Post-Secondary Mental Health and Well-Being Community of Practice

Terms of Reference (April 2026)

Background

*"Communities of Practice (CoP) are groups of people who **share a concern or a passion** for something they do and **learn how to do it better** as they **interact regularly**" – Etienne Wenger*

This CoP is affiliated with the University of Calgary's (UCalgary) Post-Secondary Mental Health and Well-Being Research and Knowledge Hub (the "Hub"), whose **vision is to advance post-secondary mental health and well-being research and knowledge mobilization** to create thriving and inclusive post-secondary communities (https://www.ucalgary.ca/mentalhealth/research).

This accompanying CoP was created to support…

- **undergraduate students**
- **graduate students**
- **postdoctoral scholars, and**
- **staff (including research assistants)**

… from across all disciplines who are affiliated with the Hub (i.e., interested/engaged in research and/or knowledge mobilization around post-secondary mental health and well-being) who may be earlier in their research journeys, or may have less experience than tenured professors.

Purpose

This CoP aims to:

- **Connect members of the UCalgary community** who might not otherwise have the opportunity to interact, either as frequently or at all, which could lead to new opportunities and transdisciplinary collaborations in postsecondary mental health and well-being research or knowledge dissemination.
- **Reduce isolation** and silos that exist within trainees, postdoctoral scholars, and staff by providing a welcoming, inclusive space
- **Provide a shared space** for people to discuss important topics, share information and experiences, and build a better understanding of research and knowledge mobilization regarding post-secondary mental health and well-being.
- **Stimulate learning** by sharing existing knowledge, practicing/building skills, encouraging authentic conversations, mentoring each other, and engaging in self-reflection.

(Cambridge, Kaplan, & Suter, 2005)

Land Acknowledgement

This CoP exists on the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which includes the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprising the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai First Nations), the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Goodstoney First Nations). The City of Calgary is also home to the Otipemiskiwak Métis Government (Calgary Nose Hill and Calgary Elbow Districts). On this land and in this place, we strive to learn together, walk together, and grow together "in a good way."

For more information on creating personalized land acknowledgements, please check out this online resource: NAHLA Document on Land Acknowledgements

Respect for Diversity and the "Principled Space"

"Artist and activist Hanalei Ramos has problematised the notion of the safe space. While the safe space is invoked at most every event discussing the experiences of marginalised people, we make efforts to understand participants' expectations and reasons for attending. We do not know how the discussions will unfold and so we must acknowledge that it is not possible to guarantee complete safety. Instead, Ramos suggests that principled spaces are better suited to creating the environments we wish to develop: we can commit to adhering to a set of principles that guide and shape the space, and increase the possibility of safety for all involved."

From: https://barcworkshop.org/resources/principled-space/

In this CoP, diversity in our identities is valued, viewed as a strength and a resource of knowledge. Sharing your experiences and different perspectives is encouraged and adds to a rich learning environment that fosters critical thought through respectful discussion and inclusion. Although we cannot always guarantee our CoP will always be a "safe space" for everyone, we must protect it as a principled space where we can engage with one another across different points of view. We will ***not*** allow statements or actions that are violent, oppressive, or deny the integrity of others. The CoP norms will guide our interactions with each other during our time together.

Our CoP Norms

We want to ensure that this CoP is a welcoming, inclusive, and valuable community for everyone. The following guidelines are shared expectations that we ask all members to read and uphold.

In this community, we will aim to:

- Be respectful, inclusive, and generous with one another

- Listen actively and value diverse perspectives, identities, and lived experiences
- Engage with curiosity rather than judgment
- Be mindful of time, capacity, power dynamics, and different levels of participation
- Be attentive to accessibility in our spaces, materials, and ways of engaging, and adapt where possible to support diverse access needs of members
- Maintain confidentiality when sensitive information is shared. *What is shared here, stays here. What is learned here, leaves here* (unless explicit consent is given).
- Offer and receive feedback constructively
- Support a culture of learning, experimentation, and care
- Have fun, learn from one another, and foster growth within ourselves!

Everyone is coming to this CoP with different experiences and viewpoints around mental health, wellbeing, and other related topics. To foster psychological safety and wellbeing of members, we also aim to:

- Be aware of our privileges and create space for voices that are quieter or less represented
- Value lived experience and experiential knowledge alongside academic expertise
- Avoid assumptions about roles, goals, or capacities
- Be transparent about decision-making processes and constraints
- Encourage questions, uncertainty, and learning in progress
- Respect members' choice to pass or participate in ways that feel safe for them, allowing members to make their own decisions about how they would like to participate and engage with certain topics.
- Be mindful of how we discuss the topics of mental health and wellbeing, avoid stigmatizing language, and be intentional about how we share on certain topics that might be difficult (e.g., avoiding specific details that may be hard for others)

Conflict Resolution Tips

Sometimes within a diverse group of individuals, conflict or interpersonal issues may arise, and we want to provide some guidance if this happens in our CoP. With our CoP norms, we want to encourage everyone to acknowledge when they make mistakes, differentiate between intention and impact (i.e., could have negatively impacted somebody by accident), and learn from the experience.

We also want to acknowledge that not all conflicts will be resolved immediately, and that is okay. Our goal is not to eliminate disagreement, but to engage with it in ways that uphold the principles of respect, care, and learning that guide this CoP.

