

A photograph of two young women sitting on a lawn covered in fallen autumn leaves. They are positioned next to a large, dark tree trunk. The woman on the left is wearing a white t-shirt and dark shorts, while the woman on the right is wearing a dark sweater and shorts. In the background, there are trees with yellow and orange leaves and a building. A person is walking in the distance on the left.

# Building a healthier McGill

The campaign for the  
Student Wellness Hub

**MADE**  
by McGill

**Faced with rising mental health issues among youth around the globe, McGill has established a trailblazing new approach to student health services that has sparked a culture shift on campus. With your support, we can take this vital initiative to new heights.**

## **Youth mental health in context**

The World Economic Forum cites youth mental health as the single biggest challenge facing society today. According to their Global Framework on Youth Mental Health (2020), over 50% of young people will have experienced at least one period of mental ill-health by the age of 25.

This is significant because mental illness is the leading cause of disability and poor life outcomes among young people. It disrupts crucial developmental processes that determine “a person’s ability to create their own individual identity, complete their education, find a job, and develop both friendships and intimate relationships” (World Economic Forum, 2020).

When widespread, these disruptions not only affect individuals and their families, but have far-reaching impacts on the social and economic health of countries across the globe.

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***“Mental ill-health represents a major threat to the health, survival and the future potential of young people around the world.”***

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**World Economic Forum Global Framework for Youth Mental Health (2020)**

As host to generations of young people who are making the transition to adulthood, post-secondary institutions have been witnessing the escalation of this global mental health crisis. Universities have seen an unprecedented increase in levels of student distress and surging demand for mental health services.

The evidence is clear that student success is highly dependent on mental and physical health – a fact that became even more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic. But even after the lockdowns had ended, anxiety, depression, stress, and sleep difficulties remained the top factors negatively impacting academic performance for students in post-secondary institutions across Canada (National College Health Assessment, 2022).

In the current context, it has never been more urgent for universities to prioritize student well-being and rethink traditional approaches to campus health services.



## **Launch of the Student Wellness Hub**

At McGill, we have been working intensively over the past few years to build and expand an exciting new model for student wellness. In 2019, the University did away with the artificial separation between physical and mental health services, combining them into a comprehensive support system known as the Student Wellness Hub.

One of eight flagship programs offered by McGill Student Services, the Hub has over 100 professionals, clinicians, administrators and support staff who serve 37,000 McGill students both in-person and virtually.

The establishment of the Hub was made possible by a landmark donation from The Rossy Foundation and generous support from many other donors. Thanks in part to this funding, McGill was able to develop an innovative wellness model that has since become the gold standard for student wellness services in Canada.

The key elements of this model include:

- > Awareness, prevention and early intervention
- > Collaborative care
- > Peer support and student voices
- > Flexible and responsive program design

## Student wellness: A university priority

As part of Student Services, the Hub operates within the larger Student Life and Learning (SLL) unit, which includes Enrollment Services, Athletics & Recreation, the Office of the Dean of Students, and Student Housing & Hospitality.

SLL and its partners across the University are working to embed student well-being into all aspects of life at McGill. This includes developing a Student Mental Health Protocol and a Suicide Awareness and Prevention Framework; promoting equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) through McGill's EDI Strategic Plan; and seeking funding for high-impact mental health research initiatives.

Promoting student wellness on a university-wide level means moving beyond service provision and cultivating lasting changes to the way students, faculty and staff think about health and wellness.

In the long term, SLL aims to create a culture shift around wellness at McGill, with the Student Wellness Hub as a key partner. This means:

- > Providing support for anxiety and depression among students
- > Empowering students to build mental fitness and take charge of their own health journeys
- > Creating opportunities for students to find wellness strategies that work for them and will last a lifetime

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*“Prevention and early intervention include raising awareness of mental health issues and mental health literacy, reducing the stigma associated with seeking help, appropriate signposting of support and services, and the greater use of digital platforms.”*

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World Economic Forum Global Framework for  
Youth Mental Health (2020)

## Distinctive elements of the Hub

### Awareness, prevention and early intervention

By focusing on awareness, prevention and early intervention at the Hub, McGill has been able to move away from an inefficient and piecemeal model of student care. Seeing healthcare systems reach a breaking point during the pandemic has underscored the importance of taking a preventive rather than a reactive approach.

