



From your VPA: A note on Mental Health, Advocacy, and Students

June 1st, 2022, Winnipeg, Manitoba

This is the first of several notes or articles that I as your new VPA will be writing throughout my term. Whether it be an interesting news story or a development at the University, this is one of the ways your new UMSU Executive will try to build engagement and a sense of community. I think it is also important for the student body to know where the union stands with advocacy issues. Please know that in any stance we take, students will always come first. So, if you are deeply interested and want to lend a hand, or vehemently disagree and want to voice your opinion, we are here to truly listen and take your thoughts into account. This first note is in article form and reports a federal initiative along with our intents to advocate provincially for this issue, it also stands as a call to government to do more.

On May 6th, 2022, Jenica Atwin, Member of Parliament for Fredericton, announced on behalf of the Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, that Health Canada would be making an investment of \$2 million for a three-year Campus Peer Support pilot project led by the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA).

This is a great step forward in working towards accessible mental health services, as well as student-specific mental health supports. The University of Manitoba Students Union is pleased to see the Federal government working in tandem with the CMHA in order to deliver these resources to students.

Unfortunately, it remains that there is an extreme lack in post-secondary student specific mental health resources provided by the provincial Government of Manitoba. Since the creation of the Mental Health ministerial portfolio in January 2022, there has been little to no discussion or marketing of mental wellness initiatives tailored for post-secondary students.

Throughout the past 2 years, the COVID-19 Pandemic has taken a large toll on everyone, particularly students. This, along with the many burdens students already face, has created an even larger need for resources to both prevent and address mental health and wellbeing concerns. While there are some provincial support resources in place for crisis management, there is little focus on preventative and de-escalatory care. Also, long waitlists for the provincial mental health services that do exist render it very difficult for students to access appropriate, timely and relevant care resources.

Undergraduate students at The University of Manitoba are calling on our provincial government to provide more adequate, post-secondary student specific mental health resources, and to take into

consideration the concerns of students when creating policy on this matter. We are here to partner with our Province's stewards in order to support our students and all students of our province. In order for our society to thrive, citizens need accessible options for all types of care - including mental health care. Students are the changemakers of the future, and our governing bodies need not only recognize this, but also proactively work to support us in reaching our potential.

If you have any inquiries or questions, please reach out to me directly at vpa@umsu.ca

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Victoria Romero', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Victoria Romero,
VP Advocacy