and single access point to health and wellness services.

The Student Health and Wellness Hub will be project managed internally and completed by August 2018.

In conclusion, this letter has generally outlined a few of the current and future steps that Student Services is taking to specifically support the mental health of our students. The list is not exhaustive. I see the role of the Senate Sub-Committee on Student Services (CSS), as well as student advisory committees for specific projects such as the Student Health and Wellness Hub, as playing integral roles in charting the future course for student mental health within Student Services.

I look forward to working together to co-construct and support a healthy learning environment for all McGill students.

With kindest regards,

Martine Gauthier
Executive Director, Services for Students