



THE CARE² PLAN

Student Mental Health
and Well-Being at NIC

Care Compassion Agency Accessibility Resilience Responsibility Engagement Equity

NORTH ISLAND COLLEGE

2021 - 2026

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Territorial Acknowledgement

North Island College is honoured to acknowledge the traditional territories of the combined 35 first nations of the Nuu-chah-nulth, Kwakwaka'wakw and Coast Salish peoples, on whose traditional and unceded territories the College's campuses are situated.



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Prepared by Felicity Blaiklock, *NIC Director, Student Affairs*

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Lynette Gallant ♦ Danean Gray ♦ Kathleen Haggith ♦ Julie Kitchener
Dean Martin ♦ Donna Merry ♦ Holly Messana ♦ Laurie Michaud
Amy Rowes ♦ Disha Salhan ♦ Carissa Wilson

With thanks to all the Mental Health and Well-being (MH&WB) Committee and Working Group members who contributed to the development to this document:

Kate Awai ♦ Niki Baird ♦ Jane Burch ♦ Ingrid Burkholder ♦ Karen Calvert
Deborah Camp ♦ Heidi Deagle ♦ Sarah Deagle ♦ Alana DeFinney
Jennifer Evans ♦ Taryn Goodwin ♦ Stacey Hartman ♦ Cathy Heyland
Shari Jakubiec ♦ Judy Johnson ♦ Brad Jones ♦ Liesel Knaack ♦ Kerri Lowey
Mackenzie ♦ Lynne MacFadgen ♦ Karen Mason ♦ Erin McConomy
Kathy O'Donnell ♦ Marie-France Paquet-Combe ♦ Romana Pasca
Stephen Paul ♦ Elena Richmond ♦ Chris Sattler ♦ Suzanne Schiller
Gerald Van de Ven ♦ Dori Willis

President's Message

It is an honour to present CARE², the first student Mental Health and Well-being Action Plan in NIC's history.

Student experiences are at the heart of this plan, which was informed by best practices in education. This plan is grounded in the work many NIC faculty and staff have done over many years, to create an institution-defining culture of care for NIC students.

Starting in January 2020, on the verge of the pandemic, NIC participated in the Canadian Campus Wellbeing Survey to better understand and support NIC students. I am proud to say the survey found almost three-quarters of NIC students felt a sense of belonging on campus. Sixty-seven percent of students said the College prioritized students' mental and emotional well-being and 83% of students agreed that NIC provided a supportive environment.

In the summer of 2020, NIC signed the Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting Universities, calling for a mental health and well-being framework to create proactive support strategies for students.

Since then, the COVID-19 pandemic had a well-documented and troubling increase in mental health concerns among post-secondary students and young people aged 15 to 24. Many students added their voices to this report, strengthening its commitments to ensure their current needs were considered.

The result is that CARE² Mental Health and Well-being Action Plan formalizes the College's deep-seated commitment to student well-being and aligns with *BUILD 2026*, NIC's strategic plan and its vision to deliver BC's best individualized education and training experience.

I am deeply grateful to Felicity Blaiklock, NIC Director of Student Affairs, the Mental Health and Well-being Committee, Working Group members, and to all the NIC students and employees whose thoughts and dedication were critical to its development.

In the future months, this plan will be actioned in alignment with the goals in *BUILD 2026* and *Working Together*, NIC's Indigenization plan.

I look forward to seeing this plan come to life as we work together to build healthy and thriving communities, one student at a time.

Dr. Lisa Domae

NIC PRESIDENT & CEO





Introduction

North Island College (NIC) recognizes that mental health and well-being are core components of success for both individuals and communities, and that institutions of higher education are uniquely positioned to provide leadership in health promotion. Accordingly, health and well-being are priorities in NIC's *BUILD 2026 Strategic Plan* and *Widening our Doorways* (the 10-point academic plan).

In May 2020, NIC formally adopted the Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting Universities and Colleges and its two Calls to Action to:

1. “Embed health into all aspects of campus culture, across the administration, operations and academic mandates”
2. “Lead health promotion action and collaboration locally and globally”

This document represents a snapshot of who and where we are at this moment and our aspirations for the next five years.

