



Canadian Nursing Students' Association  
Association des étudiant(e)s infirmier(ère)s du Canada

### **Position Statement**

Incorporation of Mental Health Into All Primary Care

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**Submitted to:** CNSA Board of Directors

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### **Introduction/Background Information**

It is estimated about 1 in 3 Canadians will experience a mental illness in their lifetime (Government of Canada, 2018). As well, the Center for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), reports that in any year up to 1 in 5 Canadians will experience mental illness or addiction, and by age 40 that will increase to 1 in 2 (CAMH, 2018). Currently, over half of Canadians consider anxiety and depression to be an epidemic in Canada (CMHA, 2018a). The first point of contact with the healthcare system for many Canadians is the primary care practice, this includes those with mental health problems and addictions (Kates, 2017). Despite this, many primary care providers report a lack of knowledge, and a lack of training as barriers to confidence in delivering mental health care (Kates, 2017).

Despite the high prevalence, a significantly large portion of those with mental illness still go untreated, and a large majority will receive no treatment over the course of a year (Kates, 2017). 1.6 million Canadians report unmet mental health care treatment needs every year (CMHA, 2018a). There is still stigma among the general population, but also among healthcare providers regarding individuals with mental illness and addiction. Canada is in the midst of an opioid crisis, and those who face addiction, also face multiple barriers and discrimination when trying to access health care.

Although Canada had taken steps to improve its mental health framework, there are still gaps in health care delivery and in collaboration. An integrated approach would allow health care providers to better meet the needs of Canadians- including raising awareness of prevention strategies, earlier diagnosis, early intervention and better access to treatment/recovery options.

### **The Position**

The position of the Canadian Nursing Students' Association (CNSA) has been in supporting and advocating for equitable mental health care for all Canadians. The CNSA understands that mental health and physical health are closely connected and deserves to be treated equally. As an organization, the CNSA believes that regular contact with primary care teams can help prevent and improve mental and physical conditions. The CNSA supports barrier



free, accessible primary care for Canadians with mental health as a core competent. The CNSA believes that primary health care providers should be knowledgeable and confident in providing high quality care to those with mental health problems and illnesses.

The CNSA supports the education of nursing students on these topics through its core principle of influencing and advancing nursing education. Topics and perspectives such as mental health promotion, trauma informed care, and stigma as a barrier are key for future nurses to understand. Advocacy for greater inclusion of mental health education could improve health promotion and general health knowledge. It would also aid in nurses entering practice being prepared to provide holistic care to individuals, resulting in better health outcomes.

The CNSA also stands in support of the Canadian Mental Health Association, who is a nationwide leader in mental health efforts and seeks to facilitate resources and support for those living with mental illness (CMHA, 2018b). The CNSA believes that as future nurses and as socially responsible health care providers, we cannot ethically allow the health care system to fail in addressing mental health needs.

### **Relation To Canadian Nursing School Curriculums**

In 2014 the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN) created a mental health and addictions core competency guide (CASN, 2014). However, there are still undergraduate students who feel mental health education is not being adequately covered in their programs. The integration of mental health curriculum into all areas of care allows students to meet the competency outlines, such as demonstrating knowledge about the mental health spectrum and providing ethical care to all clients.

As previously described, future nurses need to be prepared to provide holistic care. Inclusion of mental health topics, perspective and approaches will increase awareness of this equity-seeking population and will better prepare nurses providing primary care. It will give nurses knowledge on prevention, stigma and the recovery model, which allows them to be a collaborative member of the primary care team.

### **Conclusion and Restatement of CNSA Position**

The CNSA believes in the importance of incorporating mental health care and services into care delivered by primary care providers. Furthermore, the CNSA supports education for students regarding mental health and illness perspectives to deliver holistic care.



### References

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