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Recovery on Campus (ROC)

Recovery-Friendly Campus (RFC) Pledge

ROC Vision: Recovery-friendly campuses for all post-secondary institutions (PSIs) in Alberta and beyond.

ROC Mission: To co-create, champion, and sustain recovery programs that support and celebrate all recovery pathways for campus communities across Alberta and beyond.

Introduction

Co-creating a recovery-friendly campus is essential to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for students and employees in recovery from addiction. Recovery from addiction is about more than reducing or stopping problematic substance use and/or behaviours (e.g., gambling, gaming, eating). It is an active, non-linear process of change through which individuals improve their bio-psycho-social-spiritual health and well-being, build community and find a sense of purpose. Recovery is more than individual change; it's about co-creating communities and environments that support people across all recovery pathways so they can reach their full potential (SAMSHA, 2012)

Higher education institutions in Canada play a critical role in reducing stigma, providing support, and ensuring that recovery is integrated into campus policies, services, and culture. These guidelines provide an evidence-based approach to designing a Recovery-Friendly Campus (RFC) that supports well-being, academic and work success, and long-term recovery.

A Recovery-Friendly Campus builds on the principles of Recovery-Inclusive Cities, which emphasize the importance of community-based recovery support (Best & Colman, 2019). Just as Recovery-Inclusive Cities recognize that sustained recovery flourishes in the broader community, a Recovery-Friendly Campus extends this model into the post-secondary environment. By integrating Recovery-Oriented Systems of Care (ROSC) (Davidson et al., 2021), an approach recently adopted by the Government of Alberta (Alberta Recovery Model, n.d.), within academic institutions, these campuses create a microcosm of a recovery-inclusive city, ensuring that individuals have access to supportive services, peer networks, and policies that promote inclusion and well-being. The same way Recovery-Inclusive Cities harness community assets and lived experience to build strong recovery networks, a Recovery-Friendly Campus fosters an academic environment where recovery is celebrated, stigma is reduced, and support is embedded in the institutional culture.

A core component of Recovery-Inclusive Cities and Recovery-Friendly Campuses is the concept of Recovery Capital—the internal and external resources that individuals draw upon to initiate and sustain recovery. Recovery Capital includes personal strengths (e.g., resilience, motivation), social

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support (e.g., peer networks, family, recovery communities), and structural factors (e.g., policies, housing, education, employment). Research by Best et al. (2021) underscores the importance of building Recovery Capital at multiple levels, demonstrating that individuals with greater access to recovery resources have improved well-being and long-term success in recovery. A Recovery-Friendly Campus enhances Recovery Capital by providing a structured environment where students and staff can access peer support, recovery-focused services, and a culture that normalizes and celebrates recovery.

What is a Recovery-Friendly Campus Pledge?

The RFC Pledge is a step towards achieving ROC's mission of co-creating, championing, and sustaining addiction recovery programs that support and celebrate all recovery pathways for campus communities across Alberta. The RFC Pledge is inspired by the United Kingdom's RFC pledge (Recovery Connections) and Tennessee's Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Certified Recovery Friendly Campus.

By signing ROC's Recovery-Friendly Campus (RFC) pledge, post-secondary leaders commit to ROC's best practice model, making **addiction recovery a priority** and taking concrete steps towards implementing the **8 criteria of the RFC Pledge** (see below) in a timely manner.
While this criterion is specific, we respect that each PSI will implement the pledge in a manner that respects its unique culture, processes, and policies. If you are unsure about any of the below criteria, ROC's leadership team is here to support all partnered PSIs.

RFC Best Practice Model: Campuses must make a commitment to follow the RFC Best Practice Model and will be required to report to ROC on pledge progress annually:

1. Provide peer-centred, all-recovery pathways programming for students and employees.
2. Raise awareness, educate, and advocate about addiction recovery to reduce stigma.
3. Ensure that recovery is normalized, valued, and celebrated through increased visibility.
4. Provide a recovery-friendly space on campus to build community.
5. Create recovery-friendly events and activities on campus.
6. Ensure that student and employee support teams meet the needs of campus members along the addiction-recovery spectrum.
7. Increase awareness and address the needs of family members and friends of individuals in or seeking recovery.
8. Promote inclusive campus life by addressing systemic barriers for individuals along the addiction-recovery spectrum.

