

TO: Senate

QUESTION FROM: Madeline Wilson (Senator, 2019-2020)

RESPONSE FROM: Senator Christopher Manfredi, Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic)

SUBJECT: Question Regarding Harm Reduction and Substance Use

MEETING DATE: September 22, 2020 (Deferred from March 2020)

PREAMBLE: Over the past academic year, recent changes to University resources and policies around drug and alcohol use, particularly drug and alcohol use in residences, have come into effect.

As recently reported by The McGill Tribune¹, “the Wellness Hub’s Opioid Overdose Fact Sheet² describes how to treat a fentanyl overdose and where one might acquire Naloxone, a reversal agent for fentanyl and other opioids. However, the sheet lacks any information on how students might avoid overdosing in the first place.” Moreover, the Wellness Hub’s webpages on substance use more generally, including one titled “Just Say Know”³, are lacking in information and appear to promote an abstinence-based approach to drug and alcohol use.

In residence, previous editions of the Student Housing and Hospitality Services (SHHS) “Guide to Community Living”, sent to all students in residence and made public on the SHHS website, included a page dedicated to harm reduction⁴, which promoted the principles of “acceptance, compassion, respect, collaboration, and empowerment.” This page also included a link to a McGill University website on harm reduction. However, the Winter 2020 Guide to Community Living does not include this page⁵ and the McGill website on harm reduction has since been deleted⁶. Moreover, where Floor Fellows typically receive dedicated training on harm reduction, many have reported that little to no such training was provided this academic year. Students have also reported difficulty accessing fentanyl test strips from the University,

¹ <https://www.mcgilltribune.com/opinion/toward-a-harm-reduction-approach-to-drugs-180220/>

² <https://www.mcgill.ca/wellness-hub/opioid-overdose-fact-sheet>

³ <https://mcgill.ca/wellness-hub/just-say-know>

⁴ https://www.mcgill.ca/students/housing/files/students.housing/june_2019_community_living_guide.pdf (page 19)

⁵ https://mcgill.ca/students/housing/files/students.housing/2020_community_living_guidewinter.pdf

⁶ <https://mcgill.ca/substances/harm-reduction>

which is particularly concerning given the recent discovery of street drugs acquired near campus that tested positive for fentanyl⁷.

Additionally, the Winter 2020 Guide to Community Living page on Alcohol and Drugs includes a new section, “Controlled or Illegal Substances”, with provisions such as: “Evidence which could lead to investigation by a Residence Life Manager, Protection Services or McGill Security, includes but is not limited to: drug traces, illicit drug paraphernalia, or the smell of controlled substances,” and “As a member of the Residence community, it is your responsibility to report any instances of inappropriate behaviour related to illegal or controlled substances.” These provisions, which also reference the McGill University Policy Concerning Alcohol, Cannabis, and Other Drugs⁸, go above and beyond provincial law (which does not prohibit the possession of cannabis in University-level student residences)⁹ and serve to cultivate an environment of secrecy, and therefore, danger.

Although there is no universally-accepted definition, harm reduction is grounded on the compassionate acceptance of individuals who choose to use substances, acceptance of the fact that these individuals have chosen to use substances, and then working to minimize the harms that may occur as a result of this use. Harm reduction does not require a cessation in substance use as a precondition for support¹⁰.

QUESTION:

- 1) What is the University’s approach to drug and alcohol use by students living in residences?
- 2) What is the University’s plan to consult students on current and future changes to substance use policies?
- 3) Why has the University moved to ban drug paraphernalia and the possession of cannabis in residences even though this goes above and beyond federal and provincial law?
- 4) Does McGill University, specifically the Student Wellness Hub, have a comprehensive Substance Misuse Program? How many healthcare professionals at the Wellness Hub have specific training and experience offering services related to substance use?

RESPONSE:

Thank you for your question Senator Madeline Wilson.

QUESTION 1:

McGill Student Housing and Hospitality Services (SHHS) operates under a philosophy of respect as its foundation. The Residence Life team comprised of both student leaders as well as professional full time staff

⁷ <https://www.mcgilltribune.com/opinion/toward-a-harm-reduction-approach-to-drugs-180220/>

⁸ https://mcgill.ca/secretariat/files/secretariat/policy_concerning_alcohol_cannabis_and_other_drugs.pdf

⁹ <http://www.legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/ShowDoc/cs/C-5.3> (8.2.1)

¹⁰ <https://www.hri.global/what-is-harm-reduction>

ensure every resident is able to live in a community that is safe, respectful and conducive to learning.

With respect to drug and alcohol use, SHHS supports the safe and responsible consumption of alcohol in residence for students who are of legal age and who choose to consume alcohol. We promote to our students the educational resources outlined on the Student Wellness Hub website on substance use through the "just say know" approach, cannabis information and substance regulations.

Our Floor Fellows receive training on responsible alcohol use and harm reduction sessions at the beginning of each academic year. These sessions are facilitated by counselors from Student Services/ the Student Wellness Hub.

Lastly, our residence dedicated Local Wellness Advisor liaises with our residence life team to provide on-going support to students throughout the year.

QUESTION 2:

Student Housing and Hospitality Services (SHHS) has a consultation mechanism in place to solicit residence student feedback on changes and initiatives to substance use policies or any other residence policy that may be under consideration. Our residence councils which include elected student representatives work with SHHS administration on key policy issues and offer a forum for students to voice concerns and promote ideas.

QUESTION 3:

The University follows Quebec laws on the possession of cannabis products on campus, including in residences and allows students of legal age to possess legally permissible amount of cannabis.

Smoking of any kind inside residence buildings and possession, trafficking, or involvement with any type of illegal drug is prohibited. Possession of drug paraphernalia that could be associated with trafficking, or consumption of an illegal drug is prohibited as well.

QUESTION 4:

Substance Misuse Program (SMP) Overview: the Student Wellness Hub has collaborated with Dr. Tom Brown of the Douglas Hospital in developing an assessment and treatment program* for students who struggle with substance misuse. The philosophy is one of harm reduction through an efficient and research-based intervention model.

*The role of the substance misuse program is to provide trainings to staff and student groups on harm reduction and to collaborate with researchers

in the community to ensure that Hub staff are aligned with best practice guidelines.

Staff training and experience:

In total, the Student Wellness Hub has a number of individuals with experience in supporting individuals with substance use difficulties. This includes ten Counsellors, eight Local Wellness/Access Advisors, one Psychiatrist, one Case Manager and a number of Peer Health Ambassadors, to name a few. Several Hub clinicians have directly worked in addictions centers such as Fosters.

Furthermore, all of the Hub's Peer Health Ambassadors (Student Staff) receive the following trainings: Harm reduction training from *Head & Hands* Outreach Team, Server Training, Naloxone Training, and Safer Partying Workshop.