The Hub's preventive strategy involves ensuring that students have access to a complete menu of wellness options, ranging from lower-intensity health promotion activities to higher-intensity interventions with specialized clinicians.

The Hub's programs and services can be grouped into the following three categories:

- > **Clinical services.** The Hub provides one-on-one appointments with counsellors, advisors, dietitians, nurses, doctors, psychiatrists, sexologists, and social workers. It also hosts group therapy sessions on a variety of topics and offers on-site blood tests.
- > **Health promotion.** Based in the Healthy Living Annex, the Hub's health promotion activities include workshops, art therapy, animal therapy, peer support, sexual health education and products, relaxation and exercise, and virtual reality experiences.
- > **Telehealth and self-help.** Through the Hub, students also have access to several online platforms that provide telehealth and self-directed care options. For example, McGill has partnered with a program called Keep.meSAFE which offers unlimited 24/7 access to comprehensive mental health services.

One of the Hub's most popular health promotion activities is the McGill Art Hive, which uses art therapy as a bridge to conversation, connection, and community. By offering lower-intensity activities like the Art Hive, the Hub is helping students gain critical skills and habits that will prevent them from falling into periods of crisis.

Also known as stepped care, this approach removes pressure from frontline clinical services for those who require higher levels of care and gives students the freedom to choose what works best for them.

An important part of this strategy is making sure that students are aware of all the options that are available to them. The Hub's Instagram account (@HealthierMcGill) is helping to build this awareness by providing up-to-date information on Hub services, evidence-based psychology infographics and videos, online wellness forums, and upcoming event information.

## Collaborative care

Another central feature of the Hub's model is collaborative care. In essence, this means that everyone is working together to ensure that students get the right care from the right source at the right time. To offer a more holistic, whole-person approach to care, the Hub actively encourages collaboration on three main levels:

- > **Interprofessional collaboration.** Hub professionals meet regularly to share information and ensure that the various factors contributing to a student's distress are addressed in tandem.
- > **Cross-campus collaboration.** The Hub works with all faculties and units, as well as many campus groups, to offer an integrated approach to student wellness.
- > **External collaboration.** The Hub is constantly working to expand access to care and limit wait times by strengthening its relationship with the Quebec public healthcare system and building partnerships with off-campus clinics and services.

The Hub's Local Wellness Advisors (LWAs) are critical to the collaborative care model, especially when it comes to cross-campus partnerships. Forming the Hub's main "spokes", LWAs are mental health clinicians who are embedded in a specific faculty, unit or community at McGill – in other words, meeting students where they are.

This system is based on the understanding that an engineering student, for example, will have different needs than a law student or a varsity athlete. Each LWA specializes in supporting a specific group and has a deep knowledge of the unique challenges these students are facing.

### The Hub assigns Local Wellness Advisors to:

- |                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| > Faculties and schools  | > Students living in residences                   |
| > Macdonald Campus       | > Students who identify as 2S&LGBTQ+ <sup>1</sup> |
| > Student athletes       | > Students who identify as BIPOC <sup>2</sup>     |
| > International students |   |
| > Graduate students      |   |



Hub Peer Supporters are also the first point of contact for students who are entering the clinic. Seen as more approachable and relatable than regular staff, Hub Peer Supporters are well positioned to provide empathy and encouragement to their fellow students and build awareness of the Hub's services.

The Hub also works closely with student groups, including the Student Society of McGill University which appoints an annual representative to sit on the Hub's Advisory Board.

## Flexible and responsive program design

Everyone who works at the Hub knows that finding lasting solutions to student distress requires an ongoing commitment to innovation and quality improvement. That's why the Hub has adopted a growth mindset that encourages agility and creativity in program design and allows for regular adjustments to service models and programming.

The Hub works closely with SLL's Assessment & Evaluation team to monitor service usage trends and student satisfaction by conducting frequent surveys, holding student feedback sessions, and using rigorous data collection techniques. When services or programs are not working as expected, they are quickly altered to ensure that they are having the desired impact on students.

