



# Well-being Strategy

## 2024-2030

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# Land Acknowledgement

York University recognizes that many Indigenous Nations have longstanding relationships with the territories upon which York University campuses are located that precede the establishment of York University. York University acknowledges its presence on the traditional territory of many Indigenous Nations. The area known as Tkaronto has been care taken by the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Huron-Wendat. It is now home to many First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities. We acknowledge the current treaty holders, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. This territory is subject of the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement to peaceably share and care for the Great Lakes region.

Recognizing the Indigenous territory on which York University stands is integral to York’s commitment to well-being because it underscores its role in environmental stewardship, cultural respect, and sustainable living.

Whether acknowledged individually or as a community, the intentional act of connecting with the land is a way of enhancing well-being and promoting a more sustainable, harmonious relationship with the natural world and each other.

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## Letter from Sponsors

York University is one of the largest, most diverse universities in Canada. Over 60,000 students, faculty, instructors and staff have chosen our university to prepare for their career and pursue their success in life. We are committed to strengthening well-being on York's campuses as a precondition to working and learning.

As part of York's University Academic Plan, Living Well Together is set out as one of six priorities for action. This Well-being strategy responds to the call to "continue to implement mental health and well-being strategies, policies and collective actions that create supportive and empowering environments for all members of the community." Students, staff, faculty and instructors have let us know that stronger sense of connection, inclusion and well-being are among the key changes they are seeking in their daily experience of life at the University.

This new pan-university Well-being strategy was created with a holistic lens that reflects York's commitment to adopting the Okanagan Charter (2015). The charter is an international document that calls upon post-secondary institutions to embed health into all aspects of campus culture and to lead action and collaboration on health promotion within both local and global post-secondary networks. The Well-being strategy is built upon a solid foundation established by former mental health frameworks and work undertaken on York's campuses. This five-year strategy provides direction based on consultation with community members to reflect what is most needed to enhance well-being on York's campuses. It provides insight into the areas that York community members told us matter most to them, and it details clear actions that will bring forth meaningful change.

Collaboration and shared responsibility are vital for fostering growth and well-being across all people, communities, places and spaces. Therefore, we call on all members of the community to join us in building new relationships that promote and embed well-being throughout every area of York. Together we can create a more connected, safe, healthy and inclusive environment in which diverse community members can thrive.

