



# Annual Report 2025

Cornell  
University  
**HEALTH  
PROMOTING  
CAMPUS**

# OVERVIEW

In October of 2022, Cornell University formally adopted the [international Okanagan Charter](#) to become a Health Promoting Campus. Adopting the charter allows us – and over [400 Institutions of Higher Education \(IHE\)](#) – to advance existing institutional priorities in a systemic, sustainable way, both on campus and beyond.

Our work as a Health Promoting Campus is designed to transform the health and sustainability of our current and future societies, strengthen communities, and contribute to the wellbeing of people, places, and the planet.

Cornell has long-recognized that promoting the health and wellbeing of all students, staff, and faculty is foundational for academic, work, and life success. Examples of this commitment include:

- Cornell's student [Mental Health Framework](#), a comprehensive and integrated public health approach that reflects best practices to suicide prevention and mental health promotion.
- Our student [Mental Health Review](#), a comprehensive review of Cornell's campus climate identifying over 130 recommendations to support student mental health and wellbeing.
- The university priority for [Employee Wellbeing](#) which spans seven different facets of wellbeing and has wellbeing as a critical component of the total employee experience. In 2024, language about contributing to a culture of wellbeing and belonging was added to standard position descriptions for individual contributors and people leaders (managers) to demonstrate this commitment and articulate expectations.
- In addition, our institutional commitment to sustainability and climate change research, teaching, and engagement directly impacts the wellbeing of our university and of the planet. Our campuses are living laboratories for developing, testing, and implementing solutions that address these challenging issues.

Our commitments to people, place, and planet closely align with the guiding principles of the [international Okanagan Charter](#).

This report provides an update on our Health Promoting Campus efforts for the 2024-2025 academic year.

# KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Our highlights reflect the Key Principles for Action outlined in the Okanagan Charter. Below is a summary of the work accomplished during the 2024-2025 academic year.

## Use settings and whole system approaches.

Below are highlights of our collective efforts to foster a culture of health and wellbeing at Cornell for students, staff, and faculty by creating conditions for health.

- **Community of Practice Structure:** The [Community of Practice](#) was created to bring diverse campus stakeholders together to create common ground around our Health Promoting Campus efforts, enable collective learning, foster interaction, and identify ways to address key issues identified.
- **Community of Practice Guidelines:** The committees within our Community of Practice worked diligently to create and disseminate Health Promoting Campus guidelines designed for faculty, staff, and students to consider when working in the areas of Research and Evaluation, Policies and Practices, Supportive Environments, Belonging and Connection, Personal and Professional Development, Services and Resources. These guidelines may be found on the Health Promoting Campus website under "[Toolkit](#)."
- **Workforce Wellbeing Core Advisory Committee (WWCAC):** This committee worked in partnership with the Student Wellbeing Council to develop an institution-wide [wellbeing vision and mission](#) at Cornell. In the Fall of 2024, the committee issued a first round of recommendations to its executive sponsors with an emphasis on mental health, healthy places/spaces, and workload. In between recommendation cycles, the committee has provided timely and ongoing insight and feedback.
- **Cornell Child Care Center (CCCC) Ground Source Heat Pump:** In 2024, the university made a significant investment in support of Cornell's campus 2035 climate neutrality goals by installing the Ithaca area's [first full-scale ground source heat pump system](#) for the CCCC. This investment, which required relocating the child care program for nearly a year, has resulted in improved conditions for children and staff.
- **Sustainable Cornell Council:** Council charged with identifying, prioritizing, and advancing sustainability goals specific to their topic area, and task working groups to advance priorities each year.
- **Cornell Living Lab Model:** A comprehensive [approach](#) to sustainability that integrates research, education, and community engagement.

## Ensure comprehensive and campus-wide approaches.

The following are examples of our efforts to develop and implement multiple interconnected strategies that focus on everyone in the campus community.

