



# Student Mental Health & Wellness Survey

## National Report

Presented by the **Canadian Association of Pharmacy Students and Interns**

October 2022

Dear reader,

Thank you for taking the time to read this National Report of the Canadian Association of Pharmacy Students and Interns' (CAPSI) 2022 Student Mental Health and Wellness Survey. Whether you are a student, pharmacist, preceptor, educator, administrator, or Dean, we all have a pivotal role in promoting student wellness. At a time when [our profession faces significant burnout](#), it's critically important for students and interns to enter the pharmacy world fully energized, fresh, and ready to help each of our patients in every way we can.

While the results of this survey are focused on the student experience, we recognize the past few years have been difficult for our educators and administrators too. They have had to navigate through establishing new programs, implementing curriculum changes, and adapting to online teaching platforms amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This upheaval has been destabilizing for everyone involved in building up the next generation of pharmacists. On behalf of students and interns across Canada, we'd like to express our gratitude to each pharmacy educator, administrator, and mentor, as well as our firm belief that we must work together to restore resiliency within our educational programs. We are already so pleased to be working with the Canadian Pharmacists Association (CPhA) on addressing both workforce and student wellness issues, and we thank them for their assistance with this report.

Preparing this report has been, at times, disheartening and draining. Many students have poured out their struggles and worries but also their ideas and solutions in the responses they shared with us. Dozens of student leaders then contributed to this report itself, through CAPSI's Student Wellness Committee, and we are so grateful for their dedication and insights. It is now our collective obligation to respond to this outpouring with clear direction and meaningful action. We hope we can count on you, our readers, to support this aim by using the power and influence - no matter how great or small - that you have. We are fortunate that these survey responses not only shed light on current challenges but also on future opportunities to solve these *together*. We invite your questions, ideas, and discussions about the themes presented here. Our emails are always open to you.

Kindly,

*On behalf of CAPSI National,*

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## Executive Summary

The Canadian Association of Pharmacy Students and Interns represents over 4000 pharmacy students and interns that are invested in their professional development and the issues affecting their profession. Between February and May 2022, CAPSI surveyed its members' mental health and wellness across the country.

On average, respondents rated their mental health as 2.475 out of 5 (5 being the best), with **87% of students rating their mental health as 3/5 or worse and nearly half (49%) rating it as 2/5 or worse**. After a typical day of pharmacy school that month, only 50.6% identified feeling "positive". One in three students reported feeling disconnected, nearly half (42.6%) said they feel alone or isolated, and 41.2% expressed they were viewing pharmacy and/or pharmacy school in a more negative light. A staggering 42.5% felt scared of failing or had thoughts of dropping out.

Even where mental health resources were available, **95% of students reported facing barriers to accessing support, with the greatest barrier being lack of time**, especially during the semester or rotations. Two out of every three students reported a hesitancy to reach out to mental health services, because it may mean cutting down on study time. Mental health stigma also continues to be a prominent barrier, with nearly one in three students reporting that the most common source of stigma for them came from the professional pharmacy community itself.

**Nearly all students (97.5%) reported that school-related stress was negatively impacting their mental health**, with 85.6% reporting this negative effect as moderate-severe. The top stressors affecting mental health were uncertainty about the future (87%), a lack of adequate breaks between semesters or rotations (84.4%), inadequate contingency planning (83.1%), online or hybrid learning (80.1%), and school-related financial concerns (78.1%). The identification of these stressors closely mirrored how students identified potential solutions, as **the top three programs/supports students ranked as things that would benefit their well-being were longer breaks, financial support, and personal days during rotations**.

These results form the basis for [a dozen recommendations](#), with six directed towards CAPSI (in short: advocate for pharmacy students; push for more financial aid; provide mental health resources; provide career planning supports; provide a forum for students to connect across schools; inform students about what CAPSI does) and six directed towards pharmacy schools (in short: create more breaks; provide additional financial aid; provide additional mental health resources; implement thoughtful pandemic recovery; implement curricular changes; build stronger communication channels with students). **CAPSI looks forward to implementing the CAPSI-specific recommendations and working with pharmacy schools towards achieving the school-specific recommendations as well.**

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## About CAPSI

The Canadian Association of Pharmacy Students and Interns (hereafter referred to as “CAPSI” or “the Association”) is an association of pharmacy students and interns that are invested in their professional development and the issues affecting their profession. Together, we are the voice of over 4000 members nationwide.

Our mission is to advocate for the interests of Canadian pharmacy students in the 10 pharmacy schools in Canada. Our organization strives to facilitate excellence of pharmacy students in academia and professionalism through provision of educational and practical experience outside of the pharmacy curricula. Our vision is a national community of pharmacy students and interns empowered to advocate for the advancement of the profession towards excellence in patient-centered care.

CAPSI promotes five main values:

- Unity: Create a national community of pharmacy students and interns
- Professionalism: Exemplify the highest standards of conduct as set by the regulated profession of pharmacy
- Advocacy: Provide a voice for pharmacy students and interns
- Academics: Facilitate learning opportunities for pharmacy students and interns
- Excellence: Inspire pharmacy students and interns to achieve greatness

## Background

### *2018: CAPSI conducts a mental wellness survey*

In 2018-19, CAPSI conducted a national, open-form Mental Wellness Survey, which showed that over 85% of students feel overwhelmed during their pharmacy education. In response, CAPSI issued a [position statement](#), formed an Ad-hoc Student Wellness Committee (hereafter referred to as “Wellness Committee”), and called for all ten pharmacy schools across Canada to open discussion with CAPSI National leaders, the Wellness Committee, and leaders within local student associations to work towards three main goals:

1. Incorporating wellness and resilience topics into the curriculum, including self-awareness and self-care (e.g. integrate a class on mental health first aid)
2. Developing resources and integrating wellness and resilience into professional development programming (e.g. promote the resources available on the local campus,

organize activities such as yoga or therapy dogs to promote student wellness specific to the faculty)

3. Increasing accessible support services on campus for pharmacy students (e.g. increase access to psychologists and academic advisors, provide dedicated time for counseling services and advisors to healthcare professional students)

To make progress towards these goals, CAPSI also introduced Wellness Weeks and Voices of CAPSI, a forum for anonymous sharing of pharmacy students' mental health-related stories.