**Nona Robinson**, Vice-Provost Students

**Laina Bay-Cheng**, Interim Vice-President, Equity, People & Culture

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## Acknowledgements

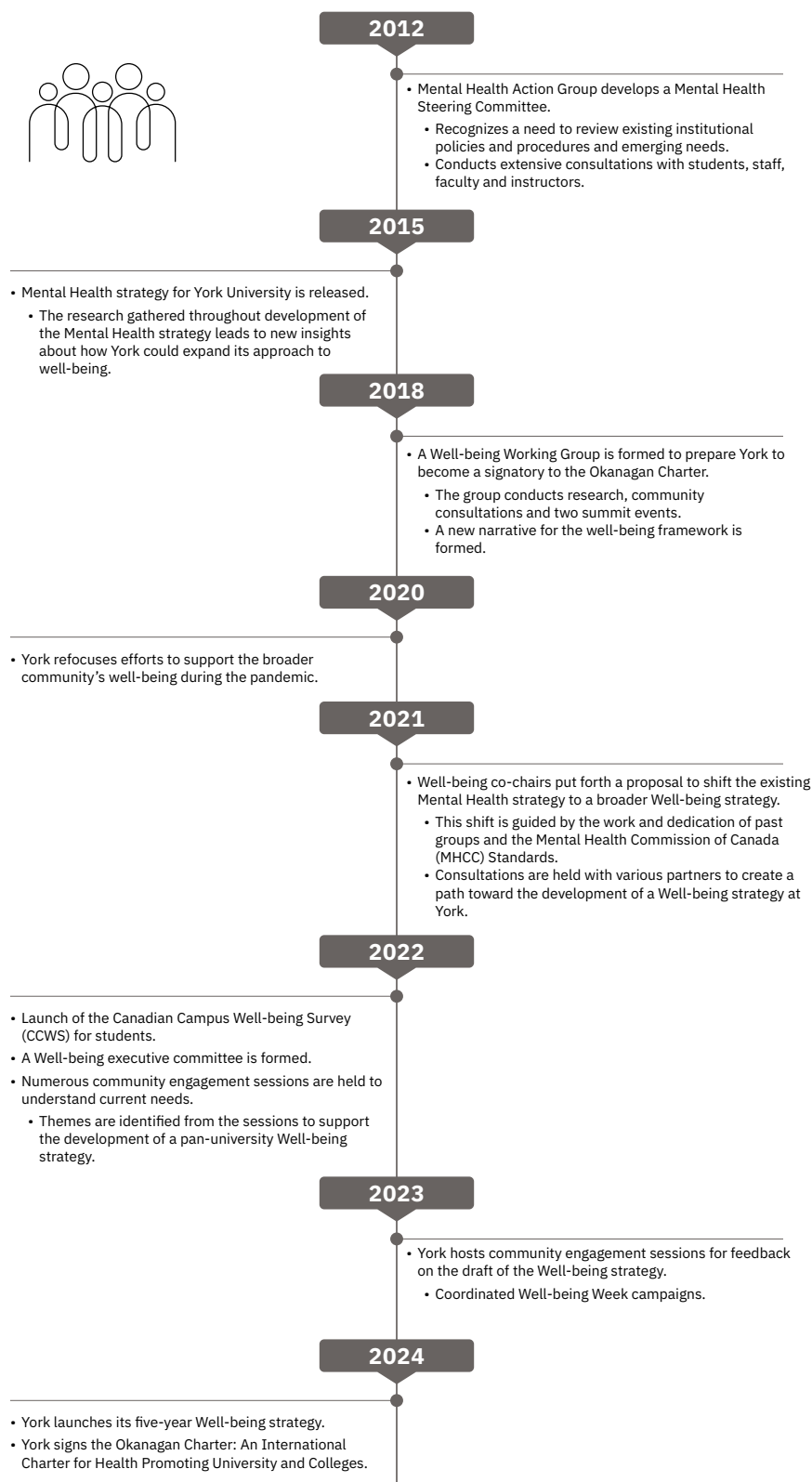
York University would like to thank the many staff, students, faculty, instructors and partners who have dedicated their time, experience and wisdom over many years to shaping the future of well-being at York. These significant community contributions have paved the way for a strong foundation that York is excited to build upon.

The Well-being strategy aligns with other strategies at York, recognizing that a holistic community approach is needed to address factors that impact well-being. The strategy aims to bring together the community to work collaboratively and integrate resources across York's campuses.

### Related York Strategies and Frameworks:

- University Academic Plan
  - Living Well Together
  - Commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
- Decolonizing, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy
- Anti-Black Racism: A Framework on Black Inclusion
- The Indigenous Framework for York University: A Guide to Action
- York University Sustainability Strategy
- York University Strategic Research Plan
- Engaging the World: York University's Internationalization and Global Engagement Strategy
- Division of Students Strategic Plan

## EVOLUTION OF THE WELL-BEING STRATEGY AT YORK



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# Guiding Documents & Treaties

## Mental Health Commission of Canada: National Standard for Mental Health and Well-Being for Post-Secondary Students

The National Standard for Mental Health and Well-Being for Post-Secondary Students is a set of flexible, voluntary guidelines to help post-secondary institutions support the mental health and well-being of students through long-term planning (MHCC, 2020). Following a socio-ecological model, this standard provides various audit tools and assessments to help guide universities in identifying opportunities to enhance well-being on campus. It is grounded in continuous improvement to support post-secondary institutions with their efforts to meet key outcomes for well-being and mental health.

