

Engaging Students in Developing a Mental Health Strategy

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Our goal for today

- We all leave with knowledge of the importance of having students as a partner in developing mental health strategies.

What we'll be covering

- Who are we, and what have we done around mental health?
- Our research.
- Why we need to consult students.

About OUSA

- Formed in 1992, incorporated in 1995
- Represent ~150,000 students from 8 Ontario universities
- Conduct research around the accessibility, affordability, accountability and quality of undergraduate education
- Develop credible & constructive policy to address challenges



**Why is OUSA
talking about
Mental Health?**

Our recent work on mental health

- Advocacy
 - \$73 million invested for publicly funded psychotherapy
 - \$6 million allocated to frontline mental health care workers on campuses
 - Mental Health Innovation Fund
 - Creation of CICMH
- Publications
 - *Shared Perspectives*, 2017
 - *Healthy Change*, 2012
- Research
 - *Student Health & Wellness (2014, updating in 2018)*
 - *Post-Secondary Student Survey (ongoing)*

Current trends

- Increased student consultation by post-secondary institutions
 - Eg.
 - Sexual violence prevention policies
 - Strategic Mandate Agreements
 - Long-term direction of post-secondary institutions

The problem.

- Articles, consultation, and student feedback shows students do not always feel like they are being **meaningfully** consulted in the development of mental health strategies.

“I am smart. I am creative. I am not getting the support I need. Talk to me about my struggles. Help me. Help me help the university. Help me help the university help others.” – Survey Participant

What can students bring to the table?

- Experience
- Knowledge
- Dedication

**WHAT HAVE WE
LEARNED?**

Accessibility

- *“... because of access to counselling support now available to secondary school students who struggle with anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorders, mood disorders, learning disabilities, or depression, students who in the past would not have been able to participate in higher education are now able to do so. However, students who have required mental health services in secondary school are also far more likely to require and seek mental health services while attending university or college.”*
- Flatt (2013) *“A Suffering Generation: Six Factors Contributing to the mental health crisis in North American higher education ”* College Quarterly vol.16 no.1

