Proposed Healthy University Strategic Plan

February 6, 2017

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

The University of Alberta acknowledges that we are located on Treaty 6 territory, and respects the histories, languages, and cultures of First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and all First Peoples of Canada, whose presence continues to enrich our vibrant community.

"Our success as an institution will be determined by our support for our people." *- For the Public Good, 2016*

The University of Alberta is an institution flourishing with human inspiration and creativity. On any given day, the university is humming with the activity of more than 50,000 people—students, faculty, and staff. Together they have a tremendous and positive impact on our city, our province, Canada, and the world. Their health and the health of the environment in which they live, learn, and work affects them personally and as a community. In a thriving, healthy community, the members of the university can continue to make meaningful contributions to society—to create one of the world's great universities for the public good.

For the Public Good recognizes that integrating health into the culture of the university is necessary for the success of the people who work, live, and learn here and for the success of the university as a whole. In objective 19, *For the Public Good* emphasizes the need to *Prioritize and sustain student, faculty and staff health, wellness and safety by delivering proactive, relevant, responsive and accessible services and initiatives*. Embedding a health perspective in the operations of the university requires commitment among its leadership to raising the profile of health across the institution, making institutional changes, and developing innovative actions.

The strategic plan that follows outlines ways to leverage existing strengths at the university, to identify opportunities, and to create action that will benefit the health and well-being of the entire university community. It builds on previous work by task groups and committees, health-promotion research, and consultation with service providers, students, faculty, and staff. Foundational to this plan is the *Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health-Promoting Universities and Colleges,* which calls for post-secondary institutions to "embed health into all aspects of campus culture, across the administration, operations and academic mandates, and to lead health promotion action and collaboration locally and globally."

By setting a clear vision, goal, strategic directions, and objectives, the plan is intended to set health as a key priority for the institution, to provide a mechanism for understanding all the health-related work already being done at the university, and to continually improve the university's capacity to foster health for all.

Defining Health

Definitions of health have evolved over time from a biomedical definition of health as the absence of disease to definitions that include many dimensions of health: physical, emotional, social, intellectual, spiritual, financial, and environmental. All cultures have systems of beliefs to explain health, the cause of illness, how it can be prevented, cured, treated, and who should be involved in the process. Every individual within the university community may see health differently and focus on different combinations of the dimensions in their journey toward optimal health. Recognizing that the university community encompasses a diversity of people, with a diversity of beliefs, this plan is grounded in the definition of health articulated by the World Health Organization: *Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.*[1] It is important to recognize that the relationship between physical, mental and social health is dynamic, with health in one area affecting health in another.

Physical Health

Levels of physical health vary by individual, with some factors within control and others outside control of the person. Generally, physical health is a function of factors such as fitness, nutrition, use of drugs or alcohol, access to medical care, and quality of sleep. Developing an environment where healthy choices are the easy choices can contribute to the overall physical health of a population. This means providing access to resources for physical activity, affordable, healthy food options, health information, quality health services, and comprehensive employee health benefits, including an employee and family assistance program.

[1] Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19-22 June 1946; signed on 22 July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States (Official Records of the World Health Organization, no. 2, p. 100) and entered into force on 7 April 1948.

Mental Health

The WHO defines mental health as *"...a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community."*[2] Like physical health, individual attributes, environmental and social conditions contribute to the mental health of an individual and there may be many dimensions of health (emotional, spiritual, intellectual) that individuals see as contributing to mental health.

Mental health is an area of focus for the post-secondary sector; it is essential to the academic success of students as well as the professional success of staff and faculty. There is increasing understanding of the importance of mental health among the student population and a desire to ensure effective supports are available. Mental health in the workplace is gaining a similar level of attention and is often supported through policy, procedure, and comprehensive employee and family assistance programs. Unfortunately, misunderstanding and stigma continue to surround mental health, often preventing people from reaching out for services and support. As institutions of higher learning and research, universities have the resources at hand to support mental health on multiple fronts.