## Mental Health Commission of Canada: National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace

The MHCC National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace is a flexible, voluntary set of guidelines, tools and resources to develop and sustain a psychologically healthy and safe workplace through a journey of continual improvement (MHCC, 2018). A psychologically healthy and safe workplace actively prevents harm to staff, faculty and instructor psychological health and promotes psychological well-being. Although there are many factors external to the workplace that can impact psychological health and safety, the national standard addresses 13 factors within the control, responsibility or influence of the workplace. The 13 factors are as follows:

- Organizational culture
- Psychological and social support
- Clear leadership and expectations
- Civility and respect
- Psychological demands
- Growth and development
- Recognition and reward
- Involvement and influence
- Workload management
- Engagement
- Balance
- Psychological protection
- Protection of physical safety

## Okanagan Charter

The Okanagan Charter (2015) is an internationally recognized charter that guides post-secondary institutions toward building health promoting universities and colleges. The charter encourages institutions to embed health and well-being into all aspects of campus culture, operations and academic mandates. It is designed to lead health-promoting action, locally and globally, through collaboration.

## Two Row Wampum Belt Treaty

The Two Row Wampum (Gaswéñdah) treaty was established in 1613 between the Haudenosaunee and European settlers (Onondaga Nation, 2023). This agreement remains a living treaty today for guiding the co-existence of Indigenous peoples and settlers on Indigenous lands. The Two Row Wampum was mutually built upon three principles: friendship, peace and the creation of a forever-lasting agreement. The Haudenosaunee created this beaded wampum to document the agreement, which depicts two boats as the two purple stripes of beads navigating on a white beaded river of life without ever interfering with the other. The wampum respects boundaries in the differences of the lives, laws and people of each culture and emphasizes the importance of respecting the right of self-determination for Indigenous peoples.



## United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

The sustainable development goals (SDGs) were set forth by the United Nations in 2015, as a path to improve the planet, including human life, by 2030. These 17 goals are embedded into the work of York University as a commitment toward positive change. The 17 SDGs are as follows:

- No poverty
- Zero hunger
- Good health and well-being
- Quality education
- Gender equality
- Clean water and sanitation
- Affordable and clean energy
- Decent work and economic growth
- Industry, innovation and infrastructure
- Reduced inequality
- Sustainable cities and communities
- Responsible consumption and production
- Climate action
- Life below water
- Life on land
- Peace, justice and strong Institutions
- Partnerships to achieve the goal



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## Vision

York University's Well-being strategy aims to deliver a safe, healthy, inclusive and supportive environment that fosters well-being. Its vision is to create opportunities for positive change across the University to benefit the community. Well-being is a necessary pre-condition to working and learning. York is committed to taking a holistic, pan-university approach to addressing well-being across all of its campuses and elevating our commitment to the Okanagan Charter in leading as a health promoting institution. This work is guided by the MHCC National Standards for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace and Mental Health and Well-Being for Post-Secondary Students to create a strategy that is aligned with and inclusive of the community's needs.

York's Well-being strategy is informed by the Anishinaabe teaching of *Mino Bimaadiziwin*, which refers to "the gift of the good life." The teaching was provided on behalf of Nookomis Julie Ozawagosh from Atikameksheng Anishnawbek (Whitefish Lake First Nation).

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**"A good life is holistic, peaceful and balanced. It lacks contradiction and conflict with one's relatives, environment and ecosystem. Mino Bimaadiziwin can be achieved by living in accordance with the Seven Grandfathers Teachings – Wisdom, Love, Respect, Bravery, Honesty, Humility and Truth.**

**This teaching inspires us to honour and learn from our individual pasts and to let go of pre-existing beliefs to grow in kindness and acceptance toward ourselves and others.**

**Each day is a new opportunity for rebirth and renewal, to discover our relationship with ourselves, to uncover our passions, to give gratitude and to contribute to our families, to our community and to our land. If I choose to lead Mino Bimaadiziwin, if I change myself, then I create a positive change in the world."**

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York is grateful to learn from this Indigenous teaching, which is referred to in the University Academic Plan under the action area of Living Well Together. As a visual representation of the Well-being strategy, a cedar tree was selected to represent the interconnectedness of well-being and growth. Cedar was chosen as a homage to the Indigenous community members who supported the development of this document. This image serves as a reminder to observe and acknowledge Indigenous protocols with reciprocity and respect.