### *2022: what's different?*

Needless to say, lots has changed since 2018. The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges with virtual classes, online assessments, fragmented social supports, burnout and trauma from frontline experiences, and, for far too many, personal loss and tragedy.

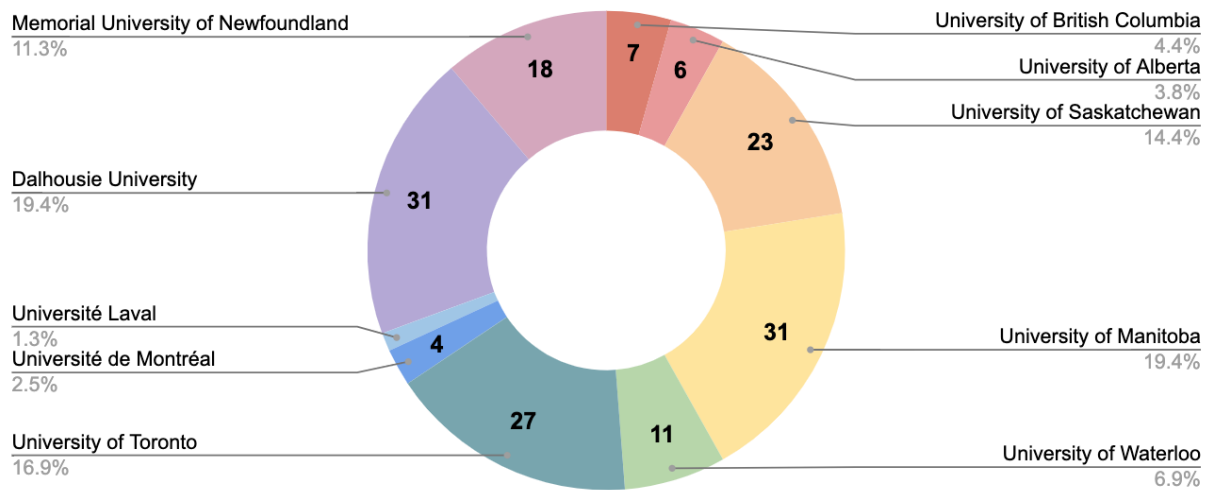
In October 2021, CAPSI received an inquiry from a school of pharmacy Dean asking if the Association would consider surveying its members on their student experience and mental wellbeing, as an update to the survey done in 2018. Throughout our development of the survey questions, CAPSI collaborated with the Association of Faculties of Pharmacy of Canada (hereafter referred to as "AFPC") to ensure a focus that would yield insightful data and actionable directions to pursue afterwards. We are grateful for the AFPC's input and support throughout this process and hope to continue working together towards tangible progress.

The 2022 survey consisted of 18 questions (three times the length of the 2018 survey, which had only 6 questions), many of which were set-up to produce quantitative data (the 2018 survey collected primarily qualitative data). CAPSI received 160 anonymous responses (155 in English and 5 en français) over the course of 3 months (between February 12 and May 17, 2022). CAPSI is grateful to the many students who took time to provide these thoughtful and often vulnerable responses, as well as to our local CAPSI representatives at each school who promoted this survey, helping us achieve a robust and representative set of information to analyze and build recommendations upon.

## Demographics

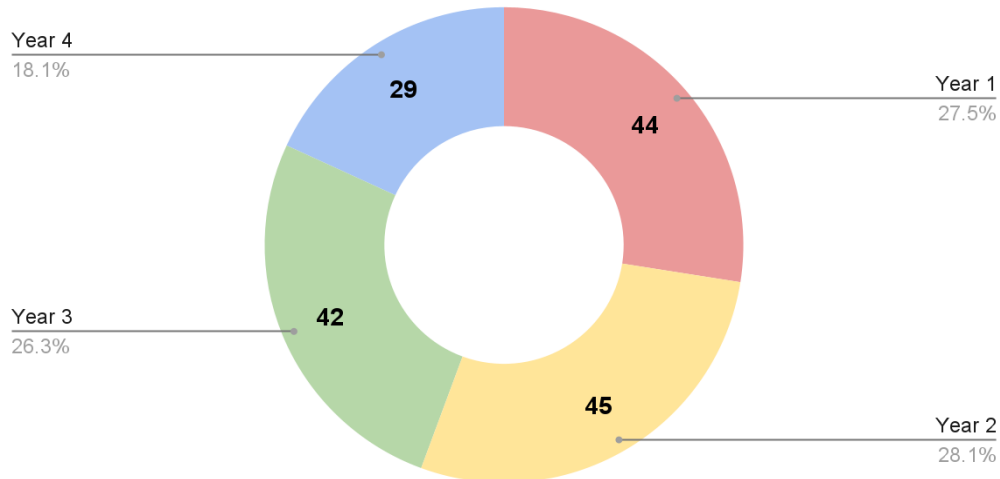
The first four questions of the survey collected demographic information. Of note, most of the responses received were from English-speaking pharmacy schools. Students from the French-speaking schools have explained that their own Faculties have recently conducted similar surveys on mental health and wellness, which is why fewer students may have felt the need or had the time to complete CAPSI's survey.

