



# Supporting International Students

Many international students do not readily seek mental health supports, despite facing multiple challenges in their transition to a new country and educational system. Here are some of the barriers to access, including stigma of mental health issues, differing cultural perceptions of the definitions, causes, and handling of mental health, and a lack of awareness of supports offered on and off campus.



## Who are International Students?

International students are:

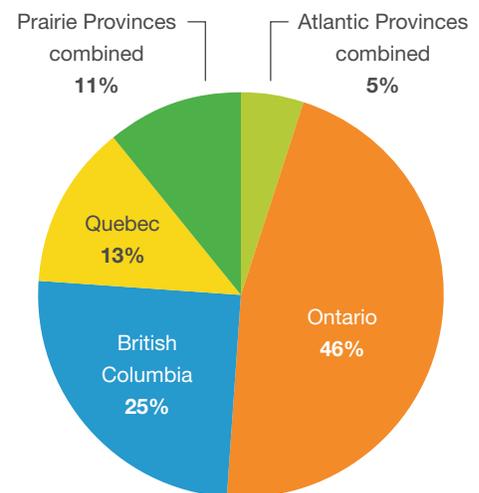
- Foreign nationals who hold a valid study permit issued by IRCC

An international student does not:

- Hold permanent residency status in Canada
- Hold Canadian citizenship
- Hold refugee or protected persons status

Between 2005 and 2015, the number of international students at Ontario colleges increased by 27%, while the number of international students at Ontario universities has increased by 92%.

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS BY PROVINCE OF STUDY



Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2017.



## Factors Influencing International Student Mental Health

- International students tend to underutilize mental health care supports available compared to their domestic counterparts.
- International students typically have a negative view of counselling and often feel uncomfortable talking about their feelings to strangers
- Some international students feel that counselling is only for “weak” or “crazy” people.
- Some international students don’t see the value in discussing their issues with a Canadian counsellor who they worry might not understand their problems because of cultural differences.
- The impact of a diagnosed mental health issue on their immigration status and ability to remain in Canada causes additional anxiety for international students



## Understanding International Students

### ➤ ACADEMIC

- Different education systems
- Course load
- Previous education

### ➤ PROFESSIONAL

- Financial, family pressure
- Unclear career path
- Immigration restrictions

### ➤ PERSONAL

- Finances
- Well-being and health
- Family and relationships
- Culture shock



## Strategies used to Increase Access and Awareness

1. Orientation workshops on mental health and stress management
2. Pamphlets about counselling designed for international students
3. Integrating counselling services into the International Centre
4. “Let’s Talk” focus groups to identify international student needs
5. Workshop series focussing on common issues of this population
6. Alternative counselling options – Good 2 Talk, Tranqool & Aspiria



## Watch the Webinar

To learn more about supporting international students, be sure to watch the webinar recording at: <https://campusmentalhealth.ca/webinars/supporting-international-students>

Credits for this collaborative webinar and content go to our speakers: Nadia D’Lima and Miguel Litonjua at Centennial College, and Ali Dohadwala and Ashley Sullivan at George Brown College.

