

Supporting Student Mental Health at Arizona's Public Universities

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College is an exciting time of new experiences, opportunities and independence – but for most students, the transition is not without its challenges. Mental health is a growing concern nationwide with students today utilizing campus behavioral health services more than any generation before them.

According to the [Center for Collegiate Mental Health](#), data from 93 higher education institutions showed a 30 percent increase of students seeking help at counseling centers from 2009 through 2015. Research from the American College Health Association shows an equally alarming mental health trend: The percentage of students who reported receiving treatment for anxiety has increased at a concerning rate from 9.2 percent in 2010 to 22.1 percent in 2018 – a 140 percent uptick just in the last eight years.

During that same time period, we've seen a 118 percent increase in students seeking treatment for depression, which today impacts more than 18 percent of all college students. Meanwhile, in the last year, 40 percent of college students reported feeling so depressed that it was difficult to function – with 10 percent seriously considering suicide.

The Arizona Legislature has also recognized this growing problem among students in Arizona. State Sen. Sean Bowie sponsored and Gov. Doug Ducey signed into law [Senate Bill 1468](#), which mandates suicide prevention training for schools who work with students from sixth grade through high school. Our universities are dedicated to educate students on suicide awareness and prevention in teacher training programs to prepare future educators as they enter the classroom and engage with students.

Students identify a number of issues that may prompt them to seek mental health services. Nationally, students report academics, finances, sleep difficulties, career-related issues, intimate relationships and appearance as issues difficult to handle over the previous 12 months.

Fortunately, there are some bright spots in the nationwide effort to address this crisis: I am talking about Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University and the University of Arizona. Arizona's public universities are not only committed to academic success, but the

institutions are committed to the health and well-being of students. Mental health is just as important as your physical health, and our institutions are giving time and resources to ensure students are mentally healthy during their college experience.

Arizona's public universities are doing innovative work to support student mental health and well-being on campus. For example: In 2018, [ASU was nationally recognized with a Healthy Campus Award](#) for its Active Minds program – a student organization focused on reducing stigma about mental health, preventing suicide and providing myriad on-campus resources for students in need.

For the past four years, [UA has ranked in the top four for best health services](#) among 384 colleges and universities by Princeton Review, while a 2017 Gallup poll found that UA alumni are “healthier, happier and more successful than their peers nationally.”

And NAU's comprehensive, creative and effective approach to prevention, early intervention and treatment ensures students are getting the help they need when they need it. NAU is even using online, interactive technology [that assists students in recognizing depression and anxiety in their peers](#), and engages them in simulated realistic conversations to determine whether and how to refer them to appropriate campus counseling centers. To date, nearly 9,000 participants at NAU have completed the training, which has been shown to increase interventions for at-risk students.

These accomplishments represent just a snapshot of the great work Arizona's public universities are doing to address mental health. This must continue to be a priority, both because of its connection to student well-being and the clear connection between mental health and academic success. Studies have shown that students who report psychological distress earn lower GPAs and are less likely to complete their education. In fact, mental illness is the second most common reason students drop out of school.

A healthy student population today means a better-prepared workforce and a healthier and more prosperous community. The Arizona Board of Regents will continue to work with our universities to expand and improve mental health services; promote innovative efforts that address the root causes of this growing concern, foster a culture of well-being and support our attainment goals; and ensure the health, safety and long-term success of every Arizona university student.

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