

# BENEFITS OF RECREATION TO THE MENTAL HEALTH OF COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY STUDENT



Recreation for Mental Health is an initiative designed to strengthen partnerships, enhance capacity, and create supportive environments to enable all Nova Scotians to have opportunities to experience the mental wellbeing benefits of recreation, physical activity, sport, and play.

This project is a collaboration between Recreation Nova Scotia (RNS), Dalhousie University and the Canadian Mental Health Association (Nova Scotia), which was funded by the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness.

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## WHY WAS IT IMPORTANT TO DO THIS RESEARCH PROJECT?

Mental health challenges are common among college and university student(s): Mental health challenges faced by Canadian students include stress and burnout (1, 2), depression and anxiety, and suicidal ideation (3).

## WHAT WAS THE PROJECT GOAL?

The goal of this project was to review existing literature and consolidate our understanding of the effect of university-based recreation programs developed with the purpose of supporting students' positive mental health.

## HOW WAS THE PROJECT DONE?

A systematic literature search was conducted in pertinent bibliographic databases. Papers that outlined the effects of recreation on university and college students mental wellness were identified. The initial search identified 4500 potentially relevant articles. A team of 4 researchers systematically reviewed these articles for relevance and scientific rigor. 19 articles met the studies inclusion criteria. This paper provided a synthesis of the results of these 19 studies.

## WHY SHOULD YOU KEEP READING?

Campus recreation can positively impact student mental health.

## WHAT WERE KEY FINDINGS?

### CONTEXT:

**STUDENTS FACE UNIQUE SOURCES OF STRESS:** Sources of stress for students include transitioning to college or university, separation from prior social supports including friends and families, financial burdens, as well as expanded social and academic demands (4, 5, 6).

**CAMPUS-BASED COUNSELLING CENTRES ARE ONLY ONE WAY THAT STUDENTS ACCESS NECESSARY SUPPORTS:** While some students develop positive coping strategies to manage their mental health independently (7), many students need mentoring and support, often obtained through campus counselling centers (8).

**HOWEVER, STUDENTS FACE SEVERAL UNIQUE BARRIERS TO ACCESSING COUNSELLING SERVICES AND SURPRISINGLY FEW STUDENTS SEEK FORMAL TREATMENT (9).** Alternatively, participation in campus funded recreation programs offers students a fun, stigma free and financially manageable approach to supporting their mental wellness.

### RESULTS:

**CAMPUS-BASED RECREATION BENEFITS STUDENT'S MENTAL HEALTH:** Research demonstrates that that group recreation activities (e.g. Mindfulness, meditation, Yoga, Tai Chi, exercise and Pilates) positively impacts college and university students mental health, and improves perceptions of stress, depression, anxiety and mood (11,12, 16).

### CONCLUSIONS:

**THERE IS A NEED TO MAKE AVAILABLE RECREATION FOR MENTAL HEALTH:** Campus recreation should play a more visible role in promoting mental health benefits of physical activity and program more social events that connect students to one another.

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