While the Division of Equity, People and Culture and the Division of Students take a leadership role in advancing the Well-being strategy, its success depends on the participation of the entire York community, including students, staff, faculty and instructors. York calls upon faculties, divisions, departments, units and all York community members to identify shared responsibilities and implement actions to support well-being.

# Dimensions of Well-being

Well-being is a state that is worked toward, one that must be approached and viewed from the diverse individual, systemic and community-based perspectives. Through this strategy, York is committed to improving the conditions of daily life related to working and learning at the University. York defines well-being across six dimensions. It emphasizes the influence of social determinants on health and well-being, prioritizing individual and collective needs and strengths across these dimensions. They serve as a guide to the various meanings of individual well-being, *Mino Bimaadiziwin* and the wellness of the overall community. By highlighting these dimensions, York encourages the development of a wide variety of well-being initiatives that account for the diverse needs of community members across a broad spectrum. York recognizes that existing institutional systems may limit community members' ability to achieve wellness. York must identify and work toward dismantling barriers to wellness.



**Physical Well-being:** Maintaining a healthy quality of life that allows individuals to get the most out of their daily activities without undue fatigue, physical stress or impacts to physical safety while on York's campuses.



**Mental Well-being:** Managing one's thoughts, feelings and stress related to learning and work, while coping with emotions to promote resilience, healthy relationships, self-compassion and happiness. It encompasses nurturing curiosity, critical thinking and continuous learning to support personal growth and development.



**Social Well-being:** Sharing, developing and sustaining meaningful relationships through involvement with other community members.



**Spiritual and Cultural Well-being:** Experiencing meaning and purpose in life through connectedness with self, others, arts, media, nature, faith or a power greater than oneself.



**Occupational Well-being:** Achieving a balance between work and leisure in a way that promotes health, personal satisfaction, growth and professional development.

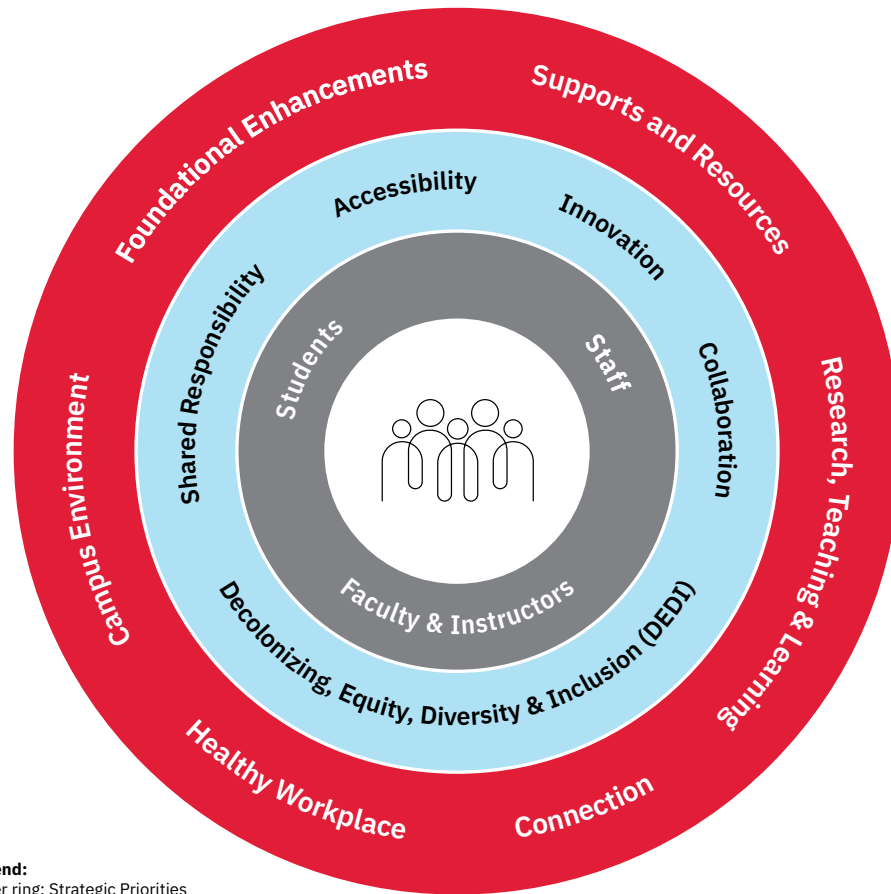


**Financial Well-being:** Managing to comfortably meet one's current financial commitments and basic needs while having the tools to continue doing so in the future.