**Figure 1.** Demographics showing how many student responses came from each university.



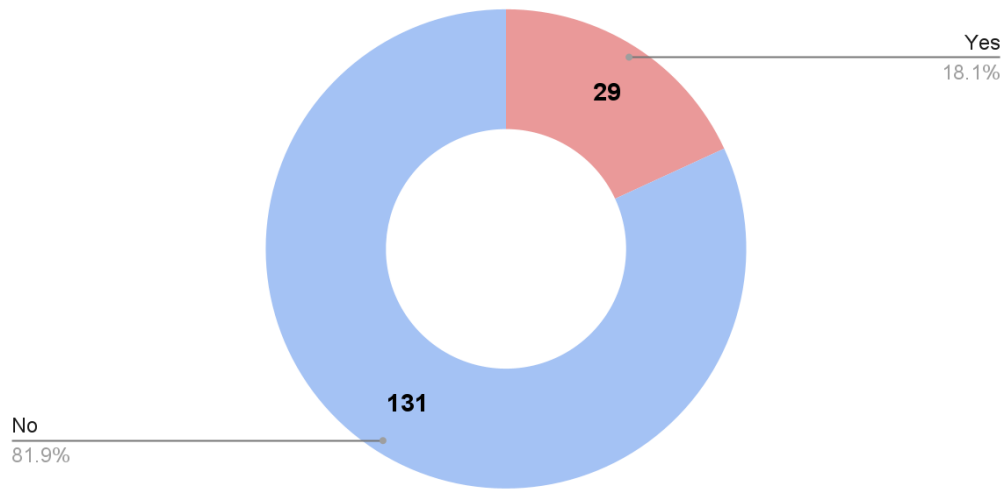
We received responses from students across Years 1-4 of their respective programs. Of note, no response from Year 5 students (applicable only to Memorial University of Newfoundland) were received, likely as these students are on their rotations/internships and closer to graduation.

**Figure 2.** Demographics of which year of study each student respondent was enrolled in.



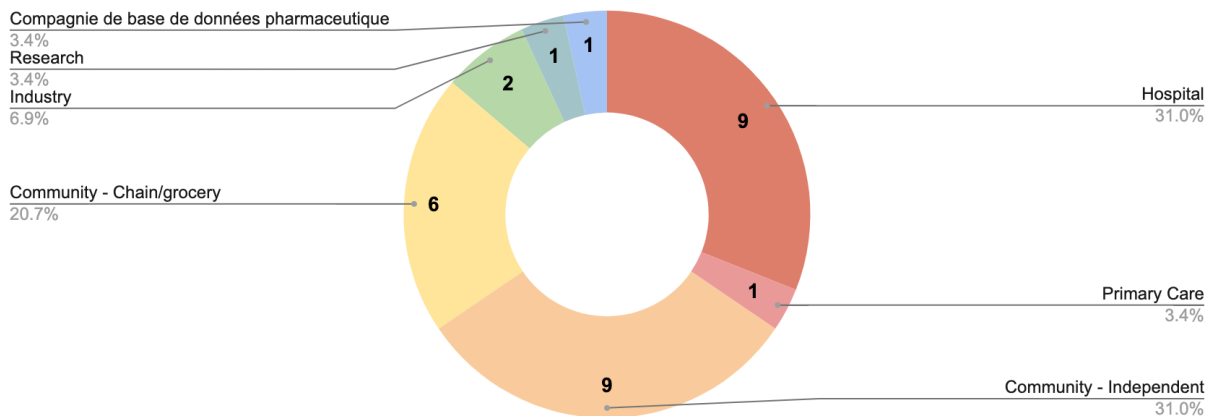
Most responses (over 4 in 5) were received from students not on a rotation or co-op placement at the time.

**Figure 3a.** Student responses to the question “Are you currently on a rotation/co-op?”, showing the demographics of which students were on a rotation at the time of the survey.



Of the student respondents who were on rotation or co-op at the time, the majority were in either community or hospital placements.

**Figure 3b.** Demographics of the placement areas of students that were currently on rotations.

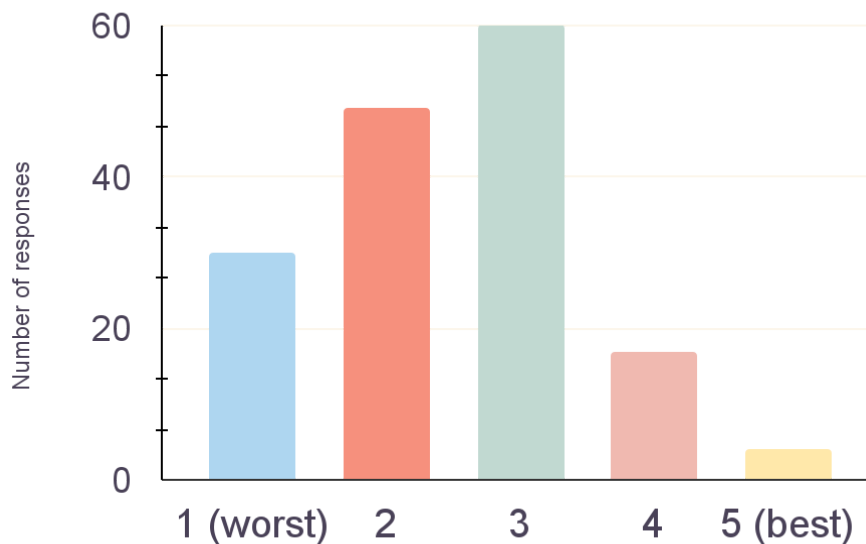


## The State of Our Mental Health

When asked to rate their own mental health over the course of the academic year on a scale of 1 (being the worst) to 5 (being the best), **on average, students rated their mental health as 2.475 out of 5**. Not only is this average below the midpoint of the scale, the overall data is skewed heavily to the worse side. As Figure 4 shows, **87% of students rate their mental health as 3/5 or worse, and nearly half (49%) rated it as 2/5 or worse**.



