



AHSU

AFRICA HEALTH
SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

AHSU STUDENT'S WELLNESS AND WELFARE POLICY

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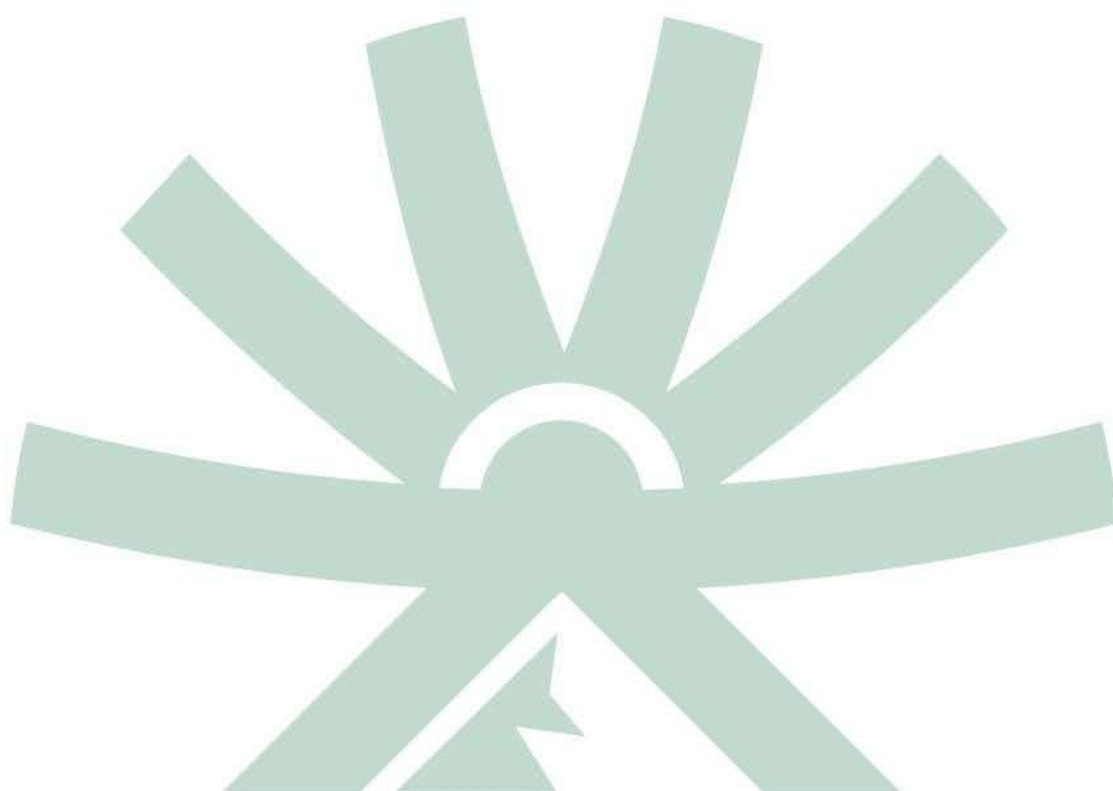
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1. Policy statement

AHSU is committed to a safe, supportive, inclusive, and high-performing learning environment for all students. Residency training is demanding and may affect mental health, professional development, and work-life balance. This policy establishes minimum standards for student welfare and wellness programming across all training sites, including clear governance, confirmed access pathways to services, a structured mentorship system, and an emergency response protocol for mental health crises, and the protection of resident confidentiality and privacy in accessing wellness and mental health support.

2. Purpose and objectives

This policy defines the minimum, consistent welfare and wellness support that AHSU will provide to students throughout the academic year, and how that support will be planned, delivered, coordinated, and reviewed. It clarifies the roles of the Student Welfare Directorate, Dean's Office, and training sites so that resident support is organized, predictable, and accountable rather than informal or uneven.

The policy also establishes an equity standard across locations, sets the expectation that resident wellness is approached as an ongoing system of support that combines planned preventive activities with timely access to professional services when concerns arise, while respecting clinical responsibilities, training site rules, and confidentiality requirements.

