

# Response to the Final Report of the Review Committee on the Role of Campus Safety (Special Constable Services) in Responding to Students in Mental Health Crises

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## Our Institutional Promise to Students

The promise that the University of Toronto holds to our students is twofold. It is to provide students with access to an exceptional learning environment and to support their personal and academic success as they follow their learning path at this institution.

Supporting our students' success means helping them in times of crisis as well as joining them in times of celebration. It means recognizing that these valued members of the U of T community—who bring creativity, insight, and a broad range of lived experiences and identities to our institution—may experience mental health challenges and, in rare cases, emergency situations that require crisis intervention.

To assist the University in fulfilling our commitment to students, we convened the Review Committee on the Role of Campus Safety (Special Constable Services) in Responding to Students in Mental Health Crises in spring 2021.

The students, faculty, and staff comprising the Review Committee—chaired by Dr. Joseph R. Desloges, Professor, Faculty of Arts and Science—assembled four Working Groups, each focusing on a respective part of the [Committee's mandate](#):

- assess health and wellness supports on UTSG, UTSC, and UTM campuses and in the broader community (e.g., Centre for Addiction and Mental Health);
- review the current structure, where Special Constables are called upon to intervene and manage situations regarding community members in situations that may represent a safety risk to self or others, and consider the implications of interactions involving students experiencing mental health crises;
- evaluate how the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion and their intersection with mental health for individuals of diverse backgrounds inform Campus Safety's response to students in mental health crises; and
- evaluate what resources, practices, and training are in place to support mental health wellness for Special Constables and what additional mental health supports may be required.

## A responsive and informed approach

The Review Committee and Working Groups were keenly aware of the complex context in which they conducted their research and consultations. This context included ongoing discussions in Canada and beyond about appropriate responses to individuals experiencing mental health crises, particularly those disproportionately impacted by systemic racism or other forms of discrimination. Fuelled by a series of fatal encounters between Canadian police and racialized individuals experiencing mental health crises, these calls to redefine crisis response often amplified voices in favour of defunding the police and limiting their presence in public institutions and at community events.

The Review Committee and Working Groups recognized the potential impacts of these public discussions on members of the University of Toronto community. They also recognized that such discussions intersected with, and in some cases escalated, internal concerns around the use of physical restraints for students experiencing mental health crises, and questions around the powers of enforcement held by Campus Police (renamed “Campus Safety” in June 2021).

The release of the [University of Toronto Presidential & Provostial Task Force on Student Mental Health Final Report & Recommendations](#) and circulation of open letters from community members to University administration reinforced calls for new protocols to assist students in mental health crisis and to inform these protocols with an intersectional anti-discriminatory lens.

In their Final Report, the Review Committee and Working Groups underscored both the urgency of reevaluating institutional responses and the importance of Campus Safety to the protection of the University of Toronto community.

## Thank you to the Review Committee and Working Group Members

We wholeheartedly thank Professor Desloges and all members of the Review Committee and Working Groups for their many hours of thoughtful discussion, research, and community consultation, and the obvious care with which they have developed the 19 recommendations of the *Final Report of the Review Committee on the Role of Campus Safety (Special Constable Services) in Responding to Students in Mental Health Crises*.

The Report is wide-ranging in its scope, encompassing considerations such as the recruitment and training of Campus Safety staff, their roles and responsibilities, and the nature of their interaction with other offices and services across our three campuses. It

affirms the need to respond to students in mental health crises with compassion and an understanding of the diverse lived experiences and identities within our University community. The Report's recommendations also recognize the impact and distress of crisis response on all members of our Campus Safety teams, who service and protect the University of Toronto community despite the risks posed to their own personal, and potentially physical, well-being.

The recommendations envision how Campus Safety can improve its response while continuing to play a key role in responding to crisis situations and in supporting our community.