**Figure 4.** Student responses to the question “On average, how would you rate your mental health and wellness this academic year?” on a scale of 1-5.



To be more precise, 2.5% (4/160 respondents) rated their mental health as 5/5, 10.6% (17/160) rated it as 4/5, 37.5% (60/160) rated it as 3/5, 30.6% (49/160) rated it as 2/5, while 18.8% (30/160) rated their mental health as 1/5 during the academic year.

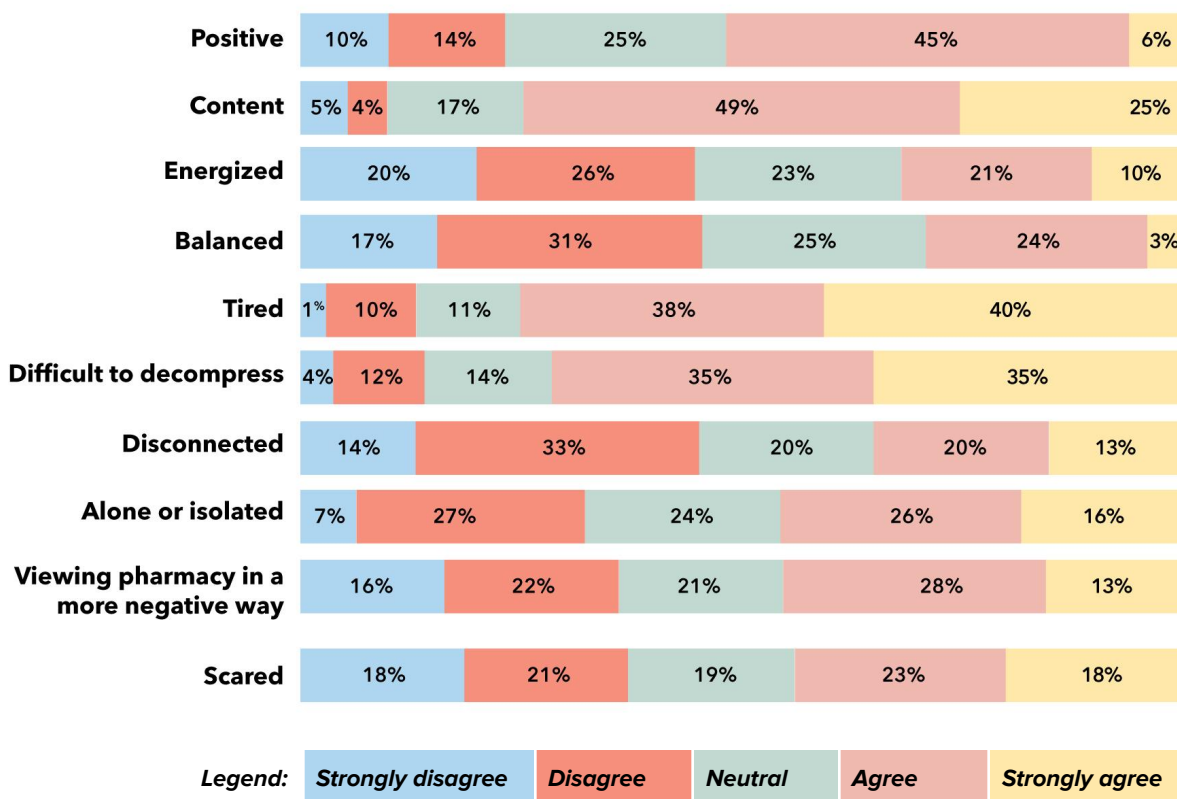
Student ratings of their mental health did not differ substantially when accounting for their year in the pharmacy program. Year 1 students averaged a 2.325 out of 5, while Year 2 students rated their mental health as 2.568 out of 5, Year 3 students rated it as 2.381 out of 5, while Year 4 students rated their mental health as 2.577 out of 5. Altogether, these values provide a disturbing overall snapshot. Our survey then delved deeper into what students were feeling, which helps us expand on what the 1-5 values truly mean.

After an average day of pharmacy school that month, **74.4% of students agree or strongly agree that they feel “content” and believe pharmacy is still what they’d like to pursue**, but **only 50.6% of students agree or strongly agree that they felt “positive”** (i.e. “it’s rewarding to be in pharmacy school, and I’m eager to participate in learning activities”).

Over 78% of students report feeling tired even *before* they arrive to their classes, rotations, or co-op, and 70% find it difficult to decompress or relax after a day of class/rotations. That perpetual cycle results in students feeling **disconnected with pharmacy (a feeling 1 in 3 students identified with), alone or isolated (like 42.6% reported feeling), and/or viewing pharmacy and/or pharmacy school in a more negative way (which 41.2% agreed or strongly agreed with).**

**Only 26.3% of students agreed or strongly agreed with feeling “balanced”** (i.e. “I’m able to tolerate school pressures (e.g. exams, assignments) well”) and 30.7% agreed or strongly agreed with feeling “energized” to participate in activities outside of school (e.g. gym, hanging out with friends). **A staggering 42.5% felt scared of failing or had thoughts of dropping out of pharmacy school.** Figure 5 details the results to this question in full.

