

Mental Health Resources

- *What is your campus doing to promote students' health and well-being?*
- *Do your services and activities adequately meet students' mental health needs?*
- *If more students seek counseling, can you and your community partners accommodate the increased need?*
- *Can your campus and community mental health providers accommodate an increased need?*
- *How can your campus mental health services partner with community services?*

Introduction

When you provide suicide prevention and awareness programs on campus, more students will seek mental health support and services. Meeting this demand for services may require doing things differently. Here are three important ways campuses can successfully address this demand:

1. Modify services to offer a range of options besides traditional one-on-one counseling sessions
2. Intervene early by providing a variety of resources and activities that help prevent students from experiencing a crisis
3. Partner with additional providers, both on and off campus, who can address students' needs

Discover the lessons learned from staff on different campuses.

Person #1 - I'm glad I took the time to assess our mental health services. I thought our campus didn't offer much since we don't have a counseling center, but I discovered that we have other departments on campus that offer stress management and yoga, which can improve students' well-being.

Person #2 - We wanted to make it easier for students to find behavioral health clinicians in the community, so we revamped our referral process and put all providers in an online database. We found that not only did this save staff time, but students appreciated having this information easily accessible.

Person #3 - Having a long wait list at the counseling center was frustrating for students who needed help. We decided to adopt a clinical triage model that allowed us to prioritize students who needed help immediately, which helped us better manage clinical flow and reduce waiting list times.

Steps: Mental Health Resources

The following steps will build your campus capacity to help students in crisis, provide a range of services, and refer to off-campus providers when necessary.

Each of the steps below can assist you with providing adequate mental health resources to your students.

Step 1: Assess mental health services on and off campus

Step 2: Address needs by modifying systems, services, and activities

Step 3: Build and strengthen your referral network

Step 1: Assess mental health services on and off campus

Typically campuses experience a surge in the number of students seeking mental health services after they start doing communications campaigns, gatekeeper trainings, and other suicide prevention activities. Before you begin any programs, it is critical to assess your campus' capacity to meet the expected increased need for mental health support. What is the extent of the services available through your counseling center (if you have one) and outside referral networks? And what other campus activities are offered to help students overcome challenges and thrive while they are at college?

Following are common questions about this step.

- **What should we include in an inventory of our campus mental health services?**
- **What else should I assess besides counseling services?**
- **What information about our referral network is helpful to collect?**

What should we include in an inventory of our campus mental health services?

Campuses can more effectively meet students' varying mental health needs and prevent suicide when they offer different types of counseling options.

A comprehensive assessment of mental health services should take into account campus counseling services as well as emergency after-hours services and student health insurance coverage. If your campus does not provide counseling services or offer student health insurance, you should still look at how you offer and/or promote emergency support.

Learn more about what to assess on your campus:

Campus Mental Health Services

- Where can students get some type of counseling or mental health services on your campus?
- What types of services are offered by your campus mental health/counseling center? How many health and mental health providers work at your institution?
- Describe the features of your counseling services (e.g., What is the wait time for a visit? Do you have a psychiatrist on staff?).

Emergency Services

- Do you offer any type of emergency mental health services after hours and on weekends at your institution?
- Is there a counselor on call for after-hours emergencies?
- Are campus and/or local police trained in how to respond to a student who is suicidal?

Health Insurance

- Does student health insurance cover on-campus mental health services? What about off-campus mental health services?
- What types of mental health services are covered under your institution's health insurance?
- How many counseling sessions are covered per year under your institution's health insurance?

What else should I assess besides counseling services?

Offering information and activities that help students build life skills may improve their well-being and prevent depression and anxiety. Researchers have identified four critical areas in which students need life skills in order to thrive: (1) relationships/interpersonal communication, (2) physical fitness/health, (3) problem-solving/decision-making, and (4) identity development. Campuses that provide information, activities, and services in each of these areas can help students grow and improve their ability to overcome challenges they may face at college.

Here are examples of information and activities to assess:

Relationships and Interpersonal Communication

- Does Residence Life offer workshops on how to deal with roommate conflicts?
- Does the Counseling Center provide support groups on dating and relationships?
- Does the Health and Wellness Center provide information and services about sexual assault?

