



# **HEALTHY UNIVERSITIES: WHOLE UNIVERSITY LEADERSHIP FOR HEALTH, WELLBEING AND SUSTAINABILITY**

## **APPENDIX 3: CASE STUDIES**

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# Case Study: University of British Columbia (UBC)

## HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF INITIATIVE

### Overview

Human and ecological wellbeing has been an important focus for the University of British Columbia (UBC) for many years. It is woven throughout strategic plans, in research across diverse disciplines, and embedded in a broad range of programs, services, and initiatives across the Vancouver and Okanagan campuses. Alongside this, the University has long prioritised and embedded sustainability, with research and learning informing day-to-day operations. The University as a whole has also progressively increased its investment in health promotion, particularly around mental health. A few historical milestones are outlined below:

- In 1996, a Health Promotions Programs unit was set up in Human Resources.
- In 2006, the University launched VOICE, a longitudinal research program about healthy community development on UBC's Okanagan campus.
- In 2008, UBC created its Respectful Environment Statement for faculty, staff, and students, as well as its Focus on People (FOP) Strategic Framework, which is concerned with creating a workplace dedicated to excellence, equity, wellbeing, and mutual respect.
- In 2009, the first Workplace Experiences Survey (WES) was conducted to give voice to faculty and staff and understand their experiences in the workplace. The survey shapes FOP priorities as well as people practices and actions within Faculties and administrative units.
- In 2010, the Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy was developed and a number of initiatives flowed from this including the development of an Early Alert program and the establishment of a 3-year Senate Ad-Hoc Committee on Student Mental Health and Wellbeing.

In 2013, there was a reset moment where people came together to consider how they could develop a more co-ordinated cross-University approach to health promotion and link this to an increased focus on the social side of sustainability. Following conversations with senior leaders, we chose the term “wellbeing” as a way of embracing the breadth of health concerns and connecting health promotion and sustainability agendas. As a result, UBC Wellbeing was established in 2014 as a University-wide priority, seen as a collaborative effort to make the University a better place to live, work, and learn through a systems-wide and settings-based approach to wellbeing across campuses.

### Governance Structure, Stakeholders, and Staffing

UBC Wellbeing is overseen by a high-level Steering Committee of dedicated academic leaders, senior administrators, and student executives representing different facets of the University across both campuses. Members include the Vice-Presidents for Students and Human Resources, an Associate Provost for Health, undergraduate and graduate student society executives, and senior academic staff and administrators of core services such as Student Development & Services and Campus Planning. While there are no external partners on the committee, there is a commitment to consider the University's impact on the broader community—a particularly important concern because the Vancouver campus operates at a municipal scale, with approximately 4,000 residents living on the University Endowment Lands and 12,500 students in residence.

At each campus, advisory committees provide guidance, partnership, and expertise to align strategic initiatives with wellbeing priorities. Additionally, under the guidance of the Wellbeing Steering

Committee, a Strategic Support Team of staff from key wellbeing-supporting units on both campuses works with faculties, units, and departments to integrate wellbeing into their practices, policies, and unit cultures.

Working groups comprised of student, faculty, staff, and community stakeholders have been formed to support each UBC Wellbeing priority area (Built and Natural Environments; Inclusion and Connection; Food and Nutrition; Mental Health and Resilience; and Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour). Each working group develops a framework for action to help guide goal-setting and facilitate cross-cutting initiatives in alignment with health promotion principles.

On both the Vancouver and Okanagan campuses, this collaborative approach is facilitated by a Director who provides strategic support for UBC Wellbeing. However, instead of a large centralised office, UBC Wellbeing takes a cross-cutting approach by embedding staff in existing places and functions to help build capacity across the University. Across UBC, about 20 staff now have “health promotion” or “wellbeing” in their job title or as a significant part of their job description. The positions are located in faculties as well as operational units such as Human Resources, Student Affairs, Food Services, and Recreation. This group gathers regularly and co-ordinates its work in the context of a whole university approach, gently building wellbeing into the existing system.