**Figure 5.** Student responses to the question “How do you feel during or after an average day of pharmacy school this month?”



## Scoping the Current Landscape of Student Supports

Our next set of questions linked back to the recommendations made in CAPSI’s 2019 Student Wellness Position Statement, as a check-in on the current resources available to students in pharmacy schools. Figure 6 details the questions asked, as well as the results. Notably, most students have access to mental health programming, such as yoga or therapy dog sessions, but, despite these, we are seeing astounding levels of imbalance, disconnection, isolation, and fear as described in the section above, suggesting these measures alone may be insufficient to address the newer, greater challenges students encounter in a pandemic and post-pandemic world.

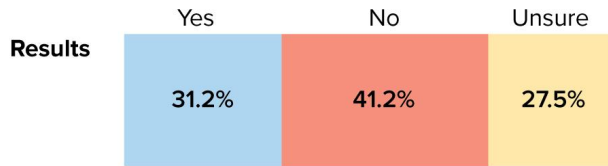
**Figure 6.** Linking back to CAPSI’s 2019 Recommendations as a reference point.

**2019 Recommendation**

Incorporate wellness and resilience topics into the curriculum, including self-awareness and self-care (e.g. integrate a class on mental health first aid)

**2022 Survey Question**

Does your pharmacy school offer student wellness and mental health topics, including self-awareness and self-care within the curriculum itself?

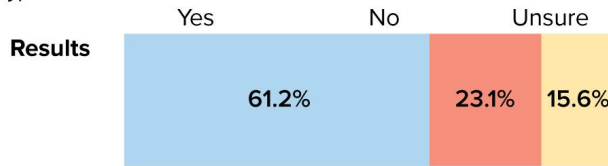


**2019 Recommendation**

Develop resources and integrating wellness and resilience into professional development programming (e.g. promote the resources available on the local campus, organize activities such as yoga or therapy dogs to promote student wellness specific within the faculty)

**2022 Survey Question**

Does your pharmacy school offer wellness and mental health programming (e.g. promoting resources available on local campus, organizing yoga or therapy dog sessions)?

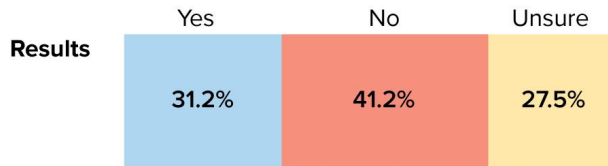


**2019 Recommendation**

Increasing accessible support services on campus for pharmacy students (e.g. increase access to psychologists and academic advisors, provide dedicated time for counseling services and advisors to health care professional students)

**2022 Survey Question**

Does your pharmacy school offer student wellness and mental health topics, including self-awareness and self-care within the curriculum itself?

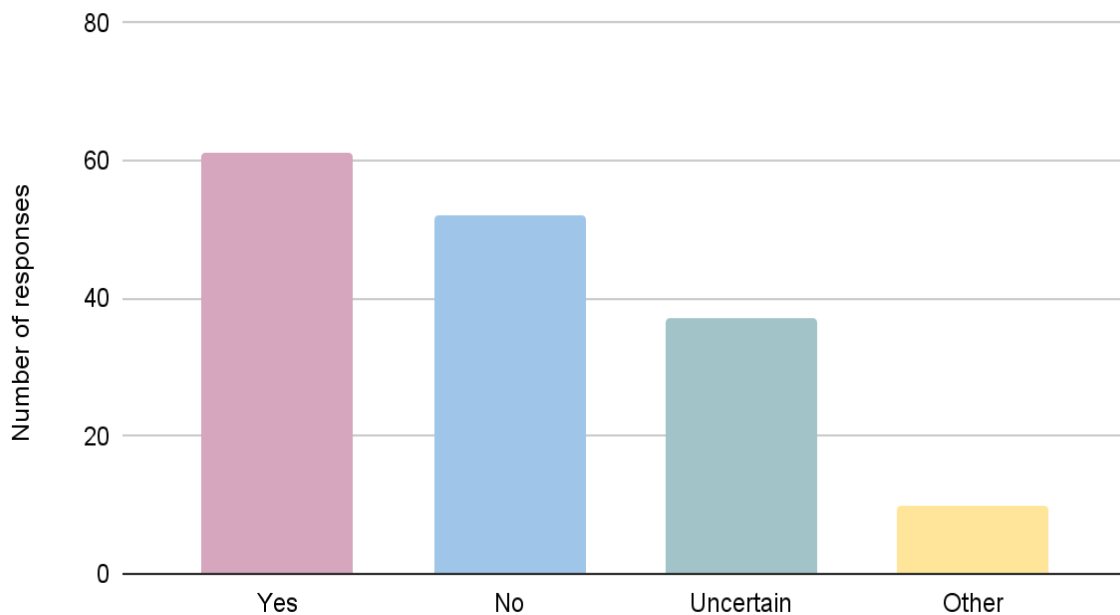


CAPSI recognizes and thanks pharmacy schools for implementing student wellness into curricular topics, promoting mental health programming, and making psychologists/counseling services more accessible for pharmacy students. Undoubtedly, without these efforts, student mental health and wellness would be even worse off throughout their pharmacy school experiences.