2.1. Objectives

AHSU's student wellness program supports student wellbeing and effective learning by providing a safe, respectful training environment, reliable access to services, and early support when concerns arise.

The program supports mental health by strengthening psychological safety, encouraging residents to seek help early, and providing clear pathways to confidential counselling and other support services. It also supports professional development through a mentorship system and practical guidance that helps residents plan their careers, progress academically, and navigate training expectations.

The program reduces isolation by promoting belonging through planned activities that are workable across all training sites. It also supports physical health by confirming and communicating access to wellness resources and encouraging routines that fit clinical schedules.

To reduce burnout, the program emphasizes prevention and timely intervention.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all AHSU students across all training sites and covers mental health support services; preventive wellness programming (including workshops and focused

sessions); social and cultural activities; mentorship; physical wellness access; monitoring and evaluation; and emergency response and post-crisis follow-up.

4. Definitions

Resident: a postgraduate trainee enrolled in an AHSU residency program at any approved training site.

Training site: any hospital or clinical facility hosting AHSU residents.

Recognized wellness activities: AHSU-approved programs supporting mental, social, self or others, are severely distressed, or are unable to function safely, requiring urgent assistance.

5. Governance and responsibilities

Student welfare and wellness is a shared responsibility across AHSU offices and training sites. Roles below are minimum expectations and may be expanded by AHSU as needed.

5.1 Student Welfare Directorate

The Student Welfare Directorate owns this policy and leads coordination of the wellness program. It maintains service directories and access guidance, supports communications, oversees monitoring and evaluation, and receives reports and incident summaries where applicable.

5.2 Directorate of Postgraduate Medical Education (PGME)

PGME ensures wellness activities align with residency schedules and training requirements, supports mentorship implementation, and coordinates with training sites to maintain a safe learning environment.

5.3 Training site leadership

Training site and departmental leadership facilitate local implementation, ensure activities do not disrupt patient care, and support referrals and emergency pathways according to site procedures.

5.4 Wellness focal persons and student wellness champions

AHSU appoints focal persons to coordinate program delivery and follow-up across sites.

Student wellness champions may support mobilization, feedback collection, and inclusive participation, under AHSU oversight.

6. Program components

6.1 Mental health support services

AHSU shall maintain and communicate clear access pathways to student mental health and wellness services.

Each academic year, AHSU will make available a structured wellness course delivered **in person and online** to ensure participation for students across training sites.



The program will go beyond reminders by including scheduled workshops and focused sessions on stress management, resilience, burnout prevention, and safe peer support.

AHSU will also pursue partnerships with selected clinics and mental health providers, with the aim of enabling students to access therapy and counselling services through the health insurance arrangements available at AHSU, where applicable.

In addition, all students will continue to have access to mental health services at King Faisal Hospital through established referral and access procedures.

At the start of each academic year, the Student Welfare Directorate shall publish a Student Mental Health Access Guide that describes the approved services and how to use them. This guide shall include contact points, appointment and referral processes, expected response times, confidentiality commitments and limits, and specific options for residents based outside Kigali, including international students.

6.2 Physical wellness and facilities

For physical wellness, AHSU shall facilitate gym access through partnerships with the Ministry of Health. Each academic year, students will be provided with an official list from the Ministry of Health of partner gyms available for resident access, including any applicable procedures for entry.

In addition, all AHSU students shall have free access to the King Faisal Hospital gym upon presentation of a valid AHSU student identification card.

For residents training in Kibuye, Kibungo, and other remote sites, AHSU will work with the Ministry of Health to secure access to an appropriate gym facility located near the relevant training area and will communicate the confirmed arrangements to residents.

International residents must be included in these access arrangements where applicable, or alternative options must be identified.

6.3 Social, cultural and spiritual wellness activities

6.3.1 Purpose

The purpose of social, cultural and spiritual support is to promote student well-being, respect diversity, and ensure that students can access appropriate support for their cultural, religious, and spiritual needs without discrimination or exclusion.

Student social, cultural and spiritual support shall be guided by the following principles:

1. **Respect for diversity:** All students shall be treated with dignity, regardless of their culture, religion, belief, nationality, language, or background.
2. **Non-discrimination:** No student shall be disadvantaged, excluded, harassed, or treated unfairly because of their cultural or spiritual identity.