The success of this collaborative model has been demonstrated through initiatives like Thrive week, a week-long initiative that promotes positive mental health for students, staff, and faculty on both campuses – a model which has been adopted by other Canadian universities. The month-long Move UBC campaign takes a similar approach to support the Physical Activity Working Group’s goals to increase physical activity and decrease sedentary behaviour across our campuses.

### **Taking a Whole University Approach**

Since UBC Wellbeing’s establishment in 2014, there has been a clear commitment to adopting and implementing a whole university approach. This was initially championed by the Vice-President, Students, but it was soon recognised that to truly champion wellbeing and embed it in campus culture, the approach could not focus solely on students. It needed to be prioritised across the whole institution and by a range of leadership.

Creating a cultural shift wherein wellbeing would become a strategic priority for the entire university, required an understanding that everyone benefits from enhanced wellbeing and everyone can contribute to an environment that promotes it. Key faculty members, including both the Associate-Provosts for Sustainability and Health, saw an opportunity to take an approach which bridged both academia and operations. Commitment and support from the Vice-President, HR brought a recognition that faculty and staff wellbeing plays a substantial role in creating a supportive environment and increased collaboration. What followed was more support and recognition of the importance of wellbeing in building capacity for all community members to achieve their best. This approach has allowed UBC Wellbeing to work effectively across faculties, operations, departments, and communities.

### **Using the Okanagan Charter**

Prior to the development of the Charter, the University was already going through a listening and consultation process to inform the collaborative development of the initiative in terms of priorities, guiding principles, and operational processes. This thinking was helpful in shaping the Charter.

However, once the planning process for the international conference was underway, it was agreed that co-creating an international charter – one that would be broadly adopted, bought into, and owned by universities across the world – would be a powerful way to connect institutions. The thinking that had already taken place was used to inform and shape the Okanagan Charter.

Since the publication of the Charter, it has proved enormously helpful in consolidating and moving UBC Wellbeing forward. It has informed the health and wellbeing planning process throughout: for example, the principles and calls to action feature in all stakeholder discussions and resulting strategic and operational plans (e.g., Action Framework for a Physically Active Campus, 20-Year Green Building Plan, Action Framework for a Nutritionally Sound Campus, Recreation Strategic Plan, Mental Health and Resilience Framework). The Okanagan Charter and the consensus-based development process that underpins it has helped UBC Wellbeing overcome a lot of internal politics and debates around which words to use or leave out.

The establishment of the Canadian Health Promoting Universities and Colleges Network has also helped drive things forward as it requires member institutions to commit to the Okanagan Charter at a President level. UBC was one of the first postsecondary institutions to adopt the Charter formally, jointly signing alongside five other Canadian institutions in October 2016. The UBC President further committed a million dollars in ongoing funding to support the wellbeing of our people by implementing systemic change and supporting UBC's ambitions to activate the Calls to Action in the Okanagan Charter.

## **SECURING AND MAINTAINING HIGH-LEVEL LEADERSHIP**

### **What has been achieved?**

While UBC is committed to a bottom-up, community-led approach to Wellbeing, it also appreciates the vital importance of senior leadership, and it has been highly successful in securing this.

The formal establishment of UBC Wellbeing was endorsed at the most senior level in the University and, as detailed above, the Steering Committee comprises senior-level academic leaders, administrators, and student executives who represent high-level leadership. This committee is a driving force in supporting wellbeing as a priority on both campuses, addressing why wellbeing matters and recognising how it can be better integrated into the strategic, academic, and operational work of the University.

Student wellbeing is also considered in academic policy and decision making. For example, a Senate Ad-Hoc Committee on Student Mental Health and Wellbeing formally developed a Framework for Senate Consideration of Student Mental Health and Wellbeing to provide support for an integrated approach to enhancing the mental health and wellbeing of students in the academic environment.