Responding to the need:

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- **1 in 5 Canadians** meet the criteria for a substance use disorder (SUD) over the course of their lives (Government of Canada, 2021).
- **Approximately 1 in 4 university-aged adults** (aged 18 to 25) experience substance use disorders (SAMHSA, 2021); stigma is a main barrier for help-seeking (McQuaid et al., 2017).
- **Campuses are known to be recovery-threatening, "abstinence-hostile" environments** (Cleveland et al., 2007), with few recovery supports and significant pressure to drink and party (Burns, 2021).
- For staff, **disclosing** a current or past problem with substances and/or behavioural addictions **may create fear of job, reputation and/or status loss** (Burns et al., 2021).
- In 1977, the first Collegiate Recovery Program (CRP) was launched at Brown University, Rhode Island. Since then, at least **138 CRPs have been introduced in the U.S.** CRP best practices include a dedicated space, paid staff, peer support, scholarships, substance-free events and housing (Vest et al., 2021)
- The collegiate recovery movement has been slower to take hold in Canada. The first launched at University of British Columbia (2019), with six being introduced shortly after (Park et al., 2023).
- In partnership with UCalgary's Campus Mental Health and Well-being Strategy, **the UCalgary Recovery Community (UCRC) began in 2021; ROC was launched in 2022 and is the first province-wide collegiate recovery initiative in Canada**. The UCRC is the co-ordination, innovation, and research Hub through the Recovering in Place Lab (RIPL) for ROC.

Benefits of a recovery-friendly campus:

- **Shifting campus culture**: Normalizes recovery and help-seeking by reducing stigma.
- Students who participate in CRPs are **associated with higher GPAs, retention, and graduation rates** compared to the general student body (Vest et al., 2021).
- Students and parents **seek out PSIs** with collegiate recovery programs.
- Flourishing students will lead to a **more-engaged alumni population**, which is beneficial for the university's reputation and fundraising efforts.
- **Cost saving:** Employees in recovery save an average of $536 a year in health-care utilization costs compared to those with untreated substance use disorder (Goplerud et al., 2017).
- **Saving lives:** CRPs foster long-term recovery while reducing the relapse cycle by 15 years (Laudet, et. al., 2015).

Thank you for considering signing the RFC Pledge. Making recovery a priority not only benefits recovering students and employees, but the post-secondary community at large.

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Recovery-Friendly Campus Pledge: 8 Criteria

1. Provide peer-centred, all-recovery pathways programming for students and employees.

It is essential for CRPs to have a community of students and staff to provide peer support to one another. Peer support provides a sense of belonging, community, fun, accountability and leadership opportunities while pursuing higher education.

Examples of how to implement this criterion:

- Recognize that there are multiple pathways and stages of recovery.
- Take a whole-campus approach that includes supporting students and employees.
- Work with campus partners to enhance academic and work success for students and employees in or seeking recovery (e.g., student and staff wellness, human resources, ability offices, residence services).
- Promote and support opportunities for people in recovery to support others in recovery.
- Hire people with lived and/or living experience (PWLLE) of addiction recovery.
- Train PWLLE to help campus members navigate addiction-recovery supports and resources (e.g., peer recovery navigators).
- Host a variety of mutual aid meetings led by PWLLE (e.g., Donuts & Discussion, 12-Step, Smart Recovery, Recovery Dharma, All People, All Pathways, etc.).
- Collaborate with community addiction recovery organizations (e.g., treatment centres, detox, mutual aid groups, etc.).

2. Raise awareness, educate and advocate about addiction recovery to reduce stigma.

Examples of how to implement this criterion:

- Promote ROC's educational activities and trainings on your campus (e.g., Recovery Ally Training, ROC Talks, harm-reduction trainings, and ROC's Toolkit).
- Create recovery-oriented educational activities on campus (e.g., webinars, workshops, trainings, awareness fairs, courses, and speaker events).
- Normalize "recovering out loud," and increase visibility of recovering role models (e.g., employees in positions of power).
- Actively challenge stigmatizing policies, processes, language, and behaviour.
- Create anti-stigma campaigns and initiatives.