Social Health

To obtain and maintain social health, individuals need connection with other people and with the social systems that affect their lives. Social health demands equity, inclusion, participation in decision-making processes, and opportunities for involvement in the functions of the society. In the university context, this may manifest in governance systems that include all members of the university community, through services and programs that focus on inclusion of marginalized groups, by designing built and natural spaces to foster social connection, and through groups and clubs that join people of similar beliefs, values, interests, intentions, or needs.

State of Health at the University

Some data about the health of the university population are available from surveys such as the National College Health Assessment (NCHA) and from statistics related to disability caseload and employee and family assistance program (EFAP) use, but there is much we don't know—especially with regard to the factors at the university that influence the health of faculty and staff at the U of A.

Students

The NCHA is the standard for comprehensive student-health baseline assessments among post-secondary institutions. In 2016, the survey was conducted in co-operation with more than forty Canadian post-secondary institutions. The NCHA assessed the current state of student health and perceived student health challenges among the U of A's student population. The survey indicates that our students generally see their health as very good or excellent, yet they experience challenges in all aspects of wellness: physical, social, and emotional. The top three issues most likely to affect their academic success are anxiety, stress, and lack of sleep.

From a physical perspective, a large proportion of students are not engaging in regular physical activity, not making healthy eating choices, and not getting enough sleep. These factors all limit their ability to succeed academically.

From a mental health perspective, the survey results indicated that:

- 2.1% of students reported having attempted suicide last year. Using recent enrolment figures (2.1% x 38,700 students) it can be estimated that 813 students attempted suicide last year.
- 9.1% of students self-harmed (3,522 students).
- 4.6% of U of A students reported having thought seriously about committing suicide last year (1,780 students).
- 45.4% felt so depressed that it was difficult to function (17,570 students).
- 39.6% felt that stress levels negatively affected their academic performance in the previous year (15,325 students).
- 31.5% felt that severe anxiety levels negatively affected their academic performance last year (12,191 students).
- 22.3% of U of A students felt socially isolated (8,630 students). Isolation is an important indicator in mental illness and threat assessment.

It is relevant to note that U of A students reported comparable levels of mental health issues to those in the 2016 Canadian reference group.

However, there is evidence of health-seeking behaviour among students indicating that they are taking steps to better their health by accessing the multiple health services available to them. Students are engaging in preventative health practices such as vaccinations, regular dental and physical health exams, and employing strategies to prevent harm from over-drinking. Social wellness is as important as physical and mental wellness, and the NCHA survey shows promising results: more than 68% of U of A students agreed or strongly agreed that they feel part of a community at the university and the majority believed that the UofA demonstrates fairness and respect for diversity on our campuses.

[2] Retrieved July 25, 2016 from http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en/

Faculty and Staff

Currently there is no tool in place that measures the physical, mental, and social health of faculty and staff at the university or the overall health of the workplace in a comprehensive way. The data available are from Human Resource Services and include disability management statistics and EFAP use.

The majority of general illness leaves were the result of musculoskeletal injury (28%) or mental health issues (21%). EFAP use provides indicators of health as well as health-seeking behaviour. The EFAP at the U of A is a comprehensive suite of services that includes psychological counselling as well as a number of preventative health services under the Plan Smart program. In 2015, 22% of staff and faculty used the services of the EFAP, with the majority (67.5%) accessing psychological services. It is encouraging that 29% accessed other health promotion services through the Plan Smart program (e.g., health, career, financial, legal, planning/retirement planning), indicating a prevention mindset. A much smaller percentage of staff and faculty accessed the e-services (1.9%).

Industry benchmarks indicate the average total utilization rate of EFAP services ranges from 15% to 30%.[3]

While the ultimate goal of a healthy university environment is the improved health of students, faculty and staff, there are many other factors that affect individual health that are outside the control of the university. Therefore the success of this strategy will not be measured by increases in the overall health of individuals, rather the increase in environmental factors that contribute to physical, mental and social health.

Why a Healthy University Strategic Plan?

Promoting health in universities makes sense. As places where significant numbers of people live, study, and work, universities can have a significant impact on individual and community health through factors such as design of the built and natural environment, social opportunities, workplace culture, policies and procedures, curriculum design, and health services. The complex interplay between these factors can either facilitate or detract from the health of the university population, ultimately affecting the university's ability to achieve its mission. A comprehensive health strategy for the University of Alberta must consider the health of all of its constituents: students, faculty, and staff.