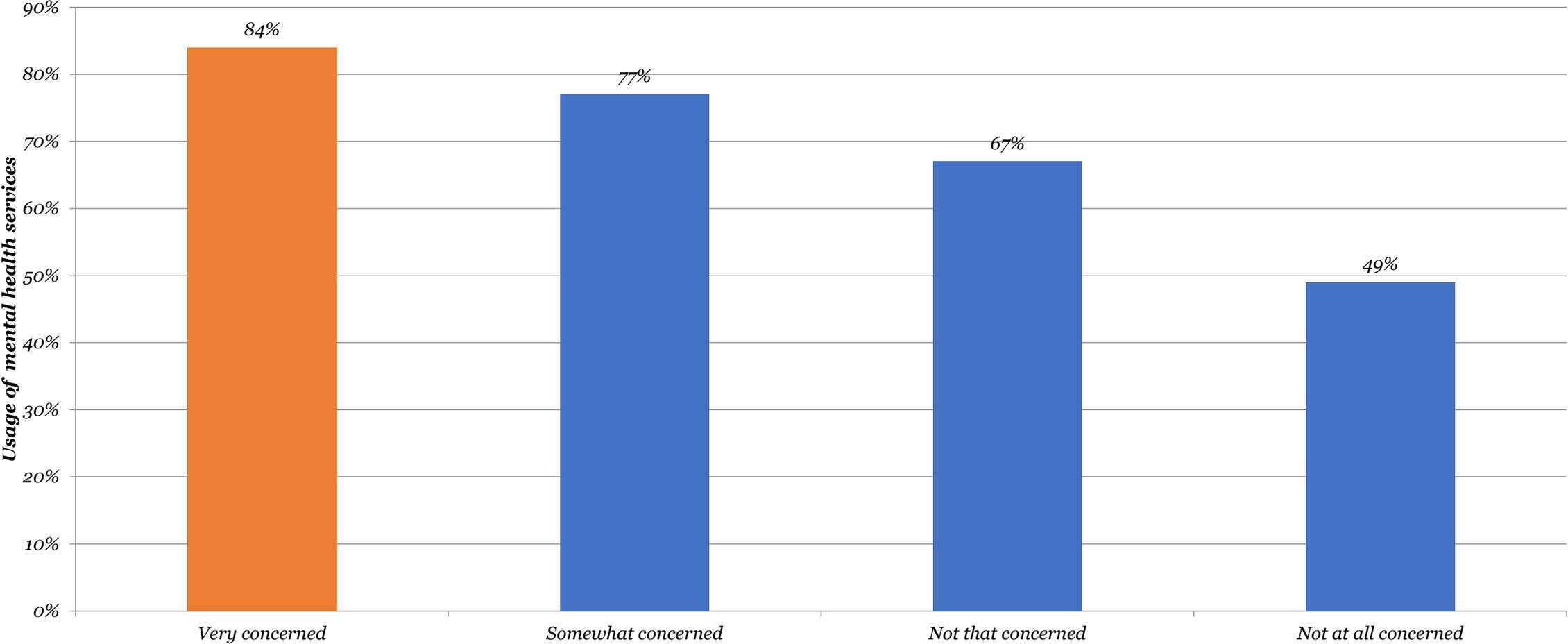
Academic Pressure

- *“College norms that define certain types of behaviour as ‘appropriate’ under certain conditions, such as staying up all night to cram for an exam may be stress-inducing and may lead to less healthy practices...”*
- Hicks and Miller (2006) *“College Life Styles, Life Stressors and Health Status: Differences Along Gender Lines”* Arlington, VA: Journal of College Admission