Informed by the National Standard of Canada for Mental Health and Well-being for Post-Secondary Students (July 2020), the NIC CARE² Plan: Student Mental Health and Well-being further cements our commitment to student mental health and well-being. It also proposes a comprehensive framework which highlights the many effective strategies and initiatives that are already in place at NIC while also identifying opportunities for enhancement. Our aim is to build on the solid foundation that exists at NIC, to make mental health and well-being institutional priorities, and to foster the resilience of our student community while supporting those in crisis.

“Health promoting universities and colleges infuse health into everyday operations, business practices and academic mandates. By doing so, health promoting universities and colleges enhance the success of our institutions; create campus cultures of compassion, well-being, equity and social justice; improve the health of the people who live, learn, work, play and love on our campuses; and strengthen the ecological, social and economic sustainability of our communities and wider society.”

THE OKANAGAN CHARTER

HEALTH, WELLNESS AND WELL-BEING

The focus of this plan is *mental* health and well-being, but we recognize that mental health has a direct impact on physical health and vice versa. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being”. In this plan, we acknowledge the intersectionality of ‘mind’ and ‘body’ and anticipate integrating many aspects of physical health into our recommendations.

The addition of the term *well-being* as opposed to *wellness* is also deliberate. Well-being is the term we have chosen to use in the CARE² Plan because, whereas wellness programs and initiatives tend to focus on disease prevention and management, the term well-being incorporates a broader perspective on mental and physical health which includes the range of factors that determine and constitute health.

The acronym CARE² is a further attempt to capture the many and varied factors that influence health and happiness:

C Care
Compassion **A** Agency
Accessibility **R** Resilience
Responsibility **E** Engagement
Equity

A STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH

When discussing mental health and well-being, there is a tendency to highlight the support and education required to remedy a problem within an individual. This deficit-based approach is not uncommon; when a person is unwell, we treat them. However, in recent times, we have seen a move towards a strength-based approach to health and well-being where the emphasis is on enhancing personal resilience and agency. This means that in addition to providing supports for students in distress or crisis, NIC recognizes the importance of resilience, capacity-building and self-advocacy as vital tools for developing and sustaining mental health and well-being.

“The strengths [based] approach as a philosophy of practice draws one away from an emphasis on procedures, techniques and knowledge as the keys to change. It reminds us that every person, family, group and community holds the key to their own transformation and meaningful change process.”

HAMMOND, WAYNE AND ZIMMERMAN, 2012

THE NEED FOR A MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING ACTION PLAN

The development of the CARE² Plan was based on the understanding that mental health and well-being are crucial to academic success as well as personal satisfaction. The importance of formulating a college-wide plan was further informed and driven by the following considerations:

1. The COVID-19 pandemic: evidence shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused an increase in mental health concerns and risk of suicide, particularly among the more vulnerable sections of the population including those already struggling with mental illness, Indigenous peoples, those with disabilities and those identifying as LGBTQ2+.
2. An increasing number of students entering post-secondary with pre-existing mental health issues.
3. The recognition that young people between the ages of 15-24 are particularly susceptible to developing mental health issues and early intervention can significantly lessen longer term struggles.
4. The transition to post-secondary can be a time of significant changes and reduced supports as young people become more independent from existing networks and support systems (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2017).
5. The toxic drug crisis: the relationship between mental health issues and opioid use is well documented. Those with mood and anxiety disorders are twice as likely to use opioids than people without (Feingold et al 2018).
6. The diversity in the college demographic and the need to look at mental and physical health and well-being from different perspectives and lived experiences.