- **Mental Health at Cornell website:** A site that serves as a one-stop shop for Cornell and Ithaca community resources. The Services and Resources committee collaborated on a re-design of the [Support for Students: Ithaca Campus](#) page this past year.
- **Third Annual Summer Wellbeing Adventure:** Designed as a fun, three-week campaign encouraging students, staff, faculty, and retirees to explore people, places, and planet through activities, reflection, and community connection. In 2024, the adventure included a [photo contest](#) and over twenty winners had their photos displayed on Health Promoting Campus banners across campus light poles, spotlighting both the university's commitment and the involvement of its constituencies.
- **Community-Based Services:** Services designed to "meet students where they are" and reduce barriers to receiving care, addressing unique challenges students may encounter within their respective colleges, schools, and rigorous academic disciplines. The services include Well-being Coaching, Embedded Therapy, Let's Talk, and CAPS Community Liaisons.
- **HPC newsletter:** A [monthly e-newsletter](#), piloted using an opt-in strategy and typically reaching 700-900 readers, showcases initiatives across Cornell that support the wellbeing of people, place, and planet. It also serves as a platform to invite feedback and engagement with ongoing HPC efforts.
- **Mental Health Programmers:** This multidisciplinary group takes a holistic and collaborative approach to promoting mental health and wellbeing. They engage regularly in ongoing dialogue about emerging issues, exchange strategies and best practices, and work together to implement theory-informed and evidence-based approaches in their support of students.
- **Nature Rx:** This initiative promotes wellbeing through engagement with the natural world. The [website](#) provides inspiration for specific engagement in natural spaces and highlights natural areas across the Ithaca Campus, highlighting the importance of place and planet.
- **Stop Campus Hazing efforts:** Group of diverse campus partners who advance health-promoting initiatives that address hazing prevention through increased awareness, engagement, and proactive response. In addition to ensuring compliance with federal legislation, the group fosters a culture of wellbeing by integrating prevention strategies into campus life.
- **Well-being In Scholarly Environments (WISE):** Initiative that supports wellbeing in academic settings by promoting inclusive and supportive classroom practices. Faculty are provided with an online 'Toolkit'

containing practical materials and resources, complemented by trainings designed to help integrate wellbeing strategies into teaching and learning.

- **People Leader (Manager/Supervisor) Training:** University staff with supervisory responsibilities are expected to go through a New Supervisor Development Program, which includes a live ninety-minute module about expectations and resources for supporting the health and wellbeing of their teams. New in 2024 was a wellbeing learning track during the Annual Employee Development Week wherein all employees were invited to a series of workshops on programs on a wide range of issues.
- **HR Wellbeing Liaisons:** To ensure equitable access to wellbeing resources, a strong connection between centralized wellbeing teams and the seventeen colleges and units across the institution is critical. The HR teams in the colleges/units appoint a liaison to engage in quarterly meetings, announcements, and trainings with wellbeing professionals. Their charge is to represent the wellbeing-related needs and interests of the staff and faculty in their organization and to spotlight centralized resources to them. This also allows for greater customization to meet unique needs.
- **Employee Wellbeing Newsletter:** A [bi-weekly newsletter](#) sent to faculty and staff with an over 50% open rate. This newsletter spotlights topics, programs, events, and resources related to the seven dimensions of wellbeing model and ensures faculty and staff in a wide variety of disciplines and work areas receive the same timely information.
- **Cornell Annual Out of the Darkness Walk for Suicide Awareness and Prevention:** This annual walk started in 2023 under the leadership of a volunteer staff member and over the span of three walks, has raised tens of thousands of dollars for the local chapter and national American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and Awareness. The entire campus and local community are invited to participate, and activities center on a shared commitment to mental health.

## Use participatory approaches and engage the voice of students and others.

This past year, we engaged diverse stakeholders to capture their input on what is working well and where there are opportunities to improve wellbeing holistically.