# YORK UNIVERSITY WELL-BEING STRATEGY



**Legend:**  
Outer ring: Strategic Priorities  
Middle ring: Guiding Principles  
Centre ring: York Community

## Guiding Principles

York University's guiding principles for well-being drive its goals to enhance well-being on its campuses. These principles informed the strategic priorities, areas of focus and subsequent recommendations set forth in this strategy to centre on what is most important to community members.

- **Accessibility:** Access to usable and meaningful information, activities and environments to promote well-being is a right for all York community members.
- **Decolonizing, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (DEDI):** Creating a culture of well-being is intended to provide all community members with equitable and just opportunities to flourish and thrive. Well-being is an equity issue, and solutions for historically underserved and underrepresented community members benefit everyone.
- **Innovation:** This means doing work both old and new in creative ways. Through innovation, community members' needs can be met.
- **Collaboration:** Well-being initiatives are enhanced when developed and implemented through partnerships within and outside of the University community.
- **Shared Responsibility:** Well-being is a shared responsibility, where all community members play a role through individual self-efficacy and/or collective responsibility for systemic change to enhance the campus environment.

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# Strategic Priorities for Well-being

The Well-being strategy priorities were developed through a series of community engagement sessions hosted in 2022 and 2023. These priorities are reflected throughout the document in collective and individual contexts for students, staff, faculty and instructors.

Through these consultations, and with guidance from the MHCC Standards, six key areas were identified:

- **Foundational enhancements**
- **Supports and resources**
- **Research, teaching and learning**
- **Connection**
- **Healthy workplace**
- **Campus environment**

Within each priority, the strategy highlights areas of focus (i.e. what should be done) and recommendations (i.e. how it can be achieved) over the next five years for faculties, divisions, departments and units to guide their development of program-specific goals and activities for well-being work in alignment with the Well-being strategy.

York recognizes that well-being work will evolve over time; and that this strategy is not all encompassing and requires a sustained approach to meaningful change. Ongoing engagement is imperative in supporting the York community with what matters most.

## ➤ Foundational Enhancements

Foundational enhancements denote the strengthening of a framework that facilitates systemic changes to implementation, accountability and assessment of well-being actions at York.

### Areas of Focus

- Apply a well-being lens to campus governance, policies, practices, processes and procedures.
- Integrate the well-being strategic priorities into Integrated Resource Plans (IRPs) across the University.
- Increase awareness and application of the MHCC National Standards for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace and Mental Health and Well-being for Post-Secondary Students.
- Increase access to well-being grants and awards that support community innovation.

### Recommendations

- Sign the Okanagan Charter as a commitment to the calls to action and the launch of the strategy.
- Develop a process to ensure that campus policies and processes support well-being.
- Support leaders to integrate well-being strategic directions as part of York's IRPs, strategic plans and program goals tailored to unique needs.
- Develop a robust evaluation and reporting strategy to measure the long-term impacts and sustainability of well-being initiatives laid out within the strategy.
- Create working groups and partnerships to support the implementation of the strategy and report outcomes at least annually.
- Provide consultation to Divisions and Faculties on implementation of guidelines and tool kits for application of the MHCC Standards.
- Partner with Advancement to generate resource funds dedicated to well-being.

## ➤ Supports and Resources

This priority focuses on expanding awareness of and access to well-being supports, resources, tools and services that will help to protect, support and enrich the well-being of all community members. It encourages York to critically examine gaps in service to take a well-being-centred approach to meeting the diverse needs of the York community.