3. **Inclusion and belonging:** Student organizations shall promote activities that bring students together, encourage mutual respect, and strengthen unity within the University community.
4. **Freedom of expression and belief:** Students may express their cultural or spiritual beliefs respectfully, as long as this does not violate University policies, disrupt academic activities, or infringe on the rights of others.
5. **Confidentiality and sensitivity:** Any student seeking spiritual or cultural support shall be treated with respect, privacy, and sensitivity.

University Support

AHSU shall support students' cultural and spiritual well-being through the following measures:

- Providing a respectful environment where students can discuss cultural, religious, or spiritual concerns when needed.
- Supporting reasonable cultural and religious accommodations where possible, including consideration for major religious observances, prayer needs, fasting periods, and culturally sensitive practices.
- Encouraging access to safe and appropriate spaces for reflection, prayer, or quiet time, where available.
- Promoting cultural exchange activities, such as cultural days, student-led discussions, and events that celebrate diversity and inclusion.
- Encouraging student organizations to include cultural and spiritual sensitivity in their planning of events, meetings, and student activities.
- Facilitating referral to appropriate internal or external support persons, mentors, counsellors, chaplains, faith leaders, or community representatives when a student requests such support.
- Implementing an annual calendar that promotes belonging and reduces isolation. This includes at least one annual cultural celebration and structured social activities that are accessible to students across sites.

Where physical attendance is not feasible for remote sites, AHSU should provide parallel local activities or hybrid participation options.

The annual AHSU Culture Day shall be organized to celebrate diversity, promote inclusion, and strengthen community among residents and other participating students. The event shall be designed to create a respectful space where residents from different backgrounds can share elements of their culture and engage in positive dialogue that strengthens understanding and cohesion.

The Culture Day may include, but is not limited to, the following activities:

- Traditional dances and music from different countries
- Cultural storytelling
- Flag exhibitions accompanied by short country descriptions
- Food and drinks representing diverse cultures



- Learning or dialogue sessions such as short talks, cultural introductions, or basic language introductions.

AHSU shall organize a Sports Day at least once per semester to promote physical activity, teamwork, stress relief, and positive resident engagement. Sports Day is intended to support healthy routines and improve peer relationships in a way that is compatible with clinical schedules.

All activities must remain inclusive, respectful, and aligned with AHSU conduct standards.

6.3.2 Timing

Culture Day shall be held **once each academic year on a Friday during the first week of December**, which reflects the period when residents are typically settled into their training schedule.

Sports Day shall be conducted twice per academic year as follows:

- **Semester 1:** First week of **September (maybe during induction period)**
- **Semester 2:** First week of **May**

6.3.3 Leadership and implementation

All events shall be primarily organized by students, with coordination led through the appropriate resident structures (Students' Union organization).

The AHSU Welfare Office shall provide minimal support focused on facilitation, approvals, and coordination needs, rather than direct management of the event.

6.3.4 Approvals and compliance

All events shall be conducted only with the prior approval of the relevant Head of Department (HOD) or training site leadership to ensure that there is no interruption to hospital activities, clinical duties, or patient care.

The organizing team must submit a basic activity plan (date, time, venue, participating group, and risk considerations) for approval in advance according to site expectations.

All activities involve training sites, use of AHSU branding, external guests, or public communications, the organizing team must obtain the required approvals and comply with AHSU rules.

All events must comply with AHSU standards for safety, respectful conduct, and inclusion. Where multiple sites exist, arrangements should be made to include residents at non-Kigali sites through site-level participation or equivalent local activities, subject to local feasibility and approvals.



6.3.5 Role of Student Organizations

Student organizations have a responsibility to promote respect, inclusion, and unity among students. They shall:

- Avoid activities, language, or practices that discriminate against any cultural, religious, or spiritual group.
- Plan student activities in a way that is inclusive and respectful of students' different backgrounds.
- Encourage dialogue and peaceful interaction among students from different cultures and beliefs.
- Report any concern related to discrimination, harassment, exclusion, or disrespect to the appropriate University office.
- Work with the University administration when organizing cultural, religious, or spiritual activities on campus.