- **Student Wellbeing Survey:** Assesses the prevalence of psychological distress, flourishing, and health disparities as well as risk and protective factors among Cornell students. It serves as a population-based case study to evaluate the impact of Cornell's Health Promoting Campus initiative over time. Findings were also disseminated in publications to contribute to the broader Health Promoting Campus field.
- **Health Promoting Campus Focus Groups:** Findings from the Spring 2024 Student Wellbeing Survey highlighted belonging as a critical protective factor, associated with both higher flourishing and lower

distress among students. Building on these insights, we sought to gain a deeper understanding of belonging and the factors that shape students' experiences of belonging at Cornell through a series of focus groups conducted during the Spring 2025 semester utilizing the [Integrative Framework for Belonging](#). Staff focus groups in areas such as Cornell Dining were also conducted and information gathered has helped inform workforce wellbeing strategy.

- **Mission Sustainability Survey:** Assesses climate literacy and attitudes, beliefs and behaviors.
- **The Coalition on Mental Health:** Serves as a forum for campus stakeholders to share insights on emerging trends, research, and initiatives supporting mental health and well-being. In 2024-2025, the Coalition contributed valuable feedback to the Framework for Belonging, which was later discussed in HPC focus groups.
- **Coalition on Sexual Violence Prevention:** Provides a forum for campus stakeholders to assess the campus climate, advance prevention efforts, and promote cultural change to reduce risks and support those affected by sexual violence. In 2024-2025, the Coalition hosted a Stanford University speaker who shared a first-year student training model focused on normalizing conversations about healthy sexuality and connecting students to resources for issues like intimate partner violence and sexual assault.
- **Student Mental Health Collective:** Serves as a forum for student leaders representing student organizations focused on health and wellbeing to come together and discuss opportunities for collaboration.
- **Belonging at Cornell Survey:** In the summer of 2025, all staff and faculty were invited to complete a survey sponsored by the university's Presidential Advisors on Diversity and Equity to help the university better understand the experiences of its employees and to inform future work. As belonging and wellbeing are deeply connected, the information gathered will also support advancing HPC.

## Develop trans-disciplinary collaborations and cross-sector partnerships.

We worked diligently to identify key cross-sector partnerships that would support the development of whole campus/community action to support the health and wellbeing of our environments.

- **U.S. Health Promoting Campus Network (USHPCN):** Members from Cornell's Community of Practice attend monthly meetings with colleagues advancing HPC efforts across the nation, sharing best practices, and support for innovation.
- **Campus Activities:** Disseminated health-promoting educational materials and training programs designed to strengthen student leaders' capacities in fostering supportive and inclusive campus communities. These efforts emphasized skill-building, peer engagement, and the creation of

environments that promote overall health and wellbeing. Deliverables include the [Cultivating Supportive Campus Environments](#) chapter in the [Big Red Guidebook for Student Organizations](#), several offerings during the [Leadership Workshop Series](#), and a Hazing prevention training for [Cornell's Professional Fraternity Council](#) (PFC).