**We are encouraged to learn that the direction of change proposed by the Report aligns with the collaborative work already underway by Campus Safety, the Vice-Provost, Students' portfolio, and student mental health services across our three campuses. We also acknowledge that additional improvements to current practices and processes are needed.**

## Recommendations & Response (Phase 1)

Several of the recommendations in this Report interconnect and are interdependent, and many require additional consultation to determine the extent to which they can be implemented. At this time, we are offering a preliminary response and will share additional updates as work progresses in the following areas:

### i. Achieving tri-campus consistency

One of the overriding concerns of the Review Committee and Working Groups was to achieve tri-campus consistency in Campus Safety operations and relevant policies supporting their work with the University community. Recognizing this concern, we have convened a new tri-campus leadership table consisting of Campus Safety leaders from each campus—Mike Munroe (Director, Campus Safety, UTSG), Tanya Poppleton (Director, Campus Safety Operations, UTSC), and Deb Fritz (Director, Campus Safety, UTM)—and chaired by Kelly Hannah-Moffat, Vice-President, People Strategy, Equity & Culture. This table will undertake a systematic assessment of all Campus Safety-specific recommendations and collaborate to identify feasible next steps. We see it as an effective alternative to creating a single Central Director staff role that oversees tri-campus operations (as identified in Rec B5, Action item ii).

Moreover, to achieve tri-campus consistency in responding to students experiencing mental health crises, this table will engage with mental health professionals on each

campus, bringing together experts with on-the-ground experience and the ability to change systems and promote cultural change from within.

In all this work, the tri-campus leadership table will ensure that the local context of each campus and its respective communities is acknowledged and valued.

## **ii. Continuing to improve the breadth and depth of mandatory training for Campus Safety staff**

Mandatory training and recertification in all areas of campus safety are ongoing realities for Special Constables and other Campus Safety staff across our three campuses. For example, the Ministry of the Solicitor General requires Special Constables to receive training that addresses mental health, Indigenous rights and culture, and equity, diversity, and inclusion in addition to de-escalation and conflict resolution strategies.

A managerial role dedicated to education planning already exists or is in development on each of our campuses. In recent years, Campus Safety teams have been working together and with the Anti-Racism & Cultural Diversity Office, Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) Office, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), and Indigenous partners to expand knowledge and awareness of communities most negatively impacted by institutionalized intervention in mental health crises.

Despite progress in this area, we affirm the Report's assessment that "deeper integration of equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism competencies and mental health knowledges throughout the education programs" is needed for tri-campus Campus Safety staff (14). In addition to expanding training opportunities in the 2022-23 academic year, the managers responsible for education planning on each campus will ensure that EDI- and mental health-related competencies are consistently offered to their respective teams, and that an evaluation process is implemented to assess the training their teams receive.

These managers will also work closely with the Executive Director, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion, tri-campus equity offices, and Office of Indigenous Initiatives to ensure the training's relevance to the University of Toronto context. Training procedures and policies will integrate an awareness of the potential intersections of mental health, racism, and discrimination for many in our community.

In making these changes, the effectiveness of developing a single Mental Health and Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism Training Competency Framework for all Campus Safety teams will be explored.

### **iii. Enhancing recruitment, hiring, onboarding, and retention strategies for Campus Safety staff**

We appreciate that the Report recognizes Campus Safety's recent efforts to develop "new approaches to the hiring and training of Special Constables with community policing and social support backgrounds" (10). We also affirm that additional change is needed—not only to enhance crisis response to students in mental health distress, but also to support Campus Safety staff involved in this response.

Recognizing the importance of staffing, a priority will be to access expertise in strategic recruitment. Campus Safety leads will work with the Division of People Strategy, Equity & Culture to develop a comprehensive plan to attract staff in all roles with competency in the areas of mental health and whose lived experiences reflect the breadth of U of T's own community. The Division will also assess hiring and onboarding practices to ensure they fully support Campus Safety's responsibilities to protect the U of T community and provide a well-informed and compassionate crisis response.

Insofar as increased staffing levels will help mitigate burnout among already-stretched teams, enhancing the wellness supports and debriefing protocols already offered to those most directly impacted by crisis situations will better equip our Campus Safety staff to fulfill their challenging roles.