The U of A is a crucible of transformation for students; it is an environment in which students are gaining independence, exploring, and experimenting. The university has a role to play in their healthy personal and social development—enabling them to explore and discover their potential, creating an environment where they can make healthy choices, and encouraging them to experiment safely. The ways in which these students grow and develop during their time at university, and the values and priorities they form, will follow them through the rest of their lives and influence their future choices.

The university community also includes graduate students, post-doctoral students, and lifelong learners. Understanding their health profiles and needs, which likely differ from those of the undergraduate community, are equally important to provide an environment conducive to good health for all. Fostering an environment that promotes physical, mental, and social health and well-being will likely contribute to academic success, as well as recruitment and retention of students.

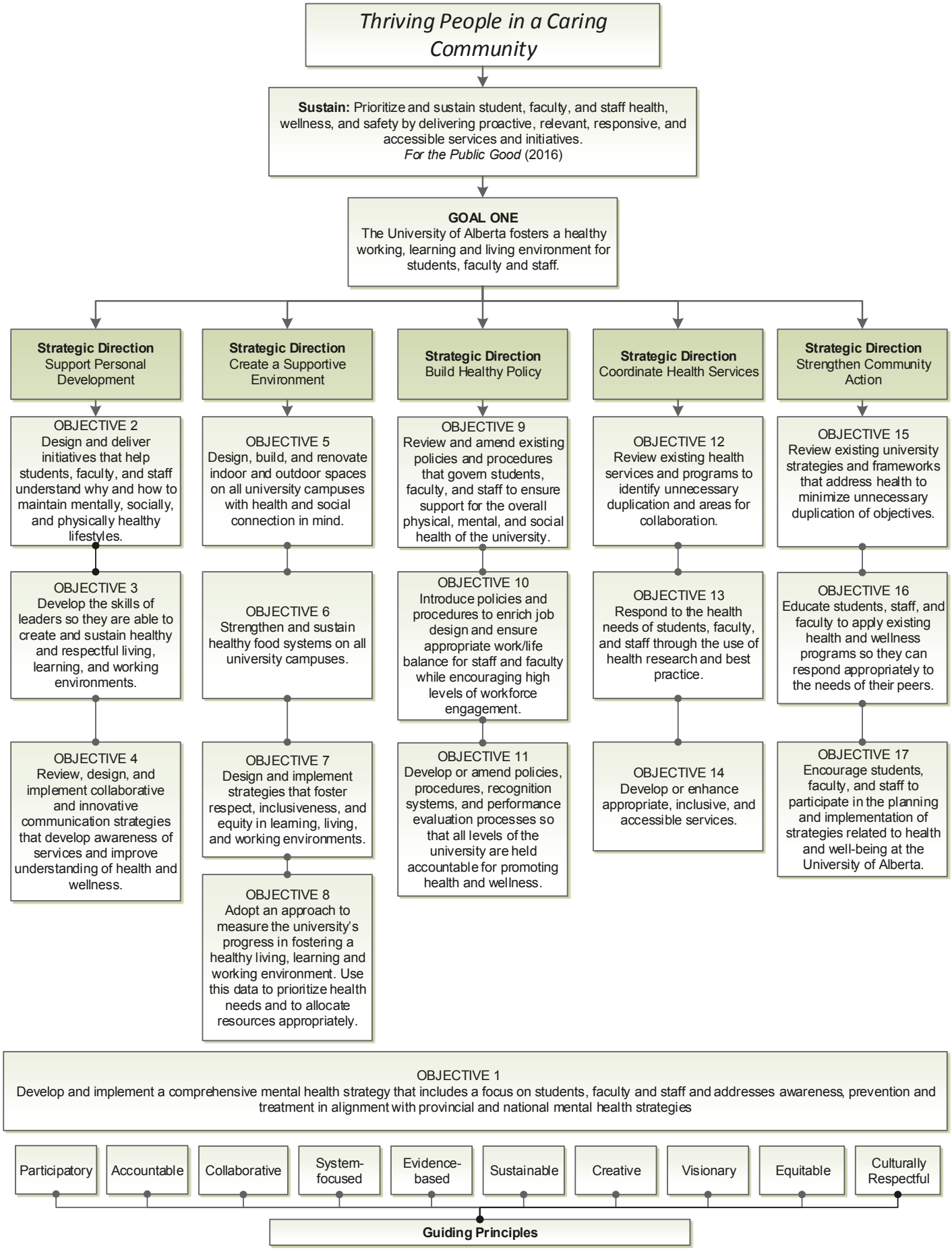
The U of A employs thousands of academic, administrative, and support staff. The physical and social environment at the U of A can affect their mental, physical, and social health, leading to either a high-performing workplace or one fraught with absenteeism, low productivity, and poor morale. Research over recent years has taken a broader view of workplace health that includes not only the physical environment (with a focus on workplace hazards that contribute to illness and injury), but the social environment as well. Factors that can contribute to a healthy workplace include employee involvement in decisions that affect them, flexibility in working arrangements, autonomy, opportunities for growth and development, recognition, and a culture of civility and respect. In a competitive talent market, attraction and retention of top-calibre faculty and staff is a priority for the U of A as outlined in *For the Public Good*. Ensuring a healthy workplace can increase both attraction and retention of quality staff and faculty who contribute productively to achieving the vision and mission of the institution.