In 2016, a Health Promotion and Education unit was established within Student Development & Services to provide leadership on health promotion strategies and programs for students on the UBC Vancouver campus, as well as work with faculty to explore ways to integrate practices that support student wellbeing in classrooms. This new unit complements existing units within Student Development & Services that have a focus on student mental health and wellbeing, including Counselling Services, Student Health Service and Access & Diversity. Moreover, the additional health promotion support in Human Resources has resulted in greater collaboration between units.

Further, as highlighted above, the President and University Executive have formally agreed to adopt the Okanagan Charter and allocate resources to support its implementation.

### **How has it been achieved?**

Overall, securing senior buy-in has evolved from many conversations at all levels, from grassroots to senior leadership. Through evaluating change, UBC Wellbeing has made the case that a commitment to health and wellbeing—alongside sustainability, equity, and indigenous engagement—is fundamental to building stronger, more productive, happier, and more inclusive communities at the

University and beyond. Throughout this journey, there have been several milestones and influencing factors, including:

- The University's longstanding commitment to health and sustainability paved the way for the Vice-President, Students to champion the idea of UBC committing itself to be the healthiest University in the world, alongside Vancouver's commitment to being the greenest city in the world. While this framing wasn't immediately adopted, it catalysed conversations at a senior management level about the need to take care of people's physical and mental health, and it resulted in a consensus about the importance of leadership for faculty, staff, and student wellbeing.
- This led to the launch of UBC Wellbeing in 2014, supported by a university-wide engagement program to develop a health and wellbeing initiative for students, staff, faculty, and community members. The following year, the University's Senate adopted the aforementioned Framework for Student Mental Health and Wellbeing.
- In 2015, UBC co-hosted the International Conference on Health Promoting Universities and Colleges, where the Okanagan Charter was developed and adopted. This proved to be highly influential at a leadership level and represented an "aha moment" for the President, UBC Steering Committee, and others who saw how much was happening at campuses around the world and how much UBC's work was influencing them and their work was, in turn, influencing UBC. This experience of "leaders influencing leaders" reinforced the University's own commitment to promoting health, wellbeing, and sustainability and provided additional leverage in strengthening high-level leadership.
- In 2016, UBC Wellbeing held Leadership Workshops on both campuses, bringing 120 faculty, staff, and student senior leaders to discuss why wellbeing matters and how to support it. The Interim President and senior leaders agreed that wellbeing must be a priority at individual and institutional levels.
- Implementing a distributed leadership model by embedding health and wellbeing into the job descriptions of staff across UBC's services and faculties has been valuable in breaking down silos, building an understanding of a whole university approach, and strengthening resilience and buy-in.
- Alongside the President, at least five or six other senior leaders now strongly champion the Health Promoting University vision and have explicitly supported UBC Wellbeing. With this high-level commitment, wellbeing will likely be incorporated into the core priority areas in the University's overarching strategic plan, marking a step-change in visibility and strengthening the pursuit of a whole university approach.
- Now that this commitment to health and wellbeing has been formalised and made visible at the highest level, people have permission to prioritise and meaningfully invest in it. This represented a significant shift and has facilitated further conversations and helped to move things along more quickly.
- In 2016, UBC joined a number of Canadian campuses in creating the Canadian Health Promoting Universities & Campuses Network to encourage health promoting institutions of higher learning through activation of the Okanagan Charter. Shortly thereafter, at a Universities Canada leadership event where Presidents of our major Universities gathered, six leaders got together and jointly committed to adopting the Charter. Since then, four more universities/colleges have also adopted the Charter, bringing the total number of institutions to formally commit to ten. Additionally, four organizations—CAUCUSS, NIRSA, CMHA-BC, and Healthy Campus Alberta—have formally endorsed the Okanagan Charter.