6.3.6 Cultural and Spiritual Accommodations

Students who require reasonable cultural or spiritual accommodation may submit a request to the relevant University office, such as the Student Affairs or Welfare office. Each request shall be reviewed fairly and respectfully, taking into account the student's needs, academic requirements, institutional capacity, and the rights of other members of the University community.

Possible accommodations may include, where reasonable and practical:

- Time or space for prayer or reflection.
- Consideration of major religious or cultural observances.
- Support during periods of fasting or mourning.
- Referral to spiritual, counselling, or mentorship support.
- Consideration of dietary needs during official student events where food is provided

PS: Cultural and spiritual support shall not be used to justify discrimination, harassment, violence, coercion, exclusion, or any action that violates University policies, national laws, or the rights and safety of others. All cultural and spiritual activities must be conducted peacefully and respectfully.

6.3.7 Reporting and Follow-up

Any student who feels excluded, disrespected, harassed, or discriminated against because of culture, religion, spirituality, nationality, or belief may report the concern to the Student's welfare University office. The University shall review such concerns in a fair, confidential, and timely manner and take appropriate action in line with existing policies.



6.4 Mentorship program

AHSU shall maintain a formal mentorship program designed to support students' academic progression, professional conduct, research interests, and career planning. Each student must be assigned a mentor, and mentorship must be implemented consistently across departments and sites.

6.4.1 Mentor training

Mentors shall receive annual preparation at the start of the academic year (September to October). Training must cover mentor roles and boundaries, confidentiality expectations, early identification of concerns, culturally responsive support, referral pathways, and appropriate documentation practices.

Mentors are not expected to provide clinical mental health care unless qualified; they are expected to support and refer.

6.4.2 Matching and rematching process

AHSU shall implement a transparent matching process.

Departments confirm mentor capacity and maximum mentee load.

Students complete a short profile (training site, career interests, preferred meeting format and frequency).

Mentor assignments are made based on capacity and alignment. The mentor and student must meet within six weeks of the academic year to agree on expectations and a check-in schedule.

Students may request a rematch through a confidential process coordinated by the Student Welfare Directorate. Rematching must be handled respectfully, without penalties.

6.4.3. Timing

Trimester 1: 1 September to 31 December

Orientation and access guidance are communicated early.

Mentor training and matching are completed by the end of October.

Key wellness activities are scheduled and delivered with site approvals.

Trimester 2: 1 January to 30 April

Workshops and focused sessions continue.

Mid-year feedback is collected and used for improvement.

Mentorship check-ins occur at least once during the trimester.

Trimester 3: 1 May to 31 August

Late-year mentorship activities continue and the annual evaluation is completed.

Planning for the next academic year is finalized before September.



7. Mental health emergency response policy

AHSU maintains a structured mental health emergency response system to protect student safety, ensure rapid connection to professional support, standardize documentation, and provide post-crisis follow-up. This applies across all training sites and must be implemented in a manner that ensures equitable access for students in Kigali, students in remote sites, and international students.

This policy is not a clinical treatment guideline. It establishes institutional actions, roles, and minimum operational standards to ensure urgent concerns are handled consistently, safely, and with appropriate confidentiality.

7.1. Definitions

A **mental health emergency** is any situation where a student's safety, ability to function safely in clinical duties, or risk of harm to self or others is an immediate concern and urgent professional support is required.

A **first responder** is any person who first identifies the urgent concern (peer, supervisor, faculty, site leader, or staff).

A **site focal person** is the designated training-site leadership for mental health emergency response.

Professional support refers to the training site's clinical pathway (e.g., emergency unit, mental health services, occupational health) and/or emergency services as defined by site procedures.

7.2 What situations qualify as a mental health emergency

The following situations are recognized as mental health emergencies under this policy. Any one of these is sufficient to activate the protocol.

7.2.1 Immediate safety risk

A situation is an emergency when there is credible concern that the student may not remain safe without urgent intervention. This includes circumstances where the student communicates intent to harm himself or others, cannot confirm they will remain safe, is dangerously agitated, or where the environment presents immediate risk.

7.2.2 Severe distress with loss of functioning

A situation is an emergency when the student's distress is so severe that safe clinical functioning is compromised. Examples include inability to continue duties safely, inability to communicate coherently for safe work, or inability to follow safety instructions.

7.2.3 Confusion, disorientation, or markedly unusual behavior affecting safety

A situation is an emergency when the student appears significantly disoriented or confused, cannot make safe decisions, or demonstrates unusual behavior that compromises safe



functioning and cannot be stabilized through basic supportive measures. Sudden-onset confusion must be treated as a safety and clinical issue and routed through the site's clinical pathway.

7.2.4 Suspected impairment related to substances (intoxication or withdrawal)

A situation is an emergency when there are signs of impairment that could affect patient care, student safety, or workplace safety. The response must follow training site occupational health and clinical procedures, while also activating AHSU documentation and follow-up requirements under this policy.

7.2.5 Acute trauma reaction following an incident

A situation is an emergency when the student experiences an acute reaction after a traumatic event (e.g., serious adverse event, violence exposure) and is unable to function safely or requires urgent professional support.

7.2.6 Unreachable/missing student with credible safety concern

A situation is an emergency when a student is unexpectedly absent or unreachable and there is a credible reason to believe they may be unsafe, especially when preceded by concerning communication, unusual behavior, or reported distress.

7.2.7 Violence, harassment, or threats causing acute distress or immediate safety concern

A situation is an emergency when a student reports assault, severe harassment, threats, or a safeguarding concern and is acutely distressed, unsafe, or at risk of retaliation. The response must prioritize immediate safety and use AHSU safeguarding pathways and training site leadership as required.

7.2 Activation

Any student, peer, supervisor, faculty member, training site leader, or designated AHSU staff member may activate the protocol when urgent concern is present.

7.2.1 Immediate response steps

The first responder should not manage the situation alone.

They should promptly engage the site's designated focal person and follow local emergency procedures to connect the resident with professional support. If there is immediate risk, local emergency services or appropriate clinical services must be contacted according to site procedures.

AHSU shall maintain an Emergency contact notification procedure that guides when and how emergency contacts may be notified, including how to document decisions and how to respond if an emergency contact minimizes the seriousness of the situation. Notification decisions must respect confidentiality while prioritizing safety, consistent with applicable law and institutional requirements.

7.2.3 Documentation

AHSU requires incident documentation that records key actions, handovers, and follow-up arrangements. Documentation must be stored securely and handled on a need-to-know basis.

7.2.4 Post-crisis follow-up and reintegration

Following an emergency, AHSU coordinates follow-up support for the student and, where appropriate, for affected peers or supervisors. A return-to-training plan may be developed when needed, including adjustments, check-ins, and escalation thresholds.

8. Monitoring, evaluation, and reporting

AHSU monitors participation and outcomes through simple metrics such as participation rates in activities, mentorship engagement frequency, student feedback and pulse checks, and trends in self-reported stress and burnout indicators. The program is reviewed annually and improved based on evidence and resident input.

9. Funding and accountability

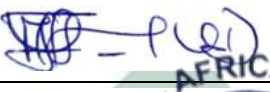
AHSU allocates resources for student wellness activities through the Student Welfare Directorate. Spending must be linked to approved activities and supported by receipts and documentation. Where partnerships provide services, AHSU maintains confirmation of scope and eligibility across sites, including international residents.

10. Appendices

- **Appendix A:** [AHSU Students Mentorship and Career Guidance policy](#)
- **Appendix B:** [AHSU Student's Organization policy](#)
- **Appendix C:** [AHSU Mentor Training Outline](#)
- **Appendix C:** [AHSU Trimester Reporting template](#)
- **Appendix D:** [AHSU Student mentor matching form](#)



11. Approval and signatures

Names	Role	Signature	Date
Dr Belise Uwurukundo	Registrar		15 December 2024
Jean Luc Ishimwe	Human Resources & Administrative Manager		16 December 2024
Dr. Edgar Kalimba	Dean of the School of Medicine		20 December 2024
Dr. Zerihun Abebe	Vice Chancellor		21 December 2024