## Peer support and student voices

The Hub strives to keep the student voice at the heart of its programming. Hub Peer Supporters – student employees who are trained in active listening, mental health first aid, harm reduction and other issue-specific skills – help organize and provide input on the Hub's health promotion activities, including workshops and social media initiatives.

1. Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning

2. Black, Indigenous and People of Colour

## International students and priority care

International students make up approximately 30% of McGill's student body but have accounted for about 40% of Hub users in the last four years. Most international students who use the Hub come from Asia (40%), Europe (24%), and the United States (24%).

The transition to university life can be especially difficult for these students who have the added challenge of integrating into a new culture, adapting to Montreal's harsh winters, and learning how to access Quebec's public healthcare system.

The Hub offers dedicated support for international students, including a Local Wellness Advisor and case workers to help them navigate public health services. The Hub also offers priority appointments to students who are coming from conflict zones or have been affected by humanitarian crises.

## Why we need your help

The Hub could not have predicted the financial and human resource toll that COVID-19 would have on its operations.

The pandemic hit only six months after the Student Wellness Hub launched its operations. Within a week, the Hub was forced to pivot to virtual service delivery while operating within infrastructure that had been designed for in-person services. Most of the Hub's doctors were pulled into Quebec's public healthcare system, reducing medical appointment capacity by over 65%. This meant that the Hub had to be in constant hiring mode to meet student needs.

During the pandemic, the Hub received emergency funding from Quebec's Health Ministry and diverted internal resources to enable the hiring of additional clinicians and clerical support staff.

The government's COVID-19 emergency funding has now come to an end, but our students' needs have not decreased. The reality is that student needs will never revert to pre-pandemic levels. In fact, according to current trends, the demand for mental and physical health services will only continue to grow.

## The Hub's current challenges and limitations

The Hub's survey results show that student satisfaction rates have remained high and stable across nearly all areas of the Hub user experience. However, the results also show that we can – and must – do more.

The Hub is actively working on implementing solutions to student feedback and finding ways to work as effectively as possible within an overloaded public healthcare system.

The Hub's major challenges include:

- > **A growing need for sustainable, long-term support.** The Hub needs dependable long-term funding from multiple sources to keep up with rising demand for mental health services, adapt to students' rapidly changing needs, and ensure that we are prepared to deal with the impacts of global upheavals and crises.
- > **The realities of the Quebec healthcare system.** The pandemic has hindered the development of the Hub's collaborative care model, as healthcare providers across Quebec continue to struggle with their own staffing shortages. Quebec lost nearly 21,000 healthcare workers in less than two years and at least 834,000 Quebecers are currently on the waiting list for a family doctor. This situation has contributed to a gap between student expectations and the Hub's capacity.
- > **Myths about clinical care.** There is a persistent myth that clinical care is the best and only option for addressing mental health issues. However, research has clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of a stepped care model that includes non-clinical supports such as those offered at the Healthy Living Annex. In a world with so many competing demands for attention, debunking these myths is challenging and takes time.



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## *The Student Wellness Hub seeks to raise \$10 million to sustain McGill's collaborative and preventative approach to student wellness.*

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### **The Hub's funding priorities**

Student Services has developed a multi-year plan to maintain the Hub's operations in the aftermath of the pandemic, address service provision gaps that have resulted from the discontinuation of emergency COVID-19 funding, and give the Hub the flexibility to adapt to future crises and rapidly evolving student needs.

Donor support will provide long-term, dependable funding for five critical areas of student wellness:

#### **Building a healthier McGill**

Health promotion activities, which are run out of the Healthy Living Annex, are central to delivering on the Hub's commitment to awareness, prevention and early intervention. Your generosity will help promote healthy living through awareness-building campaigns on Instagram and popular programs like the Art Hive and animal therapy.

#### **Developing mental fitness**

Like a muscle, mental fitness is something that can be built over time and requires an ongoing commitment. Your support will help Local Wellness Advisors offer wellness programming and resources at key moments throughout the student life cycle.