Financial Burdens

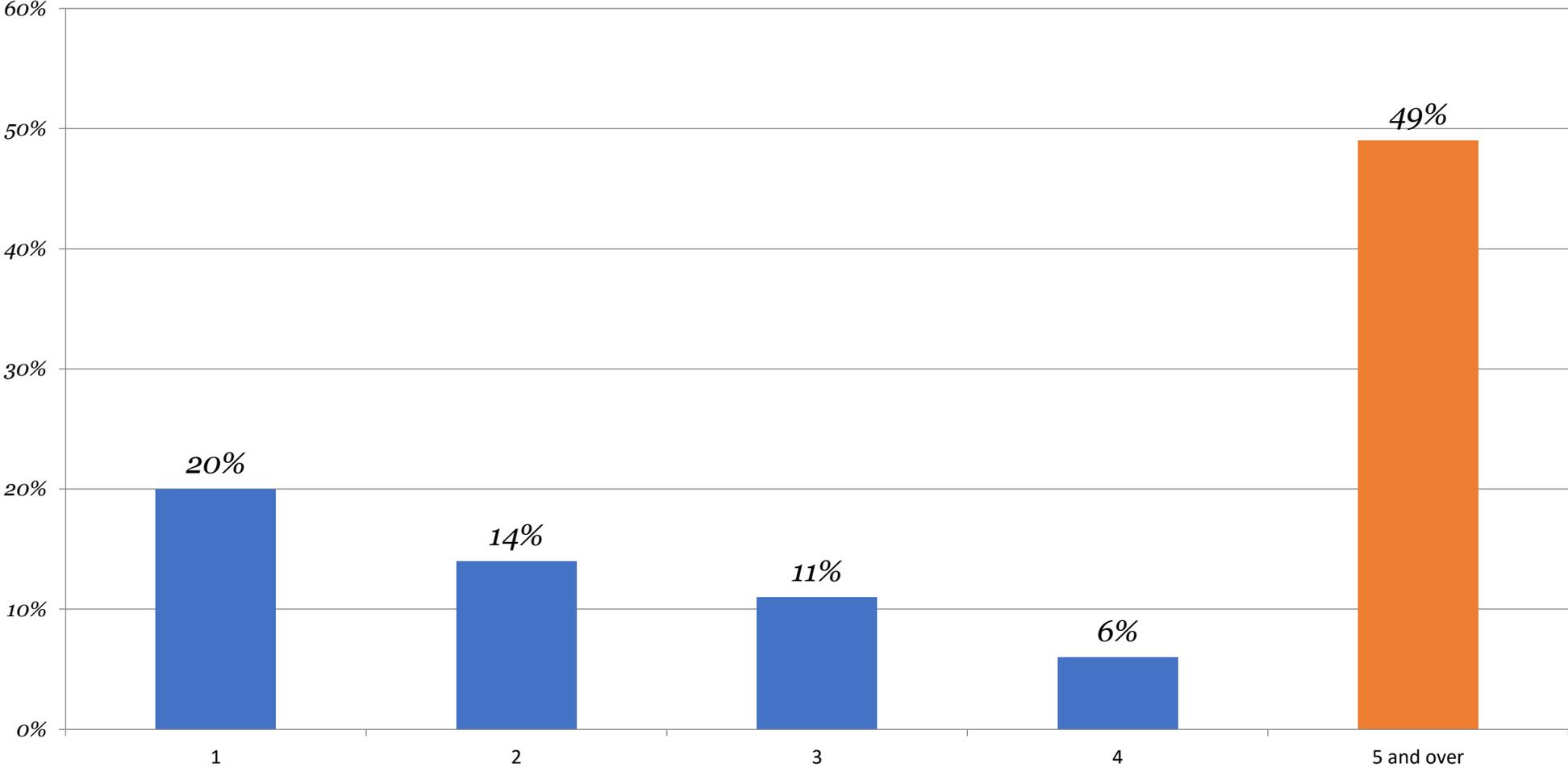
- *“Those who feel the pressure of financial struggles while attending university are found to perform less well than their peers... and may be at higher risk of mental health problems”*
 - Flatt (2013) *“A Suffering Generation: Six Factors Contributing to the mental health crisis in North American higher education”* College Quarterly vol.16 no.
- *Two thirds of students are concerned about having enough money to complete their education*
- *Almost 4 in 5 students had some level of concern about their level of debt post graduation*
 - Bristow and Nestico-Semianiw (2014) *Paying Our Way: A Look at Student Financial Assistance Usage in Ontario*. Toronto: OUSA

