



Council of Alberta University Students
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March 6, 2017

Dear Honourable Ministers of Advanced Education, Health, & Finance:

RE: Renewed Funding for Alberta Campus Mental Health in Budget 2017

We are writing today on behalf of the Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS), which represents over 100,000 undergraduate university students from MacEwan University, Mount Royal University, the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge.

The issue of mental health in our province's post-secondary education (PSE) system is a crucial one for students and one about which we care profoundly. Currently, there is a Mental Health Review ongoing and we expect a report shortly on ways to improve and better allocate resources for the campus mental health sector in Alberta. We as students would like to strongly remind the decision makers in this process of the positive and wide spread effects funding has had on our campuses thus far.

With the unfortunate data recently released in 2016 about Alberta's post-secondary students, reported in the National College Health Assessment Survey, we know that mental health funding is essential. The survey stated that in the last twelve months 13.1% of students seriously considered suicide, 57.5% of students surveyed felt hopeless, 65.0% felt lonely, and 2.1% attempted suicide. To put that into real numbers, on a campus of 30,000 students, 3,930 seriously considered suicide, 17,250 students felt hopeless, 19,500 felt lonely, and 630 attempted suicide. These are serious numbers that require a serious response.

That serious response needs to be centered on strong, predictable, per student funding to our institutions. Since 2013, funds have been flowing into mental health support on campuses and there have been numerous improvements made to campus mental health services. For example, the University of Calgary saw drastic increases in resources, information, and professional development training for its Wellness Centre staff. The University of Lethbridge was able to hire a significant amount of mental health care professionals to meet the increasing demand for campus mental health services, including counselors, a mental health physician, and administrative staff, cutting down wait times for students significantly. A Community Social Work Team was assembled at the University of Alberta composed of professional social workers to take on the task of providing essential services across campus during midterms. Additionally, MacEwan University was able to increase its mental health support staff, specifically hiring two full time psychologists. And finally, at Mount Royal University, the funding was used not only to increase counseling hours for students, but also to hire a Mental Health Facilitator position responsible for campus mental health training and outreach programs.

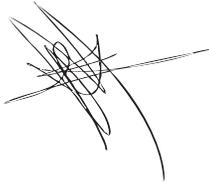
We write to you today to reiterate our passion for campus mental health and remind decision makers of our recommendations on the issues, which are as follows:

- A continuation of the government's support for PSE mental health funding and to promote a healthy and vibrant student and campus community. This support has been vital in aiding university students.
- For the government to distribute mental health funding, at existing levels, to universities on a per-student basis, in order for mental health programs to be funded according to student representation within each PSE institution.
- That funding allocated to institutions is used to maintain and expand professional programming and hire mental health service delivery experts, such as counselors and psychologists.

There is clear agreement across party lines that campus mental health funding, and the supports it creates, are vital to the long term success of Alberta's students. Now is the time to stand up the challenge of supporting our next generation through predictable and guaranteed funding in some of the most important years of their lives.

We, at CAUS, would love to discuss Campus Mental Health Funding more and would happily set up a meeting to converse on the issue. To schedule a meeting time, or should you have any further questions, please contact our Interim Executive Director, Joshua McKeown, by phone at 780-297-4531, or e-mail at josh@caus.net.

Sincerely,



Dexter Bruneau, Chair



Carley Casebeer, Vice-Chair