Alignment with *For the Public Good*

While *For the Public Good* clearly identifies the need to develop an institution-wide health and wellness strategy under the goal of Sustain, there are a number of other goals, objectives, and strategies throughout the *For the Public Good* that align with this plan; there are references to building a diverse and inclusive community, encouraging respectful dialogue, enriching the workplace and learning environment, and building trust, connection, and belonging among members of the university community. These too are descriptors of a university that is healthy, by the WHO definition. In the plan that follows, each objective references an objective or strategy from the *For the Public Good* to demonstrate the ways this plan supports and delivers on the institutional plan.

[3] Attridge, M., Amaral, T., Bjornson, T., Goplerud, E., Herlihy, P., McPherson, T., Paul, R., Routledge, S., Sharar, D., Stephenson, D., & Teems, L. (2009). Utilization of EAP Services. EASNA Research Notes, Vol. 1, No. 5. Available from easna.org

Healthy University Strategic Plan



Vision

Thriving people in a caring community

To thrive is to flourish and succeed. Thriving people are those who enjoy success in the endeavours they pursue, are well both physically and mentally, and have strong social connections in their lives.

The ability to thrive depends not only on the individual, but also on the environment that surrounds the individual. Faculty, staff, and students who attended consultations or submitted feedback online consistently expressed a desire for a university community where everyone feels connected, included, valued, supported, and respected. They recognize that a healthy organizational culture is foundational to the success of the university and that thriving people in a caring community are truly the basis for the University of Alberta to become a great university for the public good.

Guiding Principles

The following principles provided the foundation for the development of the healthy university plan.

Participatory: Achieving the vision requires action by all members of the university community at both individual and organizational levels.

Accountable: Everyone at the university has a role to play in creating an environment that facilitates the health of students, faculty, and staff, and each of us is accountable for our own health and the choices we make.

Collaborative: Working together, units, departments, faculties, and student groups can leverage existing resources and secure new resources to develop actions that will realize the healthy university vision. Collaboration in and of itself has the power to increase well-being across the institution by building positive and productive relationships.

Culturally Respectful: Achieving the vision requires recognition that there are diverse cultures among the university population and those cultures have differing beliefs, practices and values concerning health.

Equitable: Everyone at the University of Alberta deserves to have full and equal access to opportunities that enable them to lead healthy lives regardless of age, ancestry, gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, or any other protected ground at the U of A.

System-focused: The vision will be realized only with a systems-level approach. The focus is not only on individuals, but also on all the systems within the university that affect health—organizational structures, processes, and policies.