If a conflict or issue between two or more members arises:

- **Pause and create space for reflection.** When tensions arise, we may pause the discussion to allow participants time to reflect and reset before continuing the conversation.
- **Address concerns respectfully and directly.** When possible, members are encouraged to raise concerns in a constructive manner, focusing on the issue or behaviour rather than the individual.
- **Listen with the intent to understand.** All parties will be given the opportunity to share their perspectives and experiences without interruption.
- **Focus on impact and learning.** We recognize that harm can occur even when intentions are positive. We will aim to acknowledge impacts, take responsibility where needed, and support learning and growth.
- **Seek clarification before making assumptions.** Members are encouraged to ask questions and clarify meaning when something feels harmful, confusing, or uncomfortable.
- **Engage facilitators when needed.** Facilitators may step in to mediate conversations, support respectful dialogue, or redirect discussions to maintain the integrity of the space. Chair, deputy chairs, or another community member may act as this facilitator.
- **Prioritize the wellbeing of the community.** If a conversation becomes harmful or unsafe (often unintentional), facilitators may pause, redirect, or close the discussion to protect the learning environment.
- **Work toward repair when possible.** When harm occurs, we aim to support accountability, dialogue, and repair rather than blame or punishment.

These shared guidelines can be revisited and adapted as our community evolves.

Last revision: March 2026

Membership

This CoP invites **undergraduate students, graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, and non-faculty staff (including research assistants - paid or volunteer)** who are interested/engaged in research and/or knowledge mobilization related to postsecondary mental health and wellbeing.

This is a "community", so interaction and connection on an ongoing basis is a central tenet of the group. This CoP will invite folks into a collaborative environment to communicate, connect, and share knowledge and ideas.

Active Membership

To be considered an **active** member of the CoP for the year, we ask that members:

- Provide contact information for the membership list (email required, phone number for group chat optional)
- Uphold the community norms and practices set out by the group (reviewed annually)
- Be familiar with the overall Hub's values and initiatives (and participate if possible)
- Attend at least one meeting/session per semester minimum
- Beyond attendance, we ask that you contribute to the group in some other way, as we want to learn from and support each other. This may include activities such as
    - Leading a session (e.g., do you have knowledge/experience to share?)
    - Taking meeting minutes
    - Coordinating a social event outside of meetings
    - Supporting other meeting logistics (e.g., create materials, setting up room, printing)
    - Engage in mentorship activities (as a mentee or mentor)

Leadership Team

Additionally, the CoP will have a leadership organizational team to support the coordination of the group planning and activities for the year, which will ideally consist of a **Chair**, at least one **Deputy Chair**, who are responsible for:

- Updating the membership list (and optional group chats)
- Keeping membership informed (e.g., emails)
- Booking the meetings (including the room and/or online Zoom meetings)
- Facilitating/coordinating meetings (including supporting outside presenters)
- Managing the shared folders and documents for the group
- Coordinating with the Hub for events and advertising, including check-ins with the director (i.e., Jennifer Thannhauser)
- Helping the group reach decisions regarding CoP activities and goals for the year

Leadership roles should be reassessed every year (with roles and tasks outlined in writing), with priority given to active members from the previous year.

Important Note: It is recommended that the Chair is a graduate student, postdoc, or staff who is able to access room bookings, create Zoom meetings over 30 minutes, submit expense claims, and lead the deputy chairs in their tasks. It is recommended for deputy chairs to be early-year graduate students or undergraduate students who would like to foster their leadership and organizational skills. Co-Deputy Chairs would work as a team to support the tasks of the CoP, so communication amongst them is critical.

Meetings

Every year/term, the organizational team (and other active members) should contact existing members and recruit new members through advertising through appropriate channels (e.g., the Hub, word of mouth, graduate student events) and set up an organizational meeting.

At the first organizational meeting for the year/term, the group should:

- Revisit the community of norms and adjust as needed
- Decide on a meeting schedule, time, and modalities
    - Every two weeks? Monthly? We do not recommend any less than that.
    - In-person, online, hybrid, or a combination? Ensure that the logistics of your choice are possible (e.g., room that allows proper hybrid meetings)
    - Try your best to account for everyone's schedule, while knowing that it might not work out.
    - The earlier you can get it in people's schedules, the better
    - Undergraduates will have the most rigid class schedule, so try to consider that in planning.
- Decide on interests of the group for the year and work on a schedule of topics for each meeting. Ideas can include, but are not limited, to:
    - **Academic "speed-socializing" activity:** Get to know others in the group with quick 1-1 discussions followed by further visiting.
    - **Presentation/conference tips and tricks:** Hear from more experienced presenters with Q&A and practice activities
    - **Publishing:** What to know about getting involved, authorship conversations, picking a journal, and the peer-review process
    - **Knowledge Mobilization**: Creating effective visuals for communities (infographics, etc.), translating research into accessible resources,
    - **Presentation practice:** For example, have a mock 3-Minute Thesis event or have members practice presentations for actual conferences
    - **Peer Feedback/Support:** Presentations, writing (proposals, funding applications) etc.
    - **External Training:** See if there is any UCalgary training that members may want and see if they can host a session for the CoP members exclusively (e.g., Community Helpers, 3MT workshop, etc.)
    - **Journal Club:** read and reflect on relevant articles
    - **Scholarships/Grants:** share experience, tips, etc.
    - **Resource Support:** Zotero, Covidence, R, SPSS, etc.