- **Housing and Residential Life:** Delivered multiple Health Promoting Campus presentations and workshops, drawing on insights from the Community of Practice toolkit. These sessions aimed both to gather perspectives from participants' experiences and to build health-promoting skills, including empathetic listening and awareness of campus resources. Additionally, staff participated in the *Idea Generation Workshop: Shaping Cornell's Residential Experience*, ensuring that health-promoting policies and practices were considered in residential experience planning.
- **Mental Health in Athletics Committee:** Discusses policies, resources, and educational programs that support the mental wellbeing of student athletes. This group supported the development and implementation of the Wellness Ambassador program and engagement with Cornell's Annual Out of the Darkness Walk.
- **Cornell Public Health:** Collaborations included serving as a project partner for the Public Health Communications course to apply behavior change theories and communication best practices to expand awareness of the Mental Health website; delivering a presentation to the Public Health Nutrition course on the Integrative Framework for Belonging and the use of participatory approaches in Health Promoting Campus work; and supporting Applied Practicum Experience student projects, including guidance on qualitative data analysis using MaxQDA for focus group findings.
- **Cornell Botanic Gardens:** Led a *Learning Where You Live* class titled "Nature & Your Wellbeing" and worked closely with this team on the enhancement of our Nature Rx initiative.
- **Faculty Living Learning Community:** Shared the Belonging framework with faculty in residence and worked closely with faculty to collaborate on HPC focus groups.
- **Tompkins County:**
  - *Community Health Improvement Plan:* Participate in this process to identify key priorities for the county and work collaboratively to address them.
  - *Suicide Prevention Coalition*, including the Zero Suicide Committee: Participate on this county coalition to reduce suicide rates within the county.
  - *Climate Protection Initiative:* A clean energy [coalition](#) of local community leaders who are committed to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, greater energy efficiency, and the adoption of renewable energy.



- *Community Child Care Growth Initiative*: The university committed \$1.86M to a five-year initiative, launched in 2024, to support the growth of child care slots in Tompkins County. This investment made with the understanding that child care is an essential need for healthy communities and as such, invested without any ownership or expectation of priority for new slots. The program [quadrupled its original goal in year one](#).
- *Domestic Violence in the Workplace*: Building on its [eight-year awareness campaign](#), Cornell coordinated dialogue in Tompkins County across advocates, educational institutions, and public health professionals, to raise awareness and explore opportunities for spotlighting this key issue. As a result, there is greater coordination of communication and event collaboration.

## Promote research, innovation and evidence-informed action.

As a guiding principle, our HPC efforts should ensure that research and innovation contribute evidence to guide the formulation of health enhancing policies and practices to strengthen health and sustainability in campus communities and wider society. We use the data to revise action over time.

### Student Wellbeing Survey and Focus Groups

Following the adoption of the Okanagan Charter, the Research and Evaluation committee developed and implemented a comprehensive evaluation model designed to assess the impact of programs, policies, and culture shifts within the context of becoming a Health Promoting Campus over time. This model, shared in a [published article](#) with research questions, case examples, and key indicators, offers a flexible, scalable, and sustainable approach that other institutions can adopt to monitor campus health and wellbeing over time.

Early findings from the [Spring 2023](#) and [Spring 2024](#) Student Wellbeing Survey indicated improvements in mental health, including declines in distress, anxiety, and depression, with over half of students reporting they are “ready to start flourishing” or “flourishing,” consistent with national post-pandemic trends. However, persistent health disparities remain, with students of color, students with disabilities, and transgender and nonbinary (TGNB) students reporting higher distress and lower flourishing.

To better understand these disparities, subsequent surveys examined additional predictors, including academic functioning, campus engagement, sense of belonging, and campus identity climate, to identify modifiable drivers of health inequities. Belonging emerged as a key protective factor: Students who felt connected to the campus community were far more likely to report “flourishing” even in the face of distress. In response, Spring 2025 focus groups explored students’ experiences of belonging, and the Spring 2025 survey validated a brief



measure of belonging at Cornell. This measure will be shared with campus partners as a brief, valid, and consistent way to assess the impact of belonging initiatives. Shared measures are also being integrated into wellbeing initiatives, including coaching and embedded programs, to track outcomes and effectiveness over time and guide targeted interventions.

### Well-being Coaching: Case Study for Level 1 Evaluation Plan

As a Level 1 case study under our Health Promoting Campus evaluation model, we developed, piloted, and tested the feasibility, utility, and impact of a Motivational Interviewing-based Well-being Coaching program to enhance student access and wellbeing. Participants reported significant improvements in self-efficacy for change, flourishing, and core wellbeing domains (life satisfaction, relationships, and meaning/purpose) from prior to and after engaging in coaching. Qualitative feedback highlighted the program's strengths-based, non-pathologizing approach and its ability to bridge advising, student support, and counseling services. With support from the Ceriale Family Foundation, the program is being scaled up, and pilot findings are under peer review for potential dissemination as an innovative, multidisciplinary strategy to promote student health and well-being.

### Campus-wide Surveys

Questions about health and wellbeing are woven into multiple surveys delivered with targeted groups (e.g., Undergraduates, Graduate and Doctoral Students, New Hires, Exit Interviews etc.)

### Build on strengths.

Our Health Promoting Campus efforts use a salutogenic approach to recognize strengths, understand problems, celebrate successes, and share lessons learned. Some examples in how we used a strengths-based approach this past year include the following:

- **President's Awards for Employee Excellence:** We created a [Health Promoting Campus award](#) to recognize individuals or teams going above and beyond to support the university's commitment to the wellbeing of people, place, and planet. Three individuals were recognized in 2024.
- **Increased Time Off (Addition of Floating Holidays):** In early 2024, the university announced the addition of two paid floating holidays per year that employees may use to observe holidays, religious events, and celebrate other life milestones. This builds on Cornell's commitment to fostering an inclusive and equitable working environment.
- **YouTube videos:** Collaborated with the communications team to produce student-led videos showcasing how they support their wellbeing, foster meaningful connections, and share personal insights to help peers navigate student life.

- **Create Change: Health Leadership Award:** Zoey Preza '25 was the 2025 recipient of the award, which advances the legacy of Mathew A. Kleiner, CU '93 and is awarded to students who demonstrate the courage and commitment to create change that enhances the health of the Cornell community. Preza was awarded for her noteworthy contributions in promoting social connectedness and cultivating a caring community among her peers in which individuals are encouraged to ask for help and able to receive help when needed.
- **Noticing & Responding to Employees in Distress:** Leveraging the history and strength of the “Notice & Respond: Recognizing Students in Distress” educational program, Human Resources is in the process of customizing a workforce version that accounts for the unique needs and issues of staff and faculty.
- **Cornell Workforce Affinity Groups (WAGs):** Human Resources launched a new platform to help employees build community through common interests or regional experiences. Groups may be proposed at any point and are given technological infrastructure to support their goals.
- **Cornell Talent Transition Services (TTS):** TTS was established in early 2025 to assist laid off employees at Cornell with the process of identifying and applying for other positions within the university and externally. Resume reviews, interview preparation, and career coaching are services provided by employees who previously only focused on recruitment-based work. These individuals were given ample training to support the sensitive nature of this work, and it is an example of leveraging our internal strengths to meet new needs.

## Value local and indigenous communities’ contexts and priorities.

A key guiding principle in the Okanagan Charter calls for institutions of higher education to understand the local and indigenous communities’ contexts and priorities in this work. We recognize this is an area of growth within our Health Promoting Campus efforts and have begun taking steps to implement this guiding principle.

During winter 2025, Syracuse University hosted the first “Haudenosaunee & Indigenous Matrilineality” conference, a gathering designed to celebrate and explore the strength, leadership, and knowledge systems rooted in matrilineal traditions.

Panelists and teachers included indigenous leaders from local Haudenosaunee communities as well as other indigenous leaders from Turtle Island. Teachings emphasized the need for universities and other institutions to move beyond “Land Acknowledgement” to “Land Action” and highlighted the role non-indigenous allies can play in caring for the earth and honoring other indigenous teachings.

At Cornell, teachings from this conference have:

- Shaped Skorton Center curriculum infusion efforts (e.g., weaving into classroom lectures about climate change new language about the importance of gratitude and reciprocity).
- Sparked new ideas for partnerships, not only with indigenous staff and faculty, but also with specific offices (e.g., Cornell Outdoor Education, and the Office of Spirituality and Meaning Making, Office of the Ombuds).
- Informed language and promotional materials related to the Nature Rx “prescription” program at Cornell Health and engagement of Cornell students, staff, and faculty with the land and waters.
- Underscored the synergies with Restorative Practices work currently being advanced in some spaces at Cornell (e.g., West Campus, CVM).

