

Institutional Commitments

University of Connecticut Adoption of The Okanagan Charter, An International Charter for Health Promoting Universities & Colleges

In formally adopting the Okanagan Charter, the University of Connecticut commits to pursuing health for all who live, learn, work, play, and love on our campuses. Our community is a dynamic ecosystem comprised of students, faculty, staff, as well as local community members, who are interdependent with the natural and built environment we inhabit. As such, creating equitable well-being for all members of our university community necessitates transformational, whole-system work that engages each of our 7 campuses as unique settings for the promotion of human and planetary health.

The Okanagan Charter outlines eight areas of health promotion actionⁱ and emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary, cross-functional collaboration to engage diverse voices in leading health promotion, locally and globally. By formally adopting the Okanagan Charter, UConn commits to working across our university schools, colleges, departments, centers, organizations, and campuses and leveraging the health promotion actions it articulates to improve community well-being.

Beyond a promise to uphold the principles and practices described in the Okanagan Charter, UConn commits to advancing the priorities established by the university strategic planⁱⁱ which focus on improving the well-being of our community by addressing human and planetary health within our 7 campus settings. As the Okanagan Charter states, “health promoting universities [...] infuse health into everyday operations, business practices and academic mandates.” Aspiring to the vision articulated in the Okanagan Charter and endorsed by university leaders, UConn strives to embed health into every aspect of life within our community, targeting the following UConn strategic areas:

Research & Policy—Engage in research and policyⁱⁱⁱ revision/development to address health disparities, food insecurity, human & planetary health^{iv}.

Culture & Environment—Improve supports for students, faculty, and staff; promoting caring and healthy campus environments^v.

Community & Belonging—Cultivate an environment that promotes belonging and inclusion across cultures, identities, and abilities, and empowers each individual to feel connected to the Husky community^{vi}.

UConn also recognizes that efforts to promote health on our campuses will be ongoing and require an infrastructure designed to support long-term systemic change. As such, the university commits to building the foundation necessary to sustain our efforts over time, by taking steps to establish leadership, develop community engagement strategies, and define measurement approaches.

Leadership

- Form a Steering Committee, representative of the diverse constituencies within the university community, to provide ongoing leadership and guidance to health promoting university efforts.
- Maintain the Student Advisory Board, already established to facilitate student voice in the strategic direction of the health promoting university efforts at UConn, providing ongoing consultative support to the Steering Committee.
- Designate existing staffing resources^{vii} to formally serve in an operational support (backbone^{viii}) role, responsible for convening & mobilizing stakeholders, providing project management assistance, and facilitating action toward shared goals.
- Facilitate alignment in well-being initiatives at UConn through the formation of Action Teams.
- Participate in the U.S. Health Promoting Campuses Network^{ix}, leveraging the insights of other institutions and actively contributing to the network’s collective knowledge of strategies to promote health in higher education settings.

Community Engagement

- Develop an actionable plan to build on existing efforts and sustain ongoing engagement with UConn students, faculty, & staff in visioning a health promoting university.
- Provide a platform on the Office of the President’s website, facilitating ongoing transparency with the UConn community in health promoting university efforts. Develop a communication plan to share outcomes and keep stakeholders informed of the university’s progress.
- Develop a shared vision for change (common agenda^x), through meaningful inclusion of diverse community voices as well as the leadership of the Steering Committee.

Measurement

- Develop mechanisms that support ethical community access to population-level health data.
- Examine health outcomes data and conduct analyses to identify variables driving well-being on UConn’s campuses. Routinely disaggregate data to illuminate health disparities impacting members of the UConn community.
- Define Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to monitor progress in health promoting university efforts over time. Prioritize the measurement of desired outcomes closely linked to well-being, including equity, belonging, environmental sustainability, and human health.



Articulated as a fundamental human right, the World Health Organization describes **health** as, “A state of complete physical, social and mental well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” (WHO, 2021) The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion expands on this definition, adding that health is, “a resource for everyday life, not the objective of living.” (WHO, 1987)

Backbone describes a dedicated staff that serve in three primary support roles: project manager, data manager, and facilitator. (Kania & Kramer, 2011)

Common agenda is defined as a state of collaboration in which participants share a vision for change, that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions. (Kania & Kramer, 2011)

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Notes

ⁱ The 8 actions of health promotion are: Embed health in all campus policies. Create supportive campus environments. Generate thriving communities and a culture of well-being. Support personal development. Create or re-orient campus services. Integrate health, well-being and sustainability in multiple disciplines to develop change agents. Advance research, teaching, and training for health promotion knowledge and action. Lead and partner towards local and global action for health promotion.

ⁱⁱ <https://boardoftrustees.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2924/2023/12/Att.-17-Strategic-Plan-12-06-23-BOT-R.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Taking a Health in All Policies approach, UConn recognizes that population health is impacted by policies beyond the health sector. Therefore, policy efforts aim to consider the potential of every university policy to influence human and planetary health.

^{iv} Adapted from the UConn Strategic Plan (2023), as articulated in the cross-cutting initiative: Wellness of People and Planet. Original reads, “Engage with local communities in research and policy development to address health disparities, food insecurity, and wellness.” Broadened to encompass engagement both locally and globally; “policy development” adjusted to “policy revision/development” to acknowledge existing policies which may benefit from revision with a health promotion lens; “human and planetary health” added to emphasize the role of settings and environment in health

^v Adapted from the UConn Strategic Plan (2023), as articulated in the cross-cutting initiative: Wellness of People and Planet. Original reads, “Improve mental health supports...” Expanded to underscore the intersecting & holistic nature of health.

^{vi} From the UConn Strategic Plan (2023), as articulated in the cross-cutting initiative: Stronger, More Inclusive Community.

^{vii} Student Health and Wellness has identified staffing resources within the Health Promotion team to serve this function.

^{viii} For more information about the role of the backbone in Collective Impact efforts, please see: <https://collectiveimpactforum.org/resource/what-is-the-role-of-the-backbone-in-collective-impact/>

^{ix} For more about the U.S. Health Promoting Campuses Network, see: <http://ushpcn.org/>

^x For more information about Collective Impact and developing a common agenda, please see: https://www.fsg.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Collaborating-to-Create-a-Common-Agenda-11-03-2015-Handout_0.pdf

References

1. Health promotion glossary of terms 2021. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.
2. World Health Organisation. (1986). Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion: First International Conference on Health Promotion Ottawa, 21 November 1986. https://www.healthpromotion.org.au/images/ottawa_charter_hp.pdf
3. Kania & Kramer, 2022, Collective Impact, Stanford Social Innovation Review, https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact#.