



## Framework to support cooperation between the health sector and public colleges in Québec

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### Context

In October 2010, the ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) and the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) collectively adopted a framework aimed at supporting cooperation between colleges and health and social services centers (CSSS)<sup>1</sup>, with the goal of meeting the health and wellness needs for students attending institutions in the public college network. These are:

- contextual elements surrounding the initiative adopted for its development;
- principles on which it is based, as well as responsibilities of each network involved;
- current existing guidelines which may facilitate the planning of potential actions by partners;
- the added value representing a collaboration between establishments of both networks.

### A renewed vision of collaboration

The framework offers an updated version of the Guide to health and wellness services for college students<sup>2</sup>, published in 1994. This work comprises a number of existing ministerial and governmental guidelines, including the Mental Health Action Plan 2005-2010<sup>3</sup>. The contexts of each involved network were examined; among them, recent organizational action in the health sector, with the creation of 95 local health and social service networks (RLS) in 2004. In this context, CSSSs play a central role in coordinating services on their local territory.

The implementation of the RLS rests on the definition of a clinical project aimed at improved access to and consistency of services, by integrating the principle of populational responsibility with hierarchization of services. The first principle implies that RLS partners, including the colleges, collectively share responsibility toward their territory's population by offering the most complete range of services possible, in both prevention and intervention.

In industrialized nations, the joint organization of health and social services is recognized as a determining factor for the health and wellness of a population<sup>4</sup>. From this perspective, the authors emphasize the importance of increased inter-network collaboration in order to provide the optimal response to the needs of young people.

### The important and diverse needs of college students

The authors reaffirm the importance of providing young people with services adapted to their needs on the physical, mental and psychosocial levels. To achieve this, they built upon the principles that the health and wellness of college students directly affects their success and persistence in school. It has been proven that the cumulative effect and combination of health problems can increase the vulnerability of young people and harm their academic success<sup>5-6</sup>.

Furthermore, the new framework is supported by the Portrait de santé des jeunes Québécois de 15 à 24 ans<sup>7</sup>, based on information retrieval led by the Fédération des cégeps. This portrait highlights the main determining factors of health and wellness, as well as the nature and scale of health problems presented. These are diverse and concern lifestyles as much as they concern physical, mental and psychosocial health.



The health and wellness of college students directly affects their success and persistence in school.



## Key principles related to the framework

The framework takes into account this reading of different existing health problems facing college students and factors that affect their condition. It builds on four recognized principles, notably:

- that young people aged 15 to 24 have a variety of needs on the physical, mental and psychosocial levels;
- that colleges create a favourable environment for reaching young people aged 17 to 24;
- that the health of college students affects their academic success, which can have a lifelong impact on their health;
- that intersectoral collaboration is a key factor in improving health and social services for young people;
- that the responsibilities to each of the networks involved.

## Towards a greater mobilization and increased partnerships between colleges and CSSSs

Collaborative agreements are an important step toward intersectoral action to the advantage of young people. The new framework should permit increased cooperation between more institutions within the two networks. This tool aims to facilitate implementation of a collaborative process that guarantees consistent services to the best interests of all students. For example, we suggest a joint consent form for communicating personal information.

Among the key factors that would insure better internetwork cooperation:

- commitment to the population and diverse clientele;
- the recognition of expertise in other sectors;
- decision-making methods favouring egalitarian relationships between partners.<sup>8</sup>

The follow-up of collaborative agreements between the CSSSs and colleges is among the conditions conducive to developing partnerships, along with the framework follow-up by the tripartite Committee (MSSS – MELS – Fédération des cégeps) regarding health and social services in the public college network. It will be interesting to follow the development of the collaboration between partners in both networks.

\* The author of this article, together with Julie Gauthier (for the MSSS), served as researcher and writer of the framework (for the MELS). Work was conducted with the contribution of the tripartite committee, i.e. the Fédération des cégeps, the MELS and the MSSS, for health and social services provided to students in the college network, formed in 2005. Ms. Villeneuve currently works at the department of educational affairs and research of the Fédération des cégeps as research and development advisor, as well as a facilitator for a mental and social care professional network - Réseau intercollégial des intervenants psychosociaux (RIIPSO)

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