Physical Fitness and Health

- Does the Athletics Department offer yoga or Tai Chi classes?
- Does the Health and Wellness Center offer advice on getting enough sleep?

- Does the graduate program in the Nutrition Department offer resources about healthy eating on a budget?

Problem-Solving and Decision-Making

- Does the Academic Advising Department offer time-management workshops?
- Does Career Services offer individual career counseling?

Identity Development

- Does the International Center have workshops about adjusting to life in the United States for international students?
- Does the LGBTQ Center offer a coming-out support group?

What information about our referral network is helpful to collect?

When conducting an assessment of your referral network, consider other providers in the community beyond traditional mental health counselors. It is also important to assess the information you have about each provider, which will help you determine if the provider is a good fit for your students.

Here are some examples of different providers in a referral network:

- Local mental health providers
- Inpatient treatment
- Crisis services/centers
- Local hospitals
- Local support groups
- Community suicide prevention coalition

Learn more about the kind of information to collect from specific providers:

Local Mental Health Providers

- What are their current fees and hours of operation?
- Do they currently accept student insurance and supplemental insurance?
- If student insurance is not accepted, are sliding-scale fees offered to students?

Local Hospitals

- What types of services do they offer for students?
- What languages do their staff speak?
- Have they been trained on how to assess or treat patients at risk for suicide?

Step 2: Address needs by modifying systems, services, and activities

People's needs vary, and not every student will want one-on-one counseling from the campus counseling center. In addition, some campuses cannot provide counseling services, and those that do provide services may have limited hours or staff, so they aren't able to offer long-term counseling to students.

Therefore, many campuses need to modify their current services, activities, and systems in order to:

- Provide support for students in distress, and refer to outside providers, if needed.
- Offer a range of services, activities, and materials to help meet the individual needs of students.

Following are some common questions about this step.

- **In what ways can we modify our counseling services?**
- **What should we do to address gaps in services?**
- **How can we incorporate wellness activities when our staff are already so busy?**

In what ways can we modify our counseling services?

Modifying your campus counseling services can involve setting up new systems and alternative counseling options. While setting up new systems can take more time initially, it should ultimately help focus your resources more efficiently. Many counseling alternatives do not require more funding to operate than traditional one-on-one counseling and can often serve more students.

Following are some suggestions of ways to modify campus counseling services:

- **Clinical triage** – Clinical triage involves an initial brief in-person or phone screening for every client to determine suicide risk and severity. A small number of crisis appointments are made available each day for students who need to be seen immediately. The triage system can help manage the clinical flow better and reduce waiting lists.

This option would help acutely distressed students.

- **Group counseling** – Group counseling typically involves six to ten students meeting regularly with a therapist over the course of a semester, sharing their thoughts and struggles in an open and respectful environment.

This option would help students who struggle with a specific issue, such as students questioning their sexual/gender identity.

- **Just-in-time/Informal counseling** – This counseling method is for brief 20-minute drop-in sessions when students can consult informally with a counselor. It can be offered at different locations on campus, outside of the counseling center. Programs such as "Let's Talk" are examples of this method.

This option would help students with specific questions who are not interested or certain about ongoing therapy, but would like to briefly talk with a counselor.

- **Peer counseling** – Peer counselors can provide support to students through in-person and crisis phone-line counseling.

This type of counseling would help students with concerns about handling school workload, relationship issues, and self-esteem. It would also help students who feel more comfortable talking to a peer who shares and understands their life experiences.

- **Ministry counseling** – Many faith leaders receive mental health training and can provide support to students. If your campus doesn't provide faith services, options may be available in your community.

This option would help students who are involved in faith communities, who would not traditionally seek out counseling, or who would prefer their therapy to be faith-based.

- **Biofeedback** – Biofeedback can train a person to better understand his or her body's signs of stress and the methods to alleviate this stress before it can affect emotions.

This option would help students with stress and anxiety concerns but not serious mental health problems.

- **Alcoholics/Narcotics Anonymous (AA/NA)** – You could bring AA or NA to your campus and/or advertise where these services are located in the community.

This option would help students who struggle with substance use issues.

- **Telemental health** – Telemental health involves using different communication methods (e.g., phone or videoconferencing) to deliver mental health services, usually for patients who are in different geographic locations than the therapist.

This option would help students in rural locations where there are not enough mental health providers or students who lack transportation and cannot travel to counseling services.

What should we do to address gaps in services?

Students' mental health needs vary on each campus. They may require resources beyond traditional 9-to-5 counseling hours, such as support in the evening, during the summer, or while studying abroad. There are a variety of ways to address gaps in services, and each campus will need to determine the best way to meet their students' needs.

Here are several examples of how campuses addressed a need or gap in services:

After Hours

Students shared that sometimes they get upset or stressed in the evening or on weekends, and they wished they had someone to talk to when the Counseling Center is closed.

Modification: The Counseling Center decided to train students to staff a peer support crisis line, which was open every day from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. They also started heavily promoting the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline around campus and on social media.

Summer

Students reported they were frustrated that there were no counseling services offered on campus during the summer. A large number of students stay on campus during the summer to take classes, and they wished they could access counseling services.

Modification: The director of the Counseling Center was able to hire staff to work there during the summer and offer modified hours during this time.

Study Abroad

Students studying abroad did not know what to do when they experienced mental health problems.

Modification: The Study Abroad office reached out to their partner universities in other countries for information about what counseling services are available for students in these locations. Then they created fact sheets for students studying abroad that explained available counseling options. They included these fact sheets in students' pre-departure information packets, as well as information about mental health care and reminders about psychiatric medication access overseas.

How can we incorporate wellness activities when our staff are already so busy?

Campus counseling center staff are often very busy working with students in crisis and don't have the additional time to offer wellness activities. Working with other on- and off-campus partners is essential since they may be able to provide activities that promote well-being.

The wellness activities you offer will depend on your students' needs and your available partners. Here are some examples from different campuses:

Example 1 – According to results from a national survey we participated in last year, our students are feeling more stressed than students on other campuses.

Partner: Religion Professor

To address this need, we wanted to offer a meditation class. The counseling center staff weren't available to do this, but they knew of a professor in the religion department who led meditation classes in the community. He agreed to teach a meditation class to students.

Example 2 – Our LGBTQ students tell us that coming out on campus and to family members can be a challenging experience for them.

Partner: LGBTQ Office

The Counseling Center partnered with the LGBTQ Center to co-host an LGBTQ support group for students.

Example 3 – A lot of students are coming to our counseling center because of relationship issues.

Partner: Campus Ministries

We know that many of our students belong to specific religious groups. We formed a partnership with our Campus Ministries to offer a series of faith-based relationship/communication workshops to help meet this need.

Example 4 – Students who didn't drink alcohol felt isolated and complained there was nothing to do on campus.

Partner: Student Group

Our Health and Wellness Center sponsored a new student organization to host alternatives to alcohol-based activities on campus. The center helped promote the club and also gave them funding to offer activities such as ice skating, movie nights, and ballroom-dancing lessons.

Conclusion – Once you identify the specific challenges your students face, then you can determine the wellness activities that would be most helpful and who could partner with you on each activity. Every campus is different, so what you offer and who you partner with will be different from other campuses.

Step 3: Build and strengthen your referral network

It is important to have a large referral network for a variety of reasons. Here are several examples:

- Some students may not want to go to the campus counseling center.
- The counseling center may not be an appropriate fit for a student's needs.
- A student may need long-term counseling that your counseling center cannot provide.

A referral network can help address students' needs and enable you to focus more time on the services your campus can provide.

Following are some common questions about this step.

- **How can I save time expanding and utilizing my referral network?**
- **What if off-campus providers also have long wait lists or limited availability?**
- **How should we go about evaluating how our referral network is working?**

How can I save time expanding and utilizing my referral network?

Building and strengthening your referral network takes time since you want to find the right people and organizations that can provide the kind of support students need, while also addressing any barriers students may encounter (e.g., insurance, physical location, etc.).

Strengthening your network also involves ongoing contact and communication with these providers so that they understand how you can complement their work. This involves learning their systems and being responsive to their questions and needs.

See how one campus saved time by creating an online referral database:

Example – This urban campus had a robust referral network and students were frequently referred to off-campus providers, but many students were unsatisfied.

Learn how the campus addressed this problem by utilizing their referral network more efficiently and effectively.

Problem – Many of the students who were referred to an off-campus provider complained that the providers they were referred to didn't take student insurance, didn't specialize in the mental health issue they needed help with, were not near public transportation, or were not the right cultural fit. Because of these challenges, many students ended up not continuing with the referred provider. The counseling center staff wanted to fix this issue, but they didn't have time to regularly communicate with and update such a large referral network.

Solution – The campus obtained funds to develop an online provider database so that students could search for and select their own providers. It was customized to allow the providers to update their own information such as office address, hours, services provided and specialties, languages spoken, rates, and accepted insurance. The database also allowed for bulk e-mailing so that once providers' information was put into the system, they received regular reminders to update their profiles.

Outcome – Although creating the database took quite a while, it saved time for counseling center staff in the long run. Many students preferred to find their own provider online, particularly since they could search for someone who specialized in a specific area or took their insurance. It also made the students happier, since it was now easier for them to schedule an appointment with the right provider for their needs. In addition, the staff no longer had to follow up with providers to obtain updated information from them.

What if off-campus providers also have long waitlists or limited availability?

It's common that there may not be enough mental health providers to meet the needs of everyone in the community, including students from your campus. It's also common for campuses to run into challenges finding providers who are willing to take student health insurance or offer services on a sliding scale so that it is affordable for students. When this is the case, there are a few things you can try to improve the situation.

Learn more about different options:

- **Check in periodically**
Meet with the providers currently in your referral network to learn more about their availability and willingness to explore different payment options.
- **Identify other mental health providers**
Seek out other local mental health providers. Also look beyond your community. For example, one campus with limited community resources developed a partnership with a regional mobile crisis team in their state who visited the campus when a crisis occurred.
- **Offer telemental health**
Telemental health may be a possibility, particularly if there are few local resources. One university with remote satellite campuses developed a telemental health program with clinicians who were willing to provide counseling using live videoconferencing.
- **Consider other resources**
Think creatively about other organizations and resources beyond traditional counseling that may be available within your community.

Examples: veterans' affairs office, domestic violence center, local chapter of National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), community suicide prevention coalition, inpatient treatment, local support groups, churches, and ethnic and cultural groups in the community

How should we go about evaluating how our referral network is working?

The only way to make sure your referrals, as well as your services and wellness activities are used—and are useful—is to evaluate them. Evaluation is critical for ensuring that what you provide is effective. The results of the evaluation will likely point to what is working and what else is needed.

Here are some ways to obtain useful evaluative information on your referrals:

- **Ask your students**
Ask students who accessed referral networks about their satisfaction with the providers. For example, send out a brief survey to every student who requested a list of off-campus providers. The survey would ask questions such as the following:
 - Did the student encounter any barriers accessing services from an outside provider?
 - How would student rate services received?

Examples:

 - Student 1: I liked being able to talk to a therapist who specialized in the issue I was struggling with.
 - Student 2: It was great to be able to talk to someone off campus when our counseling center was full.
- **Query your provider network**
Gather data directly from your referral network in a way that maintains student confidentiality.

Examples:

- How many students went to see them? Six students received substance abuse treatment at a local clinic.
- For how long, on average, did these students receive services? Ten student veterans received counseling at the local veterans' center.
- What follow-up support or additional referrals did the students receive? 35 students saw individual mental health providers in the community.

- **Use existing surveys**

Sometimes you may be able to include questions on existing campus-wide surveys about utilization and satisfaction with counseling center services or about whether the students had seen an outside mental health provider in the community. Use this information to improve services for students.

Examples:

- 35% of students saw a community mental health provider
- 81% of these students would recommend their provider to a friend
- 86% of these students were satisfied with services received