## Challenges

Key challenges to maintaining and strengthening high-level leadership include:

- **Achieving a consensus and common vision:** Once a high-level steering committee has been established, it remains challenging to work cooperatively and respect different views and understandings, while trying to achieve consensus and agree on a common vision and approach.
- **Cultural change:** Real progress depends on securing the buy-in of a number of mid-level and senior leaders committed to prioritising the principles of the Okanagan Charter and not just focusing on short-term financial investment.
- **Prioritisation:** Health and wellbeing needs to be elevated to a “top five” priority to ensure it becomes a central part of university strategy and a regular feature of strategic leadership conversations.
- **Role and budget specification:** Explicit and separate staffing and budgets for both health services and health and wellbeing promotion work contain the risk of short-term needs such as student mental health support taking priority over long-term prevention and promotion work.
- **Building bridges between research and operations:** It is important to find ways to channel academic expertise so that research and evidence are available to inform the operational implementation of health and wellbeing promotion.
- **Applying the theoretical to the practical:** Taking a whole University approach and health promotion lens to organizational wellbeing has proven difficult for some to understand what it means in practical terms to get the buy-in. More education and awareness to bridge understanding are required along with sharing stories of success in workplace and learning environments.

## Role of the National Network in Encouraging and Strengthening Senior-Level Leadership

In place-based work, every context is different and every community is different, and it is important to harness the particular strengths and energies of each. The key is having intentional conversations, reaching out to people who are supportive, and building momentum. Often, support is found in surprising places. The establishment of the Canadian Network for Health Promoting Universities & Colleges offers opportunities to support campuses at different stages in their journey and facilitate peer-to-peer exchange and learning. For example, some institutions are driving some wonderful work on mental health, others on nutrition, and others on physical activity.

For postsecondary leaders, networking between universities can save significant time and effort by not reinventing the wheel, while also increasing credibility and confidence in investing in new initiatives. For example, a university in the U.S. launched an initiative related to healthy beverages last year and gave UBC access to the pitch it had made to its executive, plus messages, proposals, presentations, evaluation frameworks, and budget details.

Another benefit to investing in a national network has been the co-creation of a process for campuses and supporting organizations to formalizing a commitment to the calls to action and principles laid out in the Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting Universities and Colleges. In its first year, ten campuses and four organizations formally adopted and endorsed the Charter.

## **AUDIT AND EVALUATION**

### **Overview**

The approach to evaluation and audit has involved a number of strands of activity. First, we have populated existing surveying and measurement mechanisms (e.g., student and workplace experience surveys) with more health- and wellbeing-related questions.

An annual report highlights activities and stories from across both campuses. Wherever possible, it cross-informs content with other reporting mechanisms including the Sustainability and Human Resources Focus on People reports.

There is also an emerging research project to develop and pilot a new evaluation framework for UBC, in collaboration with other Universities, with the aim of creating a pan-Canadian approach.

### **Self-Review Tool**

The UK Network's Healthy Universities Self-Review Tool has been valuable in informing our frameworks and evaluation approaches. UBC regularly uses as a reference point when developing metrics, targets, and evaluation mechanisms.

### **Challenges**

- Creating a shared understanding of what to measure takes time, particularly since understandings of health and wellbeing are understood differently in different disciplines and contexts. If you move too fast, you cannot build consensus and shared understanding.
- Bridging the academic and operations sides of the university creates a tension between leaving time to take an evidence-based approach and the often urgent, short-term decision-making needs of planners and service providers.
- Building a university-wide approach across two campuses with different histories, working cultures, and reporting structures requires constant attention to information sharing and relationship management.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

- Make an explicit and visible commitment to wellbeing as an individual priority while also embedding it within all other priorities, reflecting a "health in all policies" approach. This ensures buy-in from senior leadership across a number of portfolios including students, human resources, campus planning, and research.
- Communicate successes and challenges regularly and at all levels of the university.
- Integrate health and wellbeing into the job titles and job descriptions of key positions across portfolios can be a powerful way to implement a whole university approach by breaking down silos, increasing accountability, building capacity in others, and distributing leadership.