### Act on an existing universal responsibility.

The last guiding principle in the charter calls on institutions to ensure health promotion action embodies principles of social justice, equity, dignity, and respect for diversity while recognizing the interconnectedness between people’s health and health determinants, including social and economic systems and global ecological change. Below are some ways Cornell’s work aligns with this principle:

- **Student Health Fee:** Cornell's student health fee helps support affordable and equitable access to high-quality on-campus health services. This fee, combined with other funding sources, helps enable Cornell Health to offer all students the same access to affordable on-campus care, no matter what health insurance they have.
- **Office of Global Learning’s “Global Start” approach:** The Global Start option was made available in Fall 2025 for new, first-year international undergraduate students to begin their Cornell degrees at one of three international partner universities: University of Edinburgh, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, or Yonsei University. Students were eligible for this option if they were unable to come to the United States in the fall due to visa delays. Support from a Cornell academic advisor was provided.
- **Cornell Community Response Team (CRT):** Launched shortly after the adoption of the charter, CRT provides support to individuals in distress or crisis using a co-response model in the Division of Public Safety. Serving students, staff, and faculty, CRT has expanded its staffing and evolved to meet the growing needs of our community.

- **Cornell Bridge to Employment:** This [new initiative](#) supports the recruitment, hiring, retention, and advancement of untapped talent pools for employment at Cornell. This includes supporting those who have experienced barriers to employment.
- **Cornell CARE (Cornellians Aiding and Responding to Emergencies) Fund:** Created by employees, for employees, the CARE Fund provides up to \$2,000 to employees navigating a significant unforeseen financial crisis that is threatening their basic living needs. Since adopting the charter, the volume of applications to the program have doubled and annual awards have increased considerably. From 2022-2025, a total of \$177,000 has been distributed. The university provides infrastructure support and oversight to the team of dedicated staff volunteers.
- **Food Access and Security:** The [Cornell Food Pantry](#), sponsored by Cornell Dining, has continued to meet the rising needs of food insecure students and employees alike. The Cornell Food Pantry does not ask for or expect any proof of eligibility.

# NEXT STEPS

Much has been accomplished this past year and our teams look forward to expanding our Health Promoting Campus efforts to support campus wellbeing through the following strategies.

## Reconfigure the Community of Practice (CoP)

- The Workforce Wellbeing Core Advisory Committee and the Student Wellbeing Council (the two primary organizations leading Cornell's HPC Community of Practice) have agreed that the six subcommittees previously under the Student Wellbeing Council will become joint subcommittees co-chaired and staffed with representatives from both primary organizations. This structural shift will allow for a more holistic, inclusive, and comprehensive approach to advancing Cornell's HPC commitment. The redesigned subcommittees will begin meeting in early 2026.

## Host a Health Promoting Campus Kick-off

- The HPC Fall Kickoff Meeting is scheduled to be held on Friday, October 31, 2025. Participants will include the HPC executive sponsors from Student and Campus Life, the Provost's Office, and Human Resources, members of the Community of Practice, and others interested in supporting HPC endeavors. The CoP reconfiguration will be presented, and after the executive sponsor leadership panel, experiential activities will be conducted for connection building, highlighting of strengths, and identification of needs and opportunities for our future collaborative work.

## Engage indigenous communities in this work

- Explore ways to use restorative practices across campus.
- Engage with students in the Akwe:kon residential community in HPC work and feedback.

## Continue to monitor trends in our data and expand participatory approaches

- Review results from the Student Wellbeing Survey data, Belonging at Cornell survey data, ongoing Staff New Hire and Exit Surveys, HPC focus groups, and other surveys across campus to identify actionable steps that need to be taken to advance this movement.
- Share results broadly and engage key constituencies in future participatory approaches.