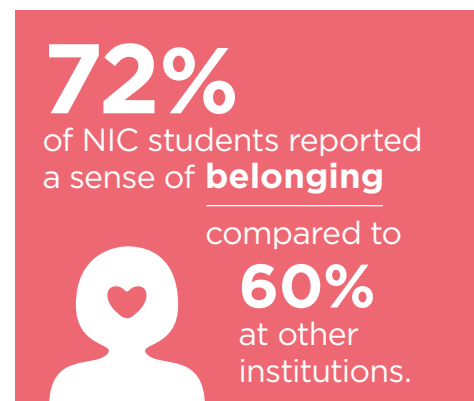
Health and wellness begin with knowing students as individuals, treating each student fairly and equitably, and celebrating and learning from their diversity. We will embed student well-being into programming to improve accessibility and build connections between students as they balance their responsibilities.

BUILD 2026

THE CANADIAN CAMPUS WELLNESS SURVEY 2020

In January 2020, UBC, in collaboration with other stakeholders, launched the Canadian Campus Wellbeing Survey (CCWS) to collect data to inform policies and practices that support student health and well-being. Students from NIC and 17 other BC post-secondary institutions (PSIs) were asked to participate. The survey covered a range of health and well-being topics grouped into nine core themes:

1. **Campus climate/student experience**
2. **Academic achievement/experience**
3. **Mental health assets**
4. **Mental health deficits**
5. **Health service utilization/help seeking**
6. **Physical health/health behaviours**
7. **Sexual health**
8. **Substance use**
9. **Food security**



A total of **708 NIC students** responded including 552 domestic students (58 of whom were Indigenous) and 156 international students.

In comparison to other BC PSIs, the survey indicates that NIC (pre-pandemic) showed some positive signs in terms of student well-being: 72% of NIC students reported a sense of belonging compared to 60% at other institutions. When asked if they felt the institution prioritized students' mental and emotional well-being, 67% of NIC's students agreed compared to 48% at other institutions

In terms of the learning environment, 83% of NIC students who responded agreed that NIC provides a supportive environment compared to 70% at other institutions. This trend continues with slightly higher percentages and favourable comparisons in almost all the core themes.

The areas where NIC could improve include food security, with 32% of respondents admitting to skipping meals due to financial issues (43% of our Indigenous respondents) as compared to 28% at other institutions. Substance use was also a little higher at NIC. Further, it is worth noting that although the majority (91%) of NIC students did not answer yes to seriously contemplating suicide during the previous 12 months, 19 of the NIC student respondents admitted to having made a plan to seriously attempt suicide.

In terms of awareness of mental health outreach and support, NIC fared slightly better than other institutions with around 56% of respondents knowing where to access campus support. Interestingly, international students at NIC were the best informed about campus support systems with 74% of respondents answering affirmatively.

NIC EMPLOYEE AND STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

The NIC CARE² Plan focuses primarily on the needs of our NIC student population, but we also recognize that our faculty, staff and administrators are often the first to identify and respond to students experiencing distress. Whether it is the Enrolment Services Representative, Educational Advisor, Indigenous Navigator, Elder or classroom instructor, each employee is integral in supporting the mental health and well-being of students and will frequently go above and beyond to support a student in need.

In order to nurture the health of our students, it is crucial that we also identify the ways we can better support the supporters — our employees. *BUILD 2026* identifies the importance of healthy employees and a safe, supportive workplace as a priority over the next five years.



Positive workplaces are cultivated. Care for our employees' physical and psychological health leads to a greater satisfaction, commitment and productivity. A healthy workplace promotes healthy lifestyles, safe physical environments, diverse and culturally safe and supportive work cultures and strong mental health for employees, and ultimately, the students we serve. We will instill health and wellness more intentionally into college structures and operations.

BUILD 2026

FRAMEWORK

The framework for this plan was adapted for the NIC context from the Canadian Mental Health Association Post-Secondary Framework: Guide to a Systemic Approach (2013). Our adapted framework focuses on the following five foundational components:

- 1. Institutional Leadership, Administration and Operations**
- 2. Teaching and Learning**
- 3. Mental Health Literacy, Resilience-building and Education**
- 4. Campus Life**
- 5. Student Support Services**



Guiding Principles

The following principles underpin the **CARE² Plan**:

CARE AND COMPASSION

Care and compassion are central to this plan. Student supports, services, kindness and interpersonal connections influence academic and personal success.