However, there seems to be a gap between the existence of these resources and their accessibility. Our survey’s next set of questions explored the barriers students faced to accessing the mental health resources they need. Only 5% of students reported facing no barriers to accessing university mental health support. The remaining 95% reported the following barriers (note that more than one barrier may apply to a particular student simultaneously):

- Two in three students (66.9%) reported **time commitment** as a barrier (e.g. afraid to cut down on study time by going to counseling sessions)
- 45.6% were **unsure of who/where to turn to** for specific supports
- 43.8% faced **long wait lists** delaying access to supports
- 26.3% were **afraid confidentiality will be broken** (i.e. pharmacy school or regulatory body will find out they are seeking mental health support)
- 25.6% reported **cost** as a barrier
- 16.9% reported **physical inaccessibility** (difficult locations, lack of transportation)

**Figure 7.** Student responses to the question “Would you feel comfortable seeking support for your mental health and well-being from your university?”



Overall, only 38.1% of students reported feeling comfortable seeking support for mental health and well-being from their university. As seen in the graph to the side, 32.5% reported feeling uncomfortable seeking support from their university, while 23.1% were unsure. Ten respondents (6.25%) replied “Other” and cited several, specific barriers, such as the services not being pharmacy-specific, individual counselors or therapists not being a good fit, hours of operation not fitting with rotation schedules or class time, university-imposed limits on the number of sessions per year, having to redo intake assessments annually, and a lack of privacy as only virtual appointments (i.e. via Zoom) were available during the pandemic, making it difficult for students to find safe spaces to open up to a counselor.

Mental health stigma also continues to be a prominent barrier, with **the most prevalent source of stigma coming from the professional pharmacy community itself (31.3% report feeling this stigma)**. Other sources of stigma were internalized (30%), from family members (22.5%), or, more rarely, attributed to culture or religion (9.3%).

## Aligning Gaps with Future Growth Opportunities

Thus far, this survey showed us that the state of student mental health is remarkably poor and - even where available - existing supports are often insufficient to address student needs or are fraught with barriers. To elucidate a way forward, CAPSI sought to identify which specific factors had the most negative impact on student mental health and well-being in the last year. It is only by aligning these factors with responses and solutions that we can begin to shine a light towards a brighter future for pharmacy school experiences.

**Figure 8.** Stressors negatively impacting student mental health.



The survey then asked respondents to rank the following nine services/programs from 1 (most beneficial) to 9 (least beneficial) in order of the extent to which they'd feel students in their school would benefit from them: career planning support, free mental health first aid classes, financial support, full fall semester reading week, longer breaks, personal days, pharmacy-specific counselors, small group meet-ups with faculty, and yoga/therapy dogs/free lunches. In analyzing student rankings of the above, three separate priority levels began to develop.



**1. High-priority needs (i.e. services/programs that were consistently ranked highly by most students)**

- a. Longer breaks were most commonly ranked #1, and nearly half (46%) of students ranked this in their top 3 most beneficial items
- b. Financial support was ranked in the top 3 by 43% of students
- c. Personal days were ranked in the top 3 by 41% of respondents



**2. Medium-priority needs (i.e. services/programs that were ranked in the middle of the list or where ranking levels were spread out more broadly)**

- a. Pharmacy-specific counseling was ranked in the top 3 by 36% of students.
- b. Career planning support was ranked in the top 3 by 29% of students



**3. Low-priority needs (i.e. services/programs that were consistently ranked lower by most students)**

- a. Free mental health first aid classes were ranked in the top 3 by 21%
- b. Small group meet-ups with faculty (i.e. during online/virtual semesters, so that students can have more direct support and some contact in-person) was ranked in the top 3 by only 15%, which may be due to its irrelevance for students who have returned to in-person coursework
- c. Yoga/therapy dogs/free lunches was most frequently ranked at the bottom of the scale and included in the top 3 by only 21%.

Of note, a full fall semester reading week was rated N/A by a considerable proportion of students (14%), as many pharmacy schools already have a full fall semester reading week. This skewed this item's rank, even though 36% of students still ranked it in their top 3. CAPSI would like to emphasize how important it is for pharmacy students to have a full fall semester reading week and strongly urges schools that do not currently provide one to reconsider their stance and explore possibilities for creating such a break in student schedules. This can be a critical time for students to re-energize, fit in additional studying efforts, or ultimately access the mental health resources they may be unable to find time for during the busy semester.

## Where do we go from here?

### *Recommendations for CAPSI*

The above findings provide recommendations for CAPSI to pursue. The survey also directly asked students what CAPSI could do to better support their mental health and wellness. Many students expressed that the survey itself - and the potential changes arising from analyzing survey results - should be CAPSI's priority for addressing the current, poor state of mental health. After careful analysis of the survey responses, there are 6 clear recommendations for CAPSI:

#### **1. Advocate for pharmacy students' well-being**

The next section, Recommendations for Pharmacy Schools, forms the basis of CAPSI's advocacy priorities in the follow-up to this survey. Advocacy (i.e. providing a voice for pharmacy students and interns) is one of CAPSI's core values. Through this survey, students have taken the time (which we repeatedly heard is a considerable commitment during busy semesters) to thoughtfully share their journeys and voice their experiences. CAPSI is committed to ensuring their time and vulnerability forms the basis of progress rather than a burden and empty hope.

## 2. Provide (or push for more) financial aid, scholarships, and bursaries

The costs of pharmacy school are growing, as is the cost of living across Canada. Over one in four survey respondents reported that costs were a barrier to accessing mental health support. When asked to rank the resources they needed most, financial support was ranked in the top 3 by 43% of students. Additional financial support (or increasing awareness of current financial support resources) would help mitigate the high 78.1% rate of students reporting school-related financial concerns as having a negative impact on their mental health, particularly the 53.1% reporting this negative effect as moderate-severe. CAPSI commits to advocate for more pharmacy student financial aid, including our continued calls on the federal government to expand their student loan forgiveness program to include pharmacist graduates.

