

# Task Force to Study the Policies and Procedures Adopted by Each Institution of Higher Education Regarding the Prevention and Treatment of Mental Illness

## **Draft of Recommendations**

### Introduction

The Task Force members were pleased to have been convened by the State of Connecticut. We valued our engaged and thoughtful discussions. Your priority to convene the Task Force meant a lot to all of us. It conveys how important this issue is not only to us but to our students, parents, faculty, staff, alumni, and trustees. Your leadership in this area will help our institutions consider important initiatives to support the mental well-being of our students and our communities as a whole.

### Research

In order to understand the extent of the mental health crisis at institutions of higher learning, it is helpful to review specific information on college student mental health. At one of our meetings, Dr. Nance Roy presented information on this very topic. Dr. Roy is an assistant clinical professor at the Yale Medical School of Medicine Department of Psychiatry and the chief clinical officer for the JED foundation. She introduced us to the Healthy Minds Survey. This survey provides a detailed sense of mental health and related issues in college aged students. (Healthy Minds survey, 2018-2019). One group of researchers reviewed the results of the survey for a 10-year period. (Lipson, SK et al. (2018) “Increased Rates of Mental Health Service Utilization by U.S. College Students: 10-Year Population-Level Trends (2007-2017).” *Psychiatry Services* November 5) 156,000 college student responses were analyzed. The researchers reported the following:

1. Rates of depression increased from 24.8% in 2009 to 29.9% in 2017.
2. Rates of suicidal ideation went up from 5.8% in 2007 to 10.8% in 2017.
3. Rates of past-year treatment increased from 18.7% in 2007 to 33.8% in 2017.
4. Students with a diagnosed mental health condition increased from 21.9% in 2007 to 35.5% in 2017.
5. Among students with depression, rates of past-year treatment went from 42.5% in 2009 to 53.3% in 2017.

Research from the combined survey of the American College Health Association (ACHA) and the National Collegiate Health Assessment (NCHA) shows students reported an increase in experiences with anxiety from about 10% in 2009 to close to 23% in 2019. Data from the same survey informs us that students reported increases in depression from 10% in 2009 to 18% in 2019.

Dr. Roy reported to the Task Force that college is often an intense and challenging time for many students and that it is important that we “foster a community of support” for our students. Dr. Roy advocates a “comprehensive public health approach that promotes

well-being, with the goal of reducing suicide and substance abuse on their campuses.” (Roy, Higher Education Today, December 2018). Dr. Roy also emphasized to our Task Force that it is very important that students find connections to peers on campus. She informed us that “loneliness and isolation are significant risk factors for mental health problems and suicidal behaviors.” (Roy, higher Education Today, December 2018)

### Mental Health Services at Higher Education Institutions in Connecticut.

Through our work we completed a survey of the college/university counseling centers in Connecticut. We have included an addendum that outlines what we learned through the survey.

### Recommendations to create “Communities of Support”

The Task Force strongly believes in the notion that it takes an entire community of college and university personnel and faculty to support student success, mental health and well-being. We are advocating for a comprehensive State campaign to support the development and implementation of “Communities of Support” on each campus in our State. We also understand that there are both long term and short term issues to be addressed. Therefore, we are making the following recommendations.

1. Short-term recommendations to advance “Communities of Support.”
  - a. Statement of values. We recommend that the well-being of college students and their mental health become a stated shared value for the State of Connecticut. This will help set a course of direction for all institutions of higher learning to provide the structure and systems to support student well-being and mental health. We recommend working with other committees and agencies who are also having this conversation. We recommend a holistic, public health approach and encourage partnership with youth programs as well as medical professionals in a shared mission statement.
  - b. \*Campus Assessment. We recommend that the state of Connecticut invest in an assessment tool to help colleges/universities determine the success/weakness in their institutional and comprehensive approach to student mental health and well-being. This can be done through the Office of Higher Education in conjunction with experts in the field of assessment. In the Short term we recommend developing the assessment tool and putting in place timelines for completion.

We then recommend that the State of Connecticut sponsors workshops to teach and train multi-constituent teams from each college/university on how to conduct such an assessment. This will allow the State to have a standard in this area. So each college/university has the same training and assessment tool.

- c. Campus Case managers or licensed counselor. We recommend that every campus has at least one person dedicated to the management of counseling outreach or as a counselor on campus. This can be either a case manager or licensed practitioner. This person can be sure students know resources and know how to access the support systems both on campus and in the local community.  
We also recommend a grant writer on all of our CSU campuses and community colleges. This will help secure more resources and funding for such positions.
- d. Memorandum of Understanding. We recommend that each institution of higher learning put in place an MOU with at least one local mental health support services in order to have various options in place for students to seek support and to identify long term care options when needed for specialized mental health services.
- e. Supporting all students and recognizing students in need. Each institution must implement awareness workshops to help employees and students recognize students in need and to know how to respond by being compassionate and when needed to make referrals to mental health professionals.
- f. Pamphlets/Websites/Awareness workshops. We recommend that each institution ensures all students know how to access services to support their mental health and well-being. All crisis management procedures should be publicized and accessible through this avenue. Workshops for faculty, staff, and students should take place each semester in order to inform them how to support students, identify students of concern, and to make referrals. This should be implemented by August 1, 2020.
- g. Telehealth. We recommend that each institution informs students to how to access telehealth services as part of services offered to the community. This should be in place by July 1, 2020.
- h. We recommend adding to the curriculum on campuses. We recommend instituting a working group comprised of faculty and mental health providers to determine what type of on going classroom education should be provided on each campus.
- i. We recommend each campus designating a space for mental health counseling and “social connectedness” This space should be separate from career centers and focus on mental and behavioral health rather than academic counseling.

2. Long-term recommendations to advance “Communities of Support.”

- a. Campus Assessment. Every institution of higher learning in the State of Connecticut must complete a campus assessment every three years.  
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The first must be completed by July 1, 2021. The focus is based on the development of a comprehensive campus assessment of student mental health support and student well-being. It is highly important that a campus multi-consistent team is put in place to accomplish this recommendation.

- b. Life Skills Education. Each institution must implement a course/program or set of courses/programs to teach life skills to students. It is important to teach how to cope with stress, manage relationships, and to make healthy lifestyle choices. This will come from the working group mentioned above.
- c. We recommend working with OHE/BOR to identify if there are specific or targeted services that could be contracted for by a few schools.  
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\*Our Task Force would like to remain in place and focus our energies on identifying goals, objectives, and strategies to implement this recommendation.