

Subject: IMA Higher Education: Mental Health in the Workplace

Optimize your mental health offerings to help employees and students thrive

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MENTAL HEALTH IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Mental health has been a growing topic of conversation in the workplace, especially in 2020. COVID-19 has challenged everyone in immense ways, and organizations are keenly aware they need to heighten their mental health resources to keep their company and employees thriving.

Higher education has the unique challenge of supporting both employees and students – whose needs, interests and stages of life are vastly different. In September 2020, the American Council on Education (ACE) surveyed college and university presidents in order to capture how they are responding to the challenges presented by COVID-19, as well as to better understand both the immediate and long-term effects of the pandemic on higher education. The most pressing issues for presidents were:

