



Health Sciences Centre
FOUNDATION

Movement for Mental Health Yoga Program

Department of Psychiatry
Health Sciences Centre



A Case for Support 2026

The journey to mental health has many paths, and they all include asking for help when you need it.

We need your help today.



Movement for Mental Health Yoga Program

HSC Department of Psychiatry Overview

The Health Sciences Centre's Department of Psychiatry is a critical lifeline for those suffering from acute mental illness. As Manitoba's largest mental health program, this is where our amazing HSC staff shine as they help people navigate a variety of truly debilitating mental health issues such as mood disorders, eating disorders, psychosis, substance use, and related conditions. This 105-bed in-patient facility exists to address some of the most difficult mental health issues Manitobans face, all made possible through an incredible team of health care professionals.

Finding Calm in the Midst of Crisis

HSC Department of Psychiatry treats mental health issues through a comprehensive approach designed to achieve the very best outcomes for our patients, despite what can often be incredibly difficult circumstances. Although often overlooked, one of the vital ingredients to achieving mental health is physical health. The undeniable connection between body and mind is well documented, which is what led to the creation of the *Movement for Mental Health Yoga Program* at HSC.

Engaging in yoga practice has been shown to improve both mental and physical health, particularly among individuals living with trauma and mental illness. Yoga has been associated with improvements in quality of life, motivation for sobriety, and social connectedness, and a recent randomized clinical trial demonstrated that yoga significantly accelerated opioid withdrawal recovery and improved autonomic regulation, anxiety, sleep, and pain symptoms among psychiatric inpatients.

The *Movement for Mental Health Yoga Program* emphasizes gentle and supported exercises as well as breathing and relaxation techniques. The program is trauma-informed, inclusive, and adaptable to a wide range of diagnoses and functional abilities. It offers patients opportunities to develop critical self-regulation skills during admission and beyond.

Supporting Youth on Their Healing Journey

Youth ages 10 to 18 can access specialized yoga therapy led by Ash Bourgeois, a trained yoga therapist with dedicated specialty training and extensive hours of practice. This expertise allows her to tailor the program to the unique needs of young people receiving care at HSC. With one to six youth participating on any given day, the program provides a welcoming, supportive space where young people can build skills to support their well-being. Participation is particularly strong among youth in the eating disorder program, highlighting the value of this therapeutic approach for young people navigating complex health challenges.

Meeting More Patients Where They Are

In addition to the strong patient-reported outcomes observed at HSC, there is growing interest in the *Movement for Mental Health Yoga Program* from staff practicing in rural settings. Residents at Brandon Hospital within the Prairie Mountain Health Region have expressed interest in adopting and evaluating this model, recognizing the limited availability of non-pharmacological, group-based mental health supports in rural hospitals. Expansion through recorded and live virtual delivery would support equitable access to evidence-based mental health care across Manitoba, aligning with provincial priorities related to innovation, access, and sustainability.

We Need Your Help

Since 2018, the *Movement for Mental Health Yoga Program* has been offered for patients admitted to HSC's Department of Psychiatry through generous funding from donors to the Health Sciences Centre Foundation. **Unfortunately, funding for this vital program has now been exhausted. We are launching an urgent appeal to raise \$510,000 to ensure this essential support continues for patients while also expanding the program to provide even greater benefits for those receiving mental health care.**

With additional funding, the program will...

1. Continue offering on-unit classes for patients with limited access to unaccompanied passes, including forensic and psychiatric intensive care units, as well as group sessions for those who can attend off-unit.
2. Expand inpatient and outpatient offerings tailored to specific needs, such as trauma or anger regulation.
3. Develop recorded yoga sessions for patients who cannot attend in person or require additional support.
4. Introduce live virtual classes outside standard business hours to reduce barriers related to work, transportation, anxiety, or geography.

The continuation and expansion of the *Movement for Mental Health Yoga Program* **depends** on financial support. Your donation will help fund the program for an additional three years, while expanding its offerings and developing online content to enhance access across inpatient, outpatient, and rural settings.

Expanding the *Movement for Mental Health Yoga Program* represents an important step toward equitable access to evidence-based, holistic mental health care at HSC. This expansion aligns with provincial priorities related to access, innovation, and sustainability, and would allow the benefits of this successful program to reach communities where options for movement and mindfulness-based mental health care are currently scarce.

But most importantly, it's a program that helps people who suffer from mental health disorders achieve the lives they were meant to live. That's why we're asking for your support today.

Program evaluations collected from 1,912 inpatient and outpatient participants between 2019 and 2024 demonstrate strong patient-level impact.

66% reported a significant improvement in mood

74% rated their post-class mood as a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale

88% reported they were very or extremely likely to attend again

Qualitative feedback consistently described feeling calmer, more relaxed, and more connected, with participants valuing the program's inclusive environment.



Real Patient Impact

Vanessa Russel

“Yoga encourages me to be calm & strong.”

Vanessa, a participant in the *Movement for Mental Health Yoga Program*, was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia in 1999. She has been an inpatient over the years at HSC and comes to the hospital once or twice a month for follow-up appointments with her psychiatric team. She is currently enjoying her longest stretch out of the hospital since first being diagnosed.

Vanessa credits this program, in part, for that stability. “You can’t just treat a mind,” she says. “And yoga is about mind, spirit, and body.”

About the Health Sciences Centre Foundation:

The Health Sciences Centre Foundation rallies individual, corporate, and institutional donors in support of HSC Winnipeg—Manitoba’s hospital. By inspiring Manitobans to donate, the HSC Foundation enhances patient care and accelerates innovation at HSC through the acquisition of state-of-the-art technology, the development of new clinical spaces, and the promotion of groundbreaking research. Through specific, timely, and essential investments, the HSC Foundation helps to deliver tomorrow’s health care, today.

Please donate today:

Online: hscfoundation.mb.ca

Telephone: 204-515-5612

Toll-Free: 1-800-679-8493

E-mail: info@hscfoundation.mb.ca

Charitable Registration #11895 5012 RR0001