### Areas of Focus

- Address challenges with equity in access to supports and resources available to York community members.
- Support equity-deserving community members with relevant resources.
- Respect and uphold the right for Indigenous community members to have self-determination surrounding their well-being needs.
- Provide services that meet individual community members or groups where they are: the right service, at the right place at the right time.
- Address the increased prevalence of mental health needs, including risk of suicide.
- Improve navigation to supports and resources by enhancing communication, awareness and promotion.

### Recommendations

- Consult and partner with campus programs to support the application of DEDI principles that impact well-being to address barriers to access for equity-deserving community members.
- Align service delivery, access and referral pathways to key support services across York's campuses for students accessing counselling, accessibility services, advising and crisis response.
- Provide supports and resources that meet the needs of community members for each of the dimensions of well-being.
- Promote and increase access to suicide prevention training available to York community members.
- Enhance York's centralized well-being website with campus communications partners to market and provide efficient and effective access to well-being information.

## ➤ Research, Teaching and Learning

Research, teaching and learning as priorities refer to the importance of integrating innovative, effective and inclusive research, teaching and learning opportunities for students, staff, faculty and instructors, including in the classroom and in professional development opportunities that enhance well-being. This direction also refers to strengthening pathways to support within, to and from the classroom to improve well-being.

### Areas of Focus

- Integrate well-being principles into teaching, classrooms, research and supervision settings.
- Implement universal design learning principles into teaching and learning practices to enhance the well-being of all learners.
- Increase availability of training for students, staff, faculty and instructors to build personal resilience and wellness that promote academic and professional success.
- Increase learning, career and professional development opportunities for employees.
- Increase student employment and work experience opportunities.

### Recommendations

- Promote teaching and learning practices that integrate inclusive curriculum and pedagogy that include concepts of well-being.
- Partner with faculties and Teaching Commons to embed well-being into the campus learning environment.
- Partner with Research Commons to embed well-being into research settings and practices.
- Expand training and collaborative learning opportunities for community members.
- Expand opportunities for employment, work experience, experiential learning, volunteering, career networking and planning for students.

## ➤ Connection

Connection focuses on building opportunities for meaningful and healthy connections among York's diverse community, in person and in virtual settings. This includes building networks, support groups, sharing circles, partnerships and collaborations that enable members to develop authentic connections and a sense of belonging. Opportunities for connection should take place virtually and in person, to ensure that all individuals can participate. York is committed to bringing people together from diverse cultures, backgrounds and experiences to foster awareness, empathy, learning and knowledge sharing. Individual wellness and community wellness are interconnected in this shared environment.

### Areas of Focus

- Create opportunities for forging relationships between community members from a global and intercultural perspective.
- Work toward repairing relations and decolonization by taking steps toward learning through Truth and Reconciliation (Commission of Canada, 2015) and the teachings from the Two Row Wampum Belt Treaty.
- As commuter campuses, find innovative ways to address barriers to belongingness.
- Foster partnerships, meaningful connections, experiential learning opportunities and collaboration across faculties and divisions.
- Drive conversations about well-being and reducing stigma across York's campuses.

### Recommendations

- Increase engagement and participation of the York community through innovative programs, events, networks, experiences and various offerings to connect on and off campus.
- Work in alignment as Indigenous community members and settlers to lead in establishing relationships rooted in peace, friendship and mutual respect.
- Promote and broadly communicate opportunities for social connectivity for community members.
- Increase community conversations and messaging about well-being on York's campuses.

## ➤ Healthy Workplace

Consistent with York's Healthy Workplace Policy, this strategic direction focuses on the development and maintenance of a psychologically healthy and safe working environment. This means an environment that actively prevents psychological harm and promotes psychological well-being. Through the lens of the MHCC National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety, York is committed to addressing workplace factors that are known to impact psychological health and safety. This well-being lens also applies to students' work and volunteer positions, placements, internships and co-ops that are part of their involvement on York's campuses.

### Areas of Focus

- Adopt the MHCC Standard for Psychological Health and Safety on York's campuses and continue building a culture that supports well-being.
- Align policies, procedures and practices with guidelines from the MHCC National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace.
- Educate all employees, including leaders, on how to play an active role in contributing to the ongoing development of a psychologically healthy and safe workplace.

### Recommendations

- Implement the MHCC National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace.
- Develop and implement initiatives focused on redesigning work environments to reduce burnout and enhance work-life balance.
- Expand training for employees, including leaders, to support a psychologically healthy and safe work environment.
- Create a network of employee well-being ambassadors to enable community involvement in support of the Well-being strategy's implementation.

## ➤ Campus Environment

This strategic direction emphasizes that York's campus environment is critical to the well-being of students, employees, faculty and instructors. Two areas of note are the physical safety of the campus community and York's relationship to the land. Physical safety refers to the York community being proactive and preventive in addressing physical risks and harms, which contribute to students and employees being safe and well while on York's campuses. Relationship to the land denotes that all community members are treaty people who play a collective role in strengthening the connections to Indigenous history and care for the Indigenous lands that York's campuses were built upon.

### Areas of Focus

- Enhance safety on York's campuses.
- Address housing and food security issues that impact community members.
- Enhance connections and care for the land that York's campuses are located on with respect and reciprocity as part of the Two Row Wampum Belt Treaty.
- Create a sustainable campus environment rich with well-being spaces.

### Recommendations

- Support the implementation of the Security Service Review.
- Activate a food security working group to address impacts for community members on York's campuses.
- Work alongside campus services to support broader access to housing options for students.
- Support and engage with sustainability initiatives across York's campuses.
- Work to actively dismantle colonial legacies on York's campuses by advocating for and promoting the development and recognition of spaces created with and by Indigenous communities.
- Consult with key partners to ensure that design standards are in place when creating spaces to consider the impact on well-being of built, living, learning and working environments.

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# Glossary

## Accessibility

The degree to which physical, pedagogical and administrative structures are (re)designed to enable the full, meaningful and equitable engagement of all York community members. Accessibility encompasses the degree to which persons with disabilities can access devices, services or environments without barriers. It is also a process: the proactive identification, removal and prevention of barriers to persons with disabilities. Accessibility includes, but is much broader than, physical access to buildings. It also includes, for example, designing for physical, financial, sensory, social and language-level access. (Adapted from York University's Decolonizing, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy)

## Equity-deserving group

Communities that experience significant collective barriers to participating in society. This could include attitudinal, historical, social and environmental barriers based on age, ethnicity, disability, economic status, gender, religion, nationality, race, sexual orientation and transgender status. Equity-deserving groups are those who face discrimination or barriers to equal access, opportunities and resources and who actively seek social justice and reparation. (Adapted from York University's Decolonizing, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy)

## Social determinants of health

The non-medical factors that influence one's health outcomes and experience of well-being. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow and live, within the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life. These can include, yet are not limited to, local and global economics, gender, race, ability, education, employment, housing and food security. (Adapted from the World Health Organization, 2024)

## Truth and Reconciliation

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) provided those directly or indirectly affected by the legacy of the Indian Residential Schools system with an opportunity to share their stories and experiences in efforts to rebuild the relationship between Indigenous communities and settlers of Canada. In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released its Calls to Action, aimed at redressing the legacy of residential schools and advancing the process of reconciliation in Canada. (Adapted from York University's Decolonizing, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy)

## Well-being

York University defines well-being as a positive state that feels healthy, purposeful, resilient and supported on an individual or community level. Wellness is the intentional and continuous act of practising daily habits that motivate better health outcomes so one can withstand adversity and even thrive. It encompasses multiple dimensions that contribute to one's experience of daily life. Thus, achieving a state of well-being involves a multi-faceted approach; intentionally and actively working toward cultivating a compassionate relationship with yourself and others; engaging in activities that fuel your growth; and feeling empowered to contribute to the world in a more sustainable and positive way.

Well-being does not refer to the absence of illness or distress. Instead, it acknowledges the importance of establishing supportive social networks and actively pursuing opportunities to build resilience as a way of effectively navigating ambiguity and inevitable adversities.

## York community

Refers to all individuals currently associated with York University and its campuses through any capacity of employment or study. This includes all students, staff, faculty, instructors, volunteers and members of a governing body of the University.

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