Service usage vs student concern with paying off debt

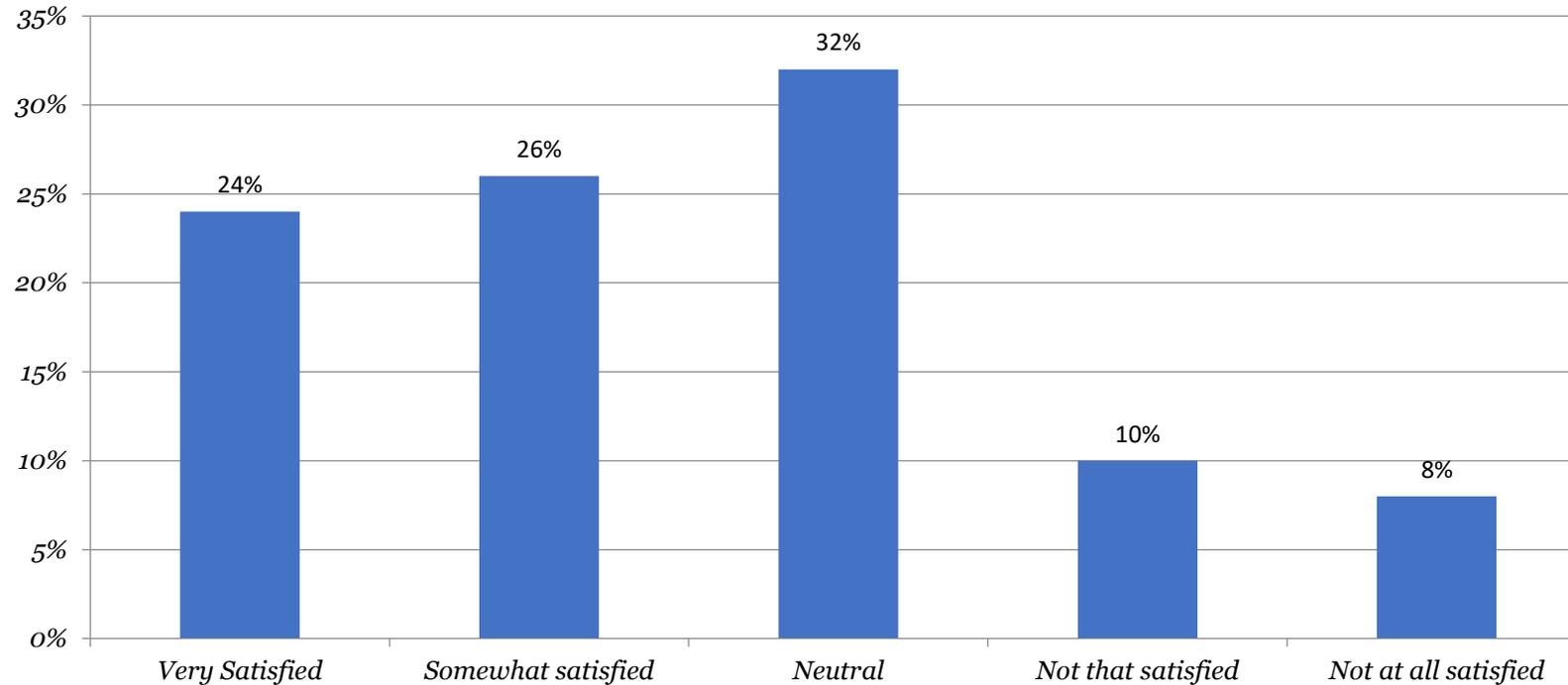


BARRIERS TO ACCESS

Number of days students reported it took for them to be able to see a counsellor or mental health nurse



How do students feel about services?



Student satisfaction with on-campus mental health services

**WHY IS THIS DATA
RELEVANT?**

What does OUSA recommend?

- *Continued investment into frontline mental health services.*
- *Education, training and resources for staff and faculty*
- *Support for peer support programs*
- *Institutional policies, structures, and organization need to reflect the importance of student health & wellness*
- *Most importantly: **a system-wide** effort which includes **meaningful** input from all stakeholder, including students*

Discussion points

- *What information would you like to hear from our students?*
- *What are the most pressing mental health issues on your campus?*
- *What strategies would you recommend for tackling some of the issues in this presentation?*
- *Does the idea of providing students with a significant input into mental health strategies scare you?*
- *What more can students do to help work on this issue? How can we all work with students?*

Let's work together

- *Next semester OUSA will be revising our Student Health & Wellness paper, which includes student mental health. We would love to hear your input and see how fellow stakeholders envision the future of mental health on Ontario's campuses.*

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Bibliography

- *Bristow, Ailsa. "University students and mental health." Presentation, July 15, 2014, Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance.*
- *Bristow and Nestico-Semianiw (2014) Paying Our Way: A Look at Student Financial Assistance Usage in Ontario. Toronto: OUSA*
- *Flatt (2013) "A Suffering Generation: Six Factors Contributing to the mental health crisis in North American higher education " College Quarterly vol.16 no.1*
- *Goldring (2012) "Cycling through the blues: the impact of system external stressors on students mental states and symptoms of depression" College Student Journal 46, no.3"*
- *Hicks and Miller (2006) "College Life Styles, Life Stressors and Health Status: Differences Along Gender Lines" Arlington, VA: Journal of College Admission*
- *OUSA Ontario Post-secondary Student Survey (2011, 2013, 2015 versions)*