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- Increase visibility of leaders in recovery so more students and junior staff feel safe disclosing.
- Protect the rights of PWLLE along the addiction-recovery spectrum.
- Host listening sessions or open forums.
- Invite government officials/stakeholders to attend events.
- Train campus members in recovery advocacy and messaging.
- Honour and respect the safety and protection of all recovery identities and pathways.
- Participate in local advocacy efforts.

3. **Ensure that recovery is normalized, valued, and celebrated through increased visibility.**

Examples of how to implement this criterion:

- Provide and/or promote Recovery Champion Awards. These awards celebrate students and employees in recovery and require a service commitment.
- Enhance help seeking by normalizing recovery through awareness campaigns.
- Promote storytelling from PWLLE (e.g., sharing on social media, in person, webinars, classroom presentations and/or newsletters).

4. Provide a recovery-friendly space on campus to build community.

Examples of how to implement this criterion:

- This is ideally a physical, dedicated physical space on campus for recovery-oriented programming; a space for the activity-oriented portions of this pledge.
- In the case where a dedicated space is unavailable, ensure access to a virtual or pop-up space (e.g., classroom).
- Ensure there is substance-free residence housing (if applicable).

5. Create recovery-friendly events and activities on campus.

Examples of how to implement this criterion:

- Provide substance-free social events (e.g., sober sip and craft, trivia nights, holiday parties, mocktail parties, tea/coffee tastings, etc.).
- Provide opportunities for PWLLE to support other campus members along the addiction-recovery spectrum through volunteering at these events.
- Utilize the ROC Event Toolkit to ensure these events are well executed (e.g., affordable, repeatable and scalable).

6. Ensure that student and employee support teams meet the needs of campus members along the addiction-recovery spectrum.

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Examples of how to implement this criterion:

- Augment addiction-recovery supports for students and employees (e.g., specialized addiction counselling) that enhance recovery principles (i.e., home, health, purpose, community, empowerment, identity and hope/optimism).
- Conduct an addiction-recovery needs assessment on campus. Find more information about needs assessment and other research on the Recovering in Place Lab site.
- Hire additional staff specialized in addiction recovery.
- Ensure student and employee support teams are well educated, trained, and supported in providing care for those across the addiction-recovery spectrum, and that a critical mass take ROC's Recovery Ally Training and other relevant trainings.
- Increase awareness of available addiction recovery supports on and off campus.

7. **Increase awareness and address the needs of family members/friends of campus members in or seeking recovery.**

Examples of how to implement this criterion:

- Conduct a needs assessment exploring the frequency and needs of family members/friends.
- Create a local peer support group for families and friends or allies of people experiencing addiction.
- Connect with community organizations that provide resources for friends and families.
- Recognize that there are multiple recovery pathways and stages.
- Take a whole campus approach that includes supporting students and employees.
- Work with campus partners to enhance academic and work success for students and employees in or seeking recovery (e.g., student and staff wellness, human resources, ability offices, residence services).
- Begin to implement a Collegiate Recovery Program utilizing the ROC Toolkit (e.g., create a working group with various stakeholders, including people with lived/living experience, host weekly peer support groups, etc.).

8. Promote inclusive campus life by addressing systemic barriers for campus members along the addiction-recovery spectrum.

Examples of how to implement this criterion:

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- Follow existing campus drug and/or alcohol advertisement, marketing, and sponsorship policies.
- Create drug/alcohol policies if they do not already exist (e.g., UCalgary's Alcohol Policy).
- Advocate for more-inclusive alcohol and drug policies on campus.
- Make recovery an institutional priority as part of other guiding strategies (e.g., mental health, student experience, Indigenization, Equality, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility, etc.).
- Hire PWLLE in paid positions in your recovery programming and allow them to take the lead.
- Ensure that accommodation options meet the needs of campus members along the addiction-recovery spectrum (e.g., substance-free housing).

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