EDUCATION

Education is at NIC's core. We believe that NIC has the opportunity and responsibility to provide learning opportunities both inside and outside the classroom, and to create supportive learning environments in which students can thrive.

ENGAGEMENT/CONNECTION

Social connection and engagement are fundamental human needs and contribute significantly to mental health and well-being.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Addressing diversity, equity and inclusion is essential to the health and well-being of our college community. This includes awareness and consideration of the historical, social and cultural factors that impact mental health and well-being.

RESILIENCE AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

In addition to providing supports for those in distress, developing resiliency, coping skills and the ability to self-advocate are all vital to on-going, life-long health and well-being.

“Mental health includes... “The capacities of each and all of us to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice, interconnectedness, and personal dignity.”

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA, 2006



Our Goals

Health and well-being are identified as priorities in *BUILD 2026* and are also integral to *Working Together*: NIC's Indigenization Plan. The NIC CARE² Plan provides a framework to guide conversations and formalize our individual and collective commitment to the mental health and well-being of our college communities. The following goals are designed to support NIC departments and employees in applying a mental health and well-being lens to operations and planning processes.

1. INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP, ADMINISTRATION AND OPERATIONS

NIC will incorporate mental health and well-being into all aspects of the institution and operations.

CURRENT STRATEGIES INCLUDE:

- ✓ Launch of *BUILD 2026*, *Widening our Doorways* (academic plan) and *Working Together* (Indigenization Plan): 2021
- ✓ Adoption of the Okanagan Charter: May 2020
- ✓ Development of Student Housing Business Plan to provide affordable and sustainable housing in the Comox Valley.

GOALS:

1. Establish area of responsibility for the CARE² Plan.
2. Ensure appropriate funding and resources for mental health and well-being initiatives identified in the CARE² Plan.
3. Identify where the goals of the CARE² Plan align with other NIC Plans including *BUILD 2026*, *Working Together*, the People Plan, the Internationalization Plan and develop opportunities for cross-departmental collaboration.
4. Encourage departments to identify goals to support student mental health and well-being during annual strategic planning.



2. TEACHING AND LEARNING

NIC will develop and promote pedagogy, curriculum and academic processes that support mental health and well-being.

CURRENT STRATEGIES INCLUDE:

- ✓ The Centre for Teaching, Learning and Innovation (CTLI) supports for faculty and students: Webinars/workshops, Learn Anywhere (students) and Teach Anywhere (faculty) resources.
- ✓ Cultivating Compassion in the Classroom initiative: CTLI - 2020
- ✓ Discussion paper: Faculty Feedback and Recommendations on 'The Role of Instructional Faculty in Supporting Student Mental Health': January 2019

GOALS:

1. Provide support and training for faculty to recognize, respond and refer students experiencing academic or personal distress.
 2. Support the development of inclusive curriculum and pedagogical approaches which foster and highlight mental health and well-being.
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3. MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY, CAPACITY-BUILDING AND EDUCATION

NIC will reduce the stigma associated with mental health and mental illness, foster help-seeking behaviour and resilience and encourage healthy behaviours.

CURRENT STRATEGIES INCLUDE:

- ✓ The Red Folder: resources to support students in distress and crisis.
- ✓ Promotion of support services through multiple platforms (student newsletter, portal, website, and social media)
- ✓ Early Assist: an online system for the early identification and referral of students to appropriate supports.
- ✓ Staff, faculty and student workshops offered including Mental Health First Aid, Supporting Students in Distress, Starting a Conversation about Mental Health (student training) and Capacity to Connect.
- ✓ Events to destigmatize mental illness, promote literacy and normalize help-seeking behaviour: Bell Let's Talk, Thrive Week/Month, Mental Health and Healthy Relationships Week.

GOALS:

1. Increase mental health training and support for student leaders, volunteers and student employees.
2. Create awareness of and access to support services.
3. Create opportunities to foster resilience and self-advocacy.
4. Encourage and support healthy behaviours.



4. CAMPUS LIFE

NIC will connect, engage and inform students through the development of inclusive, accessible and relevant initiatives and events.

CURRENT STRATEGIES INCLUDE:

- ✓ Campus Life Advisory Team: coordination of events and activities.
- ✓ North Island Students' Union (NISU) sponsored events: yoga and wellness classes (in-person and digital), breakfasts and end of year BBQ.
- ✓ Events: Brave Space conversations, Thrive, Mental Health and Healthy Relationship Weeks, Social Media campaigns (iamNICe, Moosehide, Orange Shirt Day, Bell Let's Talk, Sexualized Violence Prevention and Response campaigns etc.).
- ✓ Enhanced virtual and in-person student Orientation/Transition Program.
- ✓ Gathering spaces for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to engage in Indigenous learning.

GOALS:

1. Create opportunities for students to connect with each other and with other members of the college community.
 2. Foster opportunities for student leadership and agency.
 3. Ensure student life initiatives and events reflect the diversity of our student population and are inclusive, relevant and accessible.
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5. STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

NIC will provide accessible, inclusive and effective mental health and well-being supports.

CURRENT STRATEGIES INCLUDE:

- ✓ Student supports including Elders, Advisors, Indigenous Navigators, Counselling, DALs, Financial Aid, Student Outreach, Student Case Management, Library and Learning Commons, Early Assist, Student Life.
- ✓ Emergency funding.
- ✓ NISU: advocacy, health/dental, free menstrual products and food bank.
- ✓ Bursaries and scholarships.

GOALS:

1. Increase awareness of available support services at NIC and within the community.
 2. Normalize help-seeking behaviour.
 3. Develop relationships with community and other support services/networks.
 4. Provide culturally appropriate supports.
 5. Increase student resilience and coping skills.
-

EVALUATION AND REPORTING OF OUTCOMES

CARE² is expected to be a dynamic plan which will evolve in relation to the “fast-changing educational, economic and social landscape” (*BUILD 2026*). As we have noted, mental health and well-being are impacted by a range of factors, and it is vital that we include a process to evaluate outcomes, celebrate successes and identify new priorities that may arise. The CARE² Plan includes high-level outcomes and measurables which align with the goals of *BUILD 2026*.

3.1 STUDENT WELL-BEING

Outcome:

Increased student well-being

3.1 STUDENT WELL-BEING

Health and wellness begins with knowing students as individuals, treating each student fairly and equitably, and celebrating and learning from their diversity.

We will embed student well-being into programming to improve accessibility and build connections between students as they balance their responsibilities.

Outcome: Increased student-well-being

MEASURABLE(S)	CURRENT STATE	YEAR 5 TARGET(S)	INITIATIVE(S)
Canadian Campus Wellbeing Survey - overall mental well-being	81% (average or high mental well-being, indexed score, 2020)	Maintain or increase	Supporting Students Strategy
Student Service Customer Satisfaction Survey - overall satisfaction	90% satisfied in services (2019/20)	Maintain or increase	Supporting Students Strategy

3.2 STUDENT SUPPORT AND PERSISTENCE

Outcome:

Retain students with proactive support strategies

(BUILD 2026)

3.2 STUDENT SUPPORT AND PERSISTENCE

NIC students are never alone on their educational path. While each student's situation is unique, financial stress, lack of child care, the wrong learning path, under-developed study skills, learning struggles, inter-personal conflict, and feeling a lack of belonging can all factor into their ability to reach their educational goals. **We will seamlessly integrate in-class and out-of-class experiences to support students in completing their studies.**

Outcome: Retain students with proactive support strategies

MEASURABLE(S)	CURRENT STATE	YEAR 5 TARGET(S)	INITIATIVE(S)
% first-year student retention (fall to fall)	47% (2020 Fall Term)	Increase	Widening Our Doorways Academic Plan
\$ scholarships, bursaries, awards, and emergency funds disbursed to students	Establish benchmark	Maintain or increase	Supporting Students Strategy
# of child care spaces and early childhood care and education program seats	Establish benchmark	Increase	Working with community partners to increase child care seats and programming across the region

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