

## Co-Designing a Virtual Menopause Peer Support Program to Enhance Health Literacy and Psychosocial Well-Being

Menopause care is often hard to navigate, with limited access to evidence-based information and a lack of consistent social support. This project, *Co-Designing a Virtual Menopause Peer Support Program to Enhance Health Literacy and Psychosocial Well-Being*, aims to help fill that gap by creating a virtual peer support program shaped by the people who will use it.

The goal is to build a supportive, accessible space where people can learn more about menopause, feel confident managing it, and connect with others who understand what they are going through. Using a co-design approach, this study brings together lived experience, community input, health care professional expertise, and research to create a program that reflects real needs and experiences.

The study will evaluate the feasibility and impact of this model on four key metrics: menopause-related knowledge, confidence (self-efficacy), sense of connection, and overall quality of life. As part of my master's research at Saint Mary's University, this research aims to make menopause support more accessible, practical, and people-centered.

### Three-Phase Framework

#### Phase 1: Program Development (Advisory Group)

In this first stage, an Advisory Group made up of subject-matter experts and people with lived experience will help co-design the program, including the curriculum and materials. Their role is to shape how the program is structured and how it feels—grounded in peer support principles, inclusive and trauma-informed practices, and clear menopause health literacy. This group will also help ensure the curriculum includes clear guidance on boundaries and self-care for both participants and facilitators.

#### Phase 2: Peer Facilitator Training

The second phase focuses on leadership development. Around 6–10 people with lived experience of menopause will take part in a 5-week virtual training program. During this training, they'll build core facilitation skills such as managing group dynamics, responding to participant distress, and maintaining professional boundaries so they feel confident leading safe, supportive virtual sessions.

#### Phase 3: Peer Support Program Pilot

The final phase is a 12-week pilot with about 20–30 participants, divided into virtual groups of 8–10. These groups will be led by the trained peer facilitators and focus on building connections, sharing experiences, and increasing knowledge about menopause. The evaluation will look at four key areas: perceived menopause-related knowledge, confidence (self-efficacy), social connection, and the psychosocial domain of the MENQOL (Menopause-Specific Quality of Life) scale.

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### Engaging Lived Experience and Expertise

Role	Eligibility Criteria	Core Contribution
<b>Participant</b>	Aged 45–55; located in Canada; currently experiencing perimenopause, menopause, or postmenopause.	Join a 12-week virtual peer support program, participate in weekly sessions, and share your experiences. Your input will also help us understand how the program affects psychosocial well-being and connection.
<b>Peer Facilitator</b>	Aged 45–55; located in Canada; lived experience of menopause; interest in leadership and co-leading virtual sessions.	Complete a 5-week virtual training program and then co-facilitate small peer groups. You'll help create a respectful, inclusive space, guide conversations, and support others while practicing clear boundaries and self-care.
<b>Advisory Group Member</b>	Subject matter experts in peer support, menopause care, women's health, mental health, or inclusive practice; people with lived experience of menopause.	Contribute to curriculum design and program structure, help shape the tone and values of the program, and make sure the content is relevant, accessible, and grounded in both evidence and lived experience.

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### Logistics

This project takes place fully online to make it more accessible and include people from different locations. The virtual format helps us reach a wider community and keeps everyone engaged through organized online group discussions.

### Time Commitments by Role:

**Advisory Group:** Participation in a few virtual co-design sessions during the Phase 1 development period.

**Peer Facilitators:** A commitment of 18–20 hours total, including 6 hours of training plus 1 hour per week for the 12-week pilot and brief session feedback.

**Participants:** Attendance at one-hour weekly virtual sessions for 12 weeks, with an additional 10–15 minutes for pre-program, post-program, and session-level questionnaires.

### Oversight and Contact Information

Academic and ethical oversight ensures that this research meets the highest standards of safety and integrity.

- **Student Researcher:** Alyssa Blais, Master's Student, Applied Health Services Research ([alyssa.blais@smu.ca](mailto:alyssa.blais@smu.ca) | 613-362-5852)
- **Faculty Supervisor:** Dr. Michele Byers, Faculty of Arts, Women and Gender Studies ([michele.byers@smu.ca](mailto:michele.byers@smu.ca) | 902-440-3535)
- **Ethics Approval:** REB #26-112 (Saint Mary's University)
- **Funding:** Supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)

### Join Me in Reshaping Menopause Support

If you're interested in contributing to this project as a participant, peer facilitator, or advisory group member, please contact me at [alyssa.blais@smu.ca](mailto:alyssa.blais@smu.ca) to receive the study screening form and learn more about how to get involved.