FACT SHEET — Mental Health Issues

Mental health issues are on the rise\(^1\), and impact thousands of students in Missouri. At the same time, resources allocated to mental health services on college campuses has not kept pace\(^2\), leading to exorbitant wait times, fewer sessions, and curtailed prevention and outreach programming. According to the Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors annual survey\(^3\) of Missouri students, in 2017:

- Thirty-nine percent of students have had suicidal thoughts in their lifetime; 18 percent in the last year. 62 percent of those students did not seek help. Among those who did, one-third thought it was very helpful, and over half thought it helped somewhat.

- Thirty-six percent of students had concerns about someone having suicidal thoughts.

- One in four students reported experiencing major depression in the past year, compared with 13 percent in 2011.

- 17 percent of students reported experiencing chronic sleep issues in the past year, a figure which has remained relatively stable over time.

- Nearly half of students reported experiencing anxiety in the past year, compared with 35 percent in 2011.

- The percentage of students reporting panic attacks has doubled since 2011, from 11 percent to 22 percent.

There are multiple reasons for the increase in prevalence of mental health issues on the campuses of colleges and universities:

- More people attend university today than 40 years\(^4\), and breakthroughs like the Americans with Disabilities Act, earlier identification of mental health issues and reduced stigma has made it possible for those with mental health issues to earn a degree.

- Pressure to attend college has increased. Sixty-five percent of jobs available by 2020 will require at least some college\(^5\).

- With college an increasing necessity, it has also become more expensive. Average debt in Missouri is $30,000\(^6\), with 53 percent of students taking out loans in their name. More than half of students cited finances as a primary source of stress\(^3\).

Solving this problem will require institutions and governments to make this issue a top priority when outlining their annual budgets. While outsourcing mental health services to the community may appear a win-win for institutions with dwindling budgets, it is a false and ineffective solution.

- Seventy-two percent of students utilizing counseling services reported that it had a positive influence on their academic career\(^7\), and students increasingly feel that they can go to these centers for help, rising from 19% in 2011 to 42% in 2017\(^3\).
Appointments with mental health professionals off-campus often requires insurance coverage, something students are more likely to lack than other groups. Further, insurance companies often look for a diagnosis, which is not always appropriate or expedient in behavioral health.

Because they serve the entirety of the community, off-campus mental health professionals are often no better suited to get students in for an initial visit than the resources offered on campus.

Evidence suggests that off-campus referrals are often not effective. Forty-two percent of students referred off-campus do not end up receiving help. Among minority students, the figure is 57 percent. When struggling with anxiety or depression, making that first appointment is hard enough, and simply being redirected elsewhere can be too much to bear.

Mental health is a social welfare and public safety issue, but it is also a smart investment that will benefit university budgets, state budgets, and taxpayers.

Increased wait times for an initial visit with a counselor makes it less likely that students will ever get help. This increases the likelihood that they will drop out of college, meaning lost tuition dollars for universities. Estimated increases in student retention would easily cover the costs of hiring additional mental health professionals.

Helping a student across the finish line has huge benefits for taxpayers. An increase in educational attainment from some college to college graduate could save taxpayers as much as $109,000 per student that would otherwise go toward government assistance and the criminal justice system.

By addressing mental health issues on the front end, fewer companies will have to wrestle with worker absenteeism and low productivity, both the product of unresolved mental health issues. The total economic burden of depression is $210.5 billion a year.

---

2 Stat News: “A dangerous wait: Colleges can’t meet soaring student needs for mental health care.” Link: https://www.statnews.com/2017/02/06/mental-health-college-students/
3 Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (MACH-B) 2017 Survey
4 U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), October, 1970 through 2015. (This table was prepared July 2016.)
5 Georgetown University Public Policy Institute: Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020
6 LendEDU Student Loan Debt By State By School Report 2016.
7 Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors, 2016 Report
8 Missouri Higher Education Compact February 2016 Policy Brief
9 International Association of Counseling Services (IACS). Link: http://www.iacsinc.org/staff-to-student-ratios.html
10 Eisenberg, Golberstein, and Hunt 2009. “Mental Health and Academic Success in College.”
11 National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI), 2012 Students Speak Survey
13 Carroll and Erkut 2009. “The Benefits to Taxpayers from Increases in Students’ Educational Attainment.”
14 American Psychological Association: http://workplacementalhealth.org/Mental-Health-Topics/Depression/Quantifying-the-Cost-of-Depression