## 3. Provide mental health resources targeted to pharmacy students

In response to the question of what CAPSI could do to support student well-being, many suggested advertising or planning and hosting mental health seminars, providing care packages, as well as making and sharing mental health resources and training targeted to pharmacy students. One of CAPSI's current membership benefits is a 15% Focus Mental Wellness discount, which 83.8% of survey respondents were aware CAPSI is offering. CAPSI's Wellness Committee (which 75.6% of respondents were familiar with) will continue working to create and share mental health resources for pharmacy students.

## 4. Provide career planning supports

Student responses suggested CAPSI create more career supports for its members, including better primers on the current state of the job market, interviews with recent graduates about their experiences entering the workforce, sharing what types of things students can do to help them stand out in interviews, and teaching negotiation skills with respect to job environments, pay, and benefits. CAPSI currently offers a Mentorship Program, which connects members with practising pharmacists who can provide career advice. The survey found that only 68.8% of respondents were familiar with this program, showing there is room for raising more awareness about this opportunity for students. To this end, CAPSI has invested additional efforts and resources towards its 2022-23 iteration of the Mentorship Program.

## 5. Provide a forum for students to connect with other schools to better understand the pharmacy landscape across the country

CAPSI's vision and core value of unity is about creating a national community of pharmacy students and interns. During a time when students are feeling alone, isolated, and disconnected, CAPSI must fulfill an even greater role in building connection. CAPSI will continue with its national competitions, awards, and opportunities to learn, as well as striving towards safely hosting an



in-person Professional Development Week in Saskatoon, SK, in January 2023 to reignite the type of connection felt before pandemic times. CAPSI also should explore more intentionally inviting students from across the country to participate in its national subcommittees and initiatives.

## 6. Inform students more about what CAPSI does

CAPSI's full and successful implementation of all the above recommendations would still lack meaning if students are not informed about these endeavors. Leveraging its social media, local connections, and membership network, CAPSI should continue informing students regularly about its ongoing activities and progress towards achieving the above recommendations.

### *Recommendations for Pharmacy Schools*

By directly aligning the factors negatively impacting students' mental health with potential solutions, we can begin to see areas where it would be irresponsible not to implement recommended measures for improving student wellness. CAPSI's survey also directly asked students what pharmacy schools and the AFPC could do to improve student mental health and well-being. The analysis of these responses also yields 6 recommendations, which CAPSI looks forward to advocating for in the coming year.

#### 1. Create more breaks for students during and between semesters and rotations

When over two-thirds of students are reporting they weren't able to access the support they needed due to a lack of time and 84.4% reporting that a lack of adequate breaks between semesters or rotations was negatively impacting their mental health, it is evident that the creation of more breaks during pharmacy school is overdue. Available, published literature identifies meaningful breaks as a mechanism to combat the emotional exhaustion and burnout that has been identified in the CAPSI survey.<sup>1234</sup>

***“We found an inverse relationship between burnout and a student's emotional wellbeing and ability to perform. Although academic performance and emotional health can be influenced by many factors, burnout is clearly implicated and plays a negative role in students”<sup>5</sup>***

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<sup>1</sup> Patel, S. K., Kelm, M. J., Bush, P. W., Lee, H. J., & Ball, A. M. (2021). Prevalence and risk factors of burnout in community pharmacists. *Journal of the American Pharmacists Association : JAPhA*, 61(2), 145–150. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.japh.2020.09.022>

<sup>2</sup> Schommer, J. C., Gaither, C. A., Goode, J., Owen, J. A., Scime, G. M., Skelton, J. B., Cernasev, A., & Hillman, L. A. (2020). Pharmacist and student pharmacist views of professional and personal well-being and resilience. *Journal of the American Pharmacists Association : JAPhA*, 60(1), 47–56. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.japh.2019.09.006>

<sup>3</sup> Jones, G. M., Roe, N. A., Loudon, L., & Tubbs, C. R. (2017). Factors Associated With Burnout Among US Hospital Clinical Pharmacy Practitioners: Results of a Nationwide Pilot Survey. *Hospital pharmacy*, 52(11), 742–751. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018578717732339>

<sup>4</sup> Johnston, K., O'Reilly, C. L., Scholz, B., Georgousopoulou, E. N., & Mitchell, I. (2021). Burnout and the challenges facing pharmacists during COVID-19: results of a national survey. *International journal of clinical pharmacy*, 43(3), 716–725. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11096-021-01268-5>

<sup>5</sup> Kaur, M., Long, J. W., Luk, F. S., Mar, J., Nguyen, D. L., Ouabo, T., Singh, J., Wu, B., Rajagopalan, V., Schulte, M., & Doroudgar, S. (2020). Relationship of Burnout and Engagement to Pharmacy Students' Perception of Their Academic Ability. *American journal of pharmaceutical education*, 84(2), 7571. <https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe7571>



One of the core ways in which burnout can be prevented and stress can be reduced is by providing adequate breaks.<sup>67</sup> Introducing meaningful breaks can take multiple forms across pharmacy schools. For some, it may mean the introduction of a fall semester reading week. For others, it's providing more time between rotations for students to move, refresh, and reset before starting a new, challenging practicum block.

CAPSI was disturbed at the lack of sick days or personal days throughout student rotations. Many respondents shared how their only opportunity to access counseling or psychotherapy services is during working hours (i.e. the hours during which they must be on rotations), which means they often go months without the healthcare they need. As seen above, 68.1% of students reported that a lack of or inadequate personal days was negatively impacting their mental health, with 47.5% reporting this negative effect as moderate-severe.