### **iv. Re-examining synergies between Campus Safety, student wellness services, and student groups in responding to students in mental health crises**

We share the Report's assertion that students—and indeed, any member of our community—experiencing a mental health crisis should be met with "care and empathy" (25). We also recognize that enhancement to the recruitment, hiring, and development of Campus Safety staff, though critical, is not sufficient. Consultation and collaboration between Campus Safety and other members of the University community are needed to ensure this compassionate response.

To that end, we commit to addressing the following issues identified by the *Final Report of the Review Committee on the Role of Campus Safety (Special Constable Services) in Responding to Students in Mental Health Crises*, and will communicate progress on these areas in the coming months:

- **After-hours crisis response:** Campus Safety, tri-campus Health & Wellness units, and the Senior Executive Director, Student Mental Health Systems, Policy and Strategy in the Office of the Vice-Provost, Students will work collaboratively to develop a strategy to implement after-hours crisis response.

- **Integrating peers into institutional crisis response:** Campus Safety will collaborate with the Health & Wellness units and Student Life teams on each of the three campuses to explore peer-support models and how best to integrate peers into institutional crisis response protocols.
- **Transportation protocols:** Campus Safety, the Senior Executive Director, Student Mental Health Systems, Policy and Strategy in the Office of the Vice-Provost, Students, and Health & Wellness units will examine transportation protocols where community members experiencing mental health crises need to be transported to a medical facility. These partners will build on discussions currently underway at a local level, such as at UTSC, where a Working Group is reviewing the transfer of care between Campus Safety and Health & Wellness. They will work in full recognition of the potential trauma inflicted by physical restraints, and will clearly define the limits of this practice when responding to students experiencing mental health crises.

#### **v. Strengthening communications between Campus Safety and the U of T community**

Across many of its recommendations, the Report reveals a communication gap between Campus Safety and the U of T community that will require focus and sustained effort to address.

In the 2022-23 academic year, Campus Safety will begin working with partners in the Division of People Strategy, Equity & Culture and University of Toronto Communications to develop a tri-campus communications plan to build community relationships through information-sharing about Campus Safety's roles and responsibilities in serving all students, faculty, librarians, and staff. They will also undertake a comprehensive assessment of the reporting mechanisms currently used by Campus Safety and determine areas of improvement to support transparency and accountability.

### **Moving Forward**

The *Final Report on the Role of Campus Safety (Special Constable Services) in Responding to Students in Mental Health Crises* represents a crucial moment in the evolution of safety services at the University of Toronto. It affirms the belief—held by Campus Safety teams and leaders across this institution—that the most effective institutional responses to students in mental health crises will emerge from a focused and multi-pronged approach that is grounded in deep expertise, intercultural

competency, cultural humility, and humanity. This approach will reflect sensitivity to and understanding of the ways that racialized individuals experiencing mental health crises have been particularly challenged by current models of crisis response in our society at large and at our institution. Further, it will reflect the University's commitment to the values of equity, diversity, and inclusion and its ongoing work to create learning, working, and social environments in which all members of our community feel they belong.

Our willingness to collaborate as a community will be a key factor in our success. This approach requires a sharing of resources, knowledge, experience, and skills across offices and units and among students, faculty, librarians, and staff. It will be based on a profound respect for those who experience the trauma of a mental health crisis and for those who provide crisis response and support.

Moving forward, the University, under the leadership of the Vice-President, People Strategy, Equity & Culture and Vice-Provost, Students, will establish a framework to address the recommendations within the Report and develop compassionate solutions that better serve our community in times of crisis. The tri-campus safety leadership team, Senior Executive Director, Student Mental Health Systems, Policy and Strategy, and tri-campus Health & Wellness units are ready to begin this work immediately. We will communicate our progress and associated timelines in Spring 2023 via the People Strategy, Equity & Culture website, and the tri-campus safety services will provide updates in their annual reports to University governance.

**Once again, we thank the Review Committee and Working Groups for giving us a solid foundation upon which our community can now build, and the assurance that shared goals will inform our future actions.**