#### **Expanding access to care**

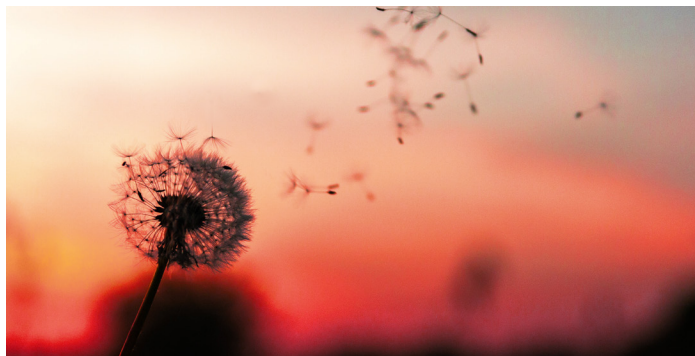
The Hub's service offerings have expanded to include both remote and in-person appointments and group programming. Your support will help maintain this expanded menu of options and eliminate barriers to accessing care.

#### **Fostering sexual health**

Sexual health and education are essential to healthy living. Your support will help us promote sexual health by offering sexologist appointments, providing inclusive medical care and programming, and supporting the Shag Shop, our sex-positive boutique on campus.

#### **Addressing student stress**

Driving a culture shift around wellness means not only addressing student stress, but creating an environment where students feel empowered and can adopt effective tools, skills and habits that will serve them at McGill as well as throughout their lifetimes.



Donor support will also provide funding for two high-impact programs that are essential to the Hub's model:

#### **Local Wellness Advisors**

As mental health clinicians embedded within faculties, units and communities across McGill, Local Wellness Advisors (LWAs) serve as a bridge – both between the Hub's centralized and localized support systems, and between its clinical services and health promotion activities. In addition to providing one-on-one counselling sessions, LWAs spend a significant amount of their time organizing and implementing wellness programming and outreach initiatives.

Starting off with eight LWAs in 2019, the Hub has since more than doubled the number of LWA positions. Your support will help the Hub maintain this expanded network of LWAs – which includes recently created positions for Black students, BIPOC students and 2S&LGBTQ+ students – and ensure that all students have easy access to programs and advising from someone who truly understands their reality.

#### **Hub Peer Supporters**

Thanks to the COVID-19 emergency funds, the Hub Peer Supporter program has seen steep growth in the last few years and they have become a key component of the Hub's community of care. The Hub currently has 18 part-time Peer Supporters: specially trained student employees who are promoting healthier living on campus, improving access to health services, and helping students understand and navigate their wellness options.

This program is essential to building awareness and excitement about the Hub among the student body – and with your support, it can continue to thrive.

## An invitation

The COVID-19 pandemic, overloaded healthcare systems, and multiple, overlapping global crises have created extremely challenging conditions for young people everywhere.

It is our responsibility, as a world-class university, to place wellness front and centre, and to build a healthier environment for our current and future students.

Through the Student Wellness Hub and other Student Life and Learning initiatives across the University, McGill has laid the foundation for a culture shift around wellness on campus – but we need your help to keep it going.

Join us in leading the transformation of student wellness in Canada and around the world. With your support, we can ensure that our graduates emerge feeling confident in their capacity to build a successful future and weather any challenge that lies ahead.



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*“Before you can be an excellent student or a researcher or change the world in medicine, you have to be healthy to do it. There is nothing that works if your body and your mind aren’t working.”*

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**Maya Willard-Stepan, BSc’23**  
Former Mental Health Commissioner of the  
Student Society of McGill University

## Celebrating your gift

The Hub is dedicated to stewarding philanthropy with the utmost care and recognizing the tremendous impact your gift will have on McGill’s students for years to come.

### Donors who give \$25K or more will:

- › Receive annual updates on the Hub’s progress and activities
- › Be named on a physical donor wall at the Hub and on a digital donor wall

### Donors who give \$100K or more will also:

- › Be inducted into the **Wellness Circle** of donors in recognition of their leading support
- › Be invited to attend special events, including a tour of the Hub and meeting with the Executive Director

## Named spaces

To celebrate the foundational contributions of this Campaign’s earliest adopters, McGill has set aside a limited amount of spaces at the Hub to be named.



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