

Clinical vs. Non-Clinical Mental Health Services

Context

The funding guidelines for post-secondary student mental health grants indicate that post-secondary institutions may not use their grants to support *clinical* mental health services.

Policy rationale

- This decision is a response to Action 18 in the [Valuing Mental Health: Next Steps](#) document, which commits to clarifying roles between ministries and service providers. Valuing Mental Health also speaks strongly to the need for a more integrated system of care. Other Government of Alberta ministries and stakeholders are also involved in implementing this action.
- Smooth, supported transitions between service providers are important, as are integrated approaches that offer students choice and a combination of services.
- The intention is for students to receive the right service, from the right provider, in the location that is best-suited, including the provision of community-based services on or near campus to minimize barriers to access and support.

Impact on existing grant-funded clinical services

- Where applicable, the five previously funded universities may continue to provide clinical services under their new grant until these services have transitioned to the community-based, public health system (including primary care), or, for a period of up to three years.
- Of the five previously funded universities, those that are providing clinical mental health services are to submit service transition plans to Advanced Education within six months of executing their grant agreements.
- There may be no deterioration in access to services for students as a result of this transition. Alberta Health is committed to working with universities during the transition to achieve this goal.

Keep in mind

- Grant guidelines do not direct that clinical services cannot be delivered on campus, only that these services must not be funded by the grant and should be delivered by the health system.
- Significant collaboration and consultation is occurring between post-secondary institutions, AHS and the Government of Alberta to ensure adequacy of services and supports to meet the needs of post-secondary students, particularly through this transition period.
- Supports for students often include a referral to community-based supports (e.g., one that provides social supports, such as the food bank) and may not be related to the non-clinical/clinical definition.
- Non-clinical services can complement clinical services by bridging therapeutic goals with academic goals. For example, a student with schizophrenia may use non-clinical services from their post-secondary institution to manage stress and enhance their coping skills.

Key Definitions

Definitions centre on the delineation between clinical and non-clinical services for the purposes of the post-secondary student mental health grants.

From Alberta Health Services' (AHS) perspective, clinical services can be defined as treatment services like addiction and mental health therapy, psychiatric consultation, and medication management that are typically provided through primary care or specialized health care services within AHS or AHS-contracted community agencies. Non-clinical services are therapeutic, but relate to providing resource information, education, screening, and support until appropriate referrals can be made to primary care or formalized health care services.

The following definitions align with this operational delineation and are included in the funding guidelines:

Non-Clinical Mental Health Services

- Activities that promote good mental health and help prevent mental health concerns for all students.
- Prevention and early intervention services for students that are at higher risk for mental health concerns.
- Activities such as short-term care (e.g., typically 6-12 sessions per instance, but could be more or less depending on the context and need), peer support, and success coaching for students requesting support.
- Short-term crisis intervention and de-escalation, with rapid linkages to appropriate health services.
- Screening, initiating, and facilitating referrals to community-based services for more intensive clinical treatment as required.

Clinical Mental Health Services

- Speciality or longer-term treatment services for post-secondary students with complex and higher intensity mental health needs.
- If a student is already diagnosed with a mental health disorder or illness, treatment related to that disorder or illness would be provided by community-based clinical services, although non-clinical services (e.g. stress coping strategies, short-term support) may still be of benefit to the student's overall functioning, complementing their care within a learning environment.

Non-clinical services include:

- ✓ Screening, evaluation of best course of action
- ✓ Short-term care
- ✓ Crisis intervention and support, including individual or group formats

Do not include:

- ✗ Clinical assessment, formal diagnosis
- ✗ Long-term or high intensity care
- ✗ Medication

In Practice

A number of mental health services are taking place on many post-secondary campuses today. The following list of examples has been prepared in consultation with Alberta Health, AHS, and representatives of the University of Alberta, University of Calgary, University of Lethbridge, MacEwan University, and Mount Royal University.

Clinical Services

- Psychological/psychiatric assessment and diagnosis
- Medication consultations *
- Medication follow-up and support *
- Medication therapy *
- Short-term counselling groups (this item is listed under both categories)

Non-Clinical Services

- Psychological short-term therapy *
- Faculty consultations
- Peer support
- On-line self help modules
- Short-term counselling groups (this item is listed under both categories)
- Psycho-educational skill building groups
- Supportive counselling, sub-clinical issues
- Awareness and stigma campaigns, training to empathize/identify issues
- Debriefing and support for staff and students witnessing/experiencing trauma
- Program collaboration, community/preventative
- Bridge counselling - facilitating transitions
- Collaborative referrals and consultations
- Short-term care, including individual counselling
- Individual appointments
- Intake, triage, and early intervention
- Crisis management
- Emergency appointments

NOTE: Asterisk () denotes a service provided by medical contractors billing to AHS*