Evidence-based: Actions toward a healthy university will rely on the principles of scientific reasoning, and will incorporate reliable data and appropriate behavioural science theory and program planning models.

Sustainable: A long-term commitment is required to achieve a healthy university community. The plan must be supported with appropriate financial and human resources, and must be aligned with the fiscal realities of the institution.

Creative: Imagination and creativity will be required to leverage existing resources and secure new resources to provide health services, benefits, programs, and policies for students, faculty, and staff that are integrated, innovative, empowering, responsive, and focused on supporting academic and professional success.

Visionary: The strategic plan is meant to demonstrate forward thinking, not only to be grounded in best practice but also to break new ground so the U of A is seen as the exemplar in this domain.

Goal

The University of Alberta fosters a healthy working, learning, and living environment for students, faculty, and staff.

To realize the vision of *thriving people in a caring community*, action must be taken to foster an environment that facilitates the physical, mental, and social health of all members of the university community, whether they are students, faculty, or staff. Achieving this goal will move the university closer to the healthy university vision.

The objectives outlined below provide a general basis for action. They have been organized under five strategic directions adapted from those identified within the *Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion*. The Ottawa Charter is an international agreement signed at the First International Conference on Health Promotion, organized by the World Health Organization and held in Ottawa in November 1986. It launched a series of actions among international organizations, national governments, and local communities to achieve the goal of "Health for All" by the year 2000 and beyond through better health promotion. These strategic directions are recognized as best practice in health promotion.

Strategic Directions

1. **Support personal development:** Supporting personal and social development by providing information and education, and enhancing life skills to create resilience, competence and personal capacity contributes to individual health. Awareness, information, and skill development allow individuals to make choices and exercise control over their own health and their own circumstances.

2. **Create a supportive environment:** The university is a complex physical and social environment comprising learning, working, and living environments for a diverse group of people. The natural and built environment can have a significant impact on health, as can the social environment. Health promotion aims to create living, learning, and working conditions that are safe, stimulating, satisfying, and enjoyable from both a social and physical perspective.

3. **Build healthy policy:** Policy influences organizational culture; therefore, developing an organizational culture that prioritizes health requires a rigorous review of existing policies and procedures to ensure that they reflect consideration of the effects on health of students, faculty, and staff. It may also require the development of new policies.

4. **Co-ordinate health services:** The university offers a wide range of health services, initiatives, and supports for students, staff, and faculty. Improved co-ordination of services and intentional collaboration between providers can reduce any unnecessary duplication of services and confusion among target audiences. It is important to co-ordinate existing services and design new services in a way that supports equitable access and efficient use of resources while promoting a supportive culture.

5. **Strengthen community action:** Health promotion is ultimately successful when there is community involvement in setting priorities, making decisions, planning activities, and implementing them in a way that achieves better health for all. An important part of community action is creating continuous and accessible learning opportunities, providing funding structures within the system to build the capacity of the population to be inspired, to get involved, and to take action. The University of Alberta has a large, diverse, and decentralized community that includes students, staff, and faculty. This community, when activated around a particular issue such as health, can create powerful outcomes. The key is engaging and building the ability of individuals and groups to take meaningful collective action while also avoiding unnecessary duplication and inefficient use of resources.

Objectives

Mental health is a priority topic for the University of Alberta and for the entire post-secondary sector. Although the public conversation at the moment centres on *student* mental health, this plan recognizes that the mental health of the entire university community is critical to the overall health and success of the institution. Rather than identify mental health objectives under each of the strategic directions, the plan establishes an overarching objective that speaks to developing a comprehensive mental health strategy for the institution.

Objective	*For the Public Good* Alignment
1. Develop and implement a comprehensive mental health strategy that includes a focus on students, faculty, and staff, and addresses awareness, prevention, and treatment in alignment with provincial and national mental health strategies.	Objective 19/Strategy ii

Strategic Direction: Support Personal Development

Objective	*For the Public Good* Alignment
2. Design and deliver initiatives that help students, faculty, and staff understand why and how to maintain mentally, socially, and physically healthy lifestyles.	Objective 19/Strategy i
3. Develop the skills of leaders so they are able to create and sustain healthy and respectful living, learning, and working environments.	Objective 15/Strategy i, iii
4. Review, design, and implement collaborative and innovative communication strategies that develop awareness of services and improve understanding of health and wellness.	Objective 19/Strategy i

Strategic Direction: Create a Supportive Environment

Objective	*For the Public Good* Alignment
5. Plan, design, build, and renovate indoor and outdoor spaces on all university campuses with health and social connection in mind.	Objective 19/Strategy i
6. Strengthen and sustain healthy food systems on all university campuses.	Objective 19/Strategy i
7. Design and implement strategies that foster respect, inclusiveness, and equity in learning, living, and working environments.	Objective 3 Objective 5/Strategy ii, v
8. Adopt an approach for measuring the university's progress in fostering a healthy living, learning and working environment. Use this data to prioritize health needs and to allocate resources appropriately.	Objective 19/Strategy i

Strategic Direction: Build Healthy Policy

Objective	*For the Public Good* Alignment
9. Review and amend existing policies and procedures that govern students, faculty, and staff to ensure support for the overall physical, mental, and social health of the university.	Objective 19
10. Introduce policies and procedures to enrich job design and ensure appropriate work/life balance for staff and faculty while encouraging high levels of workforce engagement.	Objective 3
11. Develop or amend policies, procedures, recognition systems, and performance evaluation processes so that all levels of the university are held accountable for promoting health and wellness.	Objective 21/Strategy ii

Strategic Direction: Co-ordinate Health Services

Objective	*For the Public Good* Alignment
12. Review existing health services and programs to identify unnecessary duplication and areas for collaboration.	Objective 19/Strategy i
13. Respond to the health needs of students, faculty, and staff through the use of health research and best practice.	Objective 19/Strategy i
14. Develop or enhance appropriate, inclusive, and accessible services.	Objective 19/Strategy i

Strategic Direction: Strengthen Community Action

Objective	*For the Public Good* Alignment
15. Review university strategies and frameworks that address health to minimize unnecessary duplication of objectives	Objective 21/Strategy iv
16. Educate students, staff, and faculty to apply existing health and wellness programs so they can respond appropriately to the needs of their peers.	Objective 19/Strategy i
17. Encourage students, faculty, and staff to participate in the planning and implementation of strategies related to health and well-being at the University of Alberta.	Objective 21

Evaluation

Within the context of a health-promoting university, evaluation should be focused at two levels: component activities and projects, and at the "whole system" level. These two levels of outcome are likely to be interrelated. Multiple evaluation approaches are needed to accurately describe and attribute outcomes to these efforts and be responsive to the ever-changing needs and complexities of our institution.

The activities related to meeting the strategic directions and objectives laid out in the Healthy University Strategic Plan should be evaluated individually, assessing whether they achieved the objective as well as assessing the process, to determine what worked well, what didn't, and why. However, this level of evaluation does not provide feedback on the effectiveness of the overall whole system approach that underlies this strategy. For evaluation to capture the possible added value of the whole system approach and to help generate and build evidence of effectiveness, it must adopt non-linear approaches, looking at the whole and mapping interrelationships, interactions and synergies between different university population sub-groups, the components of the system and the different issues related to physical, social and mental health to create a fuller understanding.

Continued consultation and participation of students, staff, and faculty is required to develop evaluation measures that are useful and provide a meaningful dialogue about the value of embedding a health perspective in advancing *For The Public Good*. Designing an evaluation approach which can consistently provide stakeholders with credible and trusted sources of information yet remains flexible to balance available resources and changing contexts can guide continuous innovation and adaptation.

A sub-committee comprising experts in health promotion evaluation will be struck during the implementation phase to build out an appropriate evaluation system that allows for continuous improvement and key learnings to be shared within and beyond the University of Alberta.

Next Steps

The process of creating a healthy university will be a continuous one. This ambitious plan is only a starting point in taking a strategic, co-ordinated, and intentional approach to achieving the vision of *thriving people in a caring community*. With the full support of the institution, the implementation phase can begin. Five key actions need to take place upon approval of this plan:

1. Set priorities: It will be important to identify a priority order for each of the 17 objectives outlining how the objectives will be addressed over the five-year time frame.
2. Stakeholder engagement: The objectives outlined in this plan require participation and co-operation between multiple units and departments across the university. To avoid unnecessary duplication and maximize scarce resources, collaboration with stakeholders in meeting the objectives is essential.
3. Baseline measure: Establish a baseline measure of student, faculty, and staff health as defined in this document.
4. Program audit: The university is already undertaking activities that will help meet the objectives within this plan. It will be important to capture information about these activities and set up a mechanism to track new activities that come about as a result of this plan.
5. Assign resources: funding and allocated FTE positions to co-ordinate and report on progress.

For the Public Good recognizes that the success of the university depends on support for the people. Creating a healthy environment and working to foster health among the university population is good for the university, but it is also an obligation to society that the U of A holds as a public institution and a place of higher learning and research.

The U of A can be an exemplary organization in this domain. By co-ordinating the exceptional work already underway and by collaborating and pooling resources, the incredible people who make up this institution can create a student experience and workplace that is second to none. We will be *thriving people in a caring community* and we will help to build a better province, better Canada, and better world because of it.

Healthy University Committee Membership

Steering Committee

Current members:

Chair: Kerry Mummery, Dean of Physical Education and Recreation

Andre Costopoulos, Dean of Students

Jay Spark, Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President, Human Resource Services

Dan Charlton, Director, Human Resource Consulting Services (interim member)

Former members:

Robin Everall, former Dean of Students

Working Committee

Chair: Gerry McCune, Manager, Organizational Health and Effectiveness, Human Resource Services

Sarah Flower, Health Promotion Consultant, Human Resource Services

Kevin Friese, Assistant Dean, Health and Wellness Services

Melissa Visconti, Healthy Campus Unit Team Lead, Health and Wellness Services

Megan Ragush, Wellness Program Co-ordinator, Campus and Community Recreation

Grachella Garcia, Associate Director Programming, Campus and Community Recreation

Dianne Payeur, Assistant Chair - Administration, Biological Sciences

Victor Do, student representative

Yasmin Rafiei, student representative

Support

Dale Reesor, Program Advisor, Human Resource Services

Germaine Hamilton, Program Administrative Co-ordinator, Human Resource Services

Danielle Stewart, Administrative and Initiatives Co-ordinator, Human Resource Services

Kiann McNeill, OHE Consultant, Human Resource Services

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Appendices

A1. Definitions of Key Terms

Keyword/Term	Definition
University Community	The **University Community** consists of the five campuses of the University of Alberta and their various constituencies.
Campus Participation	**Campus Participation** is the process of actively supporting the development of the strategic plan, through consultation and input.
Campus-Wide	The term **Campus-Wide** is used when an activity or event directly affects all constituent groups.
Champion	A **Champion** advances and promotes the project within all levels of institutional leadership, the academy, and stakeholders, to promote maximum support and participation.
Health	**Health** is viewed holistically, reflecting physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. (WHO definition)
Health and Wellness Service Provider	A **Health and Wellness Service Provider** is an organization or department on campus whose core area of accountability/mandate is to provide services directly related to the health and wellness of faculty, staff, or students on campus.
Healthy University	"A **Healthy University** aspires to create a learning environment and organizational culture that enhances the health, well-being, and sustainability of its community and enables people to achieve their full potential."
Healthy Settings Approach	The **Healthy Settings Approach** is a whole systems approach that recognizes health as being created in the settings where people learn, work, play, and love. Universities are an example of a setting that can support health and well-being through organizational, environmental, and personal factors.
Steering Committee	The **Steering Committee** is the governing group for the Healthy Campus project (i.e., the Dean of Physical Education and Recreation, the Vice-Provost and Dean of Students, and the Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President Human Resources who report through the Provost.)
Well-Being	A good or satisfactory condition of existence; a state characterized by health, happiness, prosperity, and welfare.
Working Committee	The **Working Committee** comprises representatives from the Steering Committee departments along with staff and student representatives. The Working Committee is charged by the Steering Committee to develop the project deliverable.