CAPSI recognizes the progress made by many pharmacy schools, such as the University of British Columbia, University of Toronto, Université de Montréal, and most recently, the University of Manitoba in providing sick days for their students and interns. Notably, the University of Manitoba has also introduced personal reflective days, set for the midpoint of each 4th year rotation block. CAPSI recognizes that the landscape of student schedules and breaks is different across the country, and we look forward to joining local students in advocating for breaks where there are current needs.

## 2. Provide additional financial aid, scholarships, and bursaries

The provision of additional financial aid, scholarships, and bursaries was a recommendation for both CAPSI and pharmacy schools alike. The same findings that support the CAPSI-specific recommendations to push for additional financial aid, scholarships, and bursaries also supports this school-specific recommendation. CAPSI also recognizes that schools have ongoing efforts to introduce financial aid, which students may be unaware of. The significance of increasing student awareness of these resources, as well as having advisors available to help students navigate them, cannot be overstated.

## 3. Provide additional mental health resources targeted to pharmacy students

Despite a 2019 recommendation, 26.3% of students said they do not yet have adequate access to counselling services specific to pharmacy students, while 28.8% were unsure. While some progress has been made, further increasing access and awareness will be important moving forward. Students at schools with pharmacy-specific counselors have noted how valuable these can be, as they ensure pharmacy students can avoid the longer wait times associated with

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<sup>6</sup> Chan, M., & Yang, M. (2021, July 16). Pharmacy burnout during COVID-19. Retrieved June 23, 2022, from <https://www.canadianhealthcarenetwork.ca/pharmacy-burnout-during-covid-19>

<sup>7</sup> Jabr, F. (2013, October 15). Why Your Brain Needs More Downtime. Retrieved June 23, 2022, from <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/mental-downtime/>

university-wide resources (nearly half of students, 43.8%, reported facing long wait lists, which hampered the potential of accessing short-term counseling support).

The expansion of mental health resources should be thoughtfully targeted at addressing existing barriers, rather than taking the form of superficial wellness challenges or token encouragement. Some current barriers included uncertainty of who/where to turn to for specific support (reported by 45.6% of students) and fears over confidentiality being broken and pharmacy schools or regulatory bodies being notified of who is seeking mental health support (reported by 26.3% of students). Whenever services are promoted, highlighting specific contact details and busting myths and stigma is critical.

Pharmacy schools may also wish to consider allotting designated class time to focus on mental health and self-care. Linking back to another 2019 recommendation, 41.2% of students reported that such classes were not yet integrated into their curriculum, presenting a potential area for consideration in courses that focus on professionalism, pharmacy practice, or even therapeutics.

#### 4. Implement thoughtful pandemic recovery plans and transitions

The responses we received asked CAPSI to advocate for more in-person opportunities. In-person learning provides for “collision spaces”, areas where faculty members, administrators, students (from pharmacy and other health professions) can interact with each other. These interactions can spark informal relationships and foster feelings of connectedness. As schools move back to in-person learning, it’s important to support this transition. Throughout the pandemic, lecture recordings have been helpful for students reviewing course content ahead of assessments. Lecture recordings should continue to be provided, especially for students who have COVID-19 infections or other illnesses during the semester, in order to prevent transmission and ensure safety on campus. Temporary, at-home rotation plans for students with COVID-19 are another way pharmacy schools can help support pandemic recovery.

Of note, 80.1% reported online or hybrid learning negatively impacting their mental health, with 56.3% reporting this negative effect as moderate-severe. A return to online or hybrid learning would have a negative toll on students, and innovative ways to promote connection during these periods is critical. One of these ways can be through small group meet-ups on campus between students and faculty members.

#### 5. Consider and implement curricular changes that support better learning

Many students provided suggestions for curricular changes that would create space for breaks without compromising on learning, such as less overlap/repetition of topics and less asynchronous work. Students called for a greater focus on clinical or case-based practice, rather than memorization, as well as more class review sessions and PEBC studying support. Pharmacy

education literature has also recently identified an emerging theme of “curricular hoarding”, whereby “topics, modules, or entire courses are “hoarded” into degree programs. The challenges associated with curricular hoarding are compounded by increasing accreditation requirements as well as other internal and external factors.”<sup>8</sup>

***“To avoid and curtail curricular hoarding of material it may be prudent to periodically engage in reviews of material assessing them for not only adherence to accreditation standards but also in terms of their on-going appropriateness and relevance to contemporary pharmacy practice.”***

## 6. Build stronger and more direct communication channels with students

Last but not least, students expressed that mental health and wellness supports often feel performative and are not responsive to student needs. Even when student feedback is sought by pharmacy schools, which is an important first step, students shared that they’re rarely made aware of how this feedback is integrated, which makes them less likely to participate and share feedback in the future. To address this misalignment, CAPSI recommends more regular communication about how student feedback has been implemented, as well as the establishment of more regular and direct communication channels with students.

## Closing Remarks

CAPSI recognizes many schools have made progress in offering mental health and wellness programming, such as resiliency modules, yoga sessions, therapy dogs on campus, or other resources. The central finding of this national survey is surprisingly not the need for more of these resources (although some, such as pharmacy-specific counselors, are certainly helpful and worthwhile). It is rather the fundamental need for students to have time to access these resources or other avenues for replenishing their well-being. It is time for collective reflection on the adequacy of existing breaks in pharmacy school and *how* we can introduce additional resources more meaningfully while reducing the current stressors faced by pharmacy students.

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<sup>8</sup> Romanelli F. (2020). Curricular Hoarding. American journal of pharmaceutical education, 84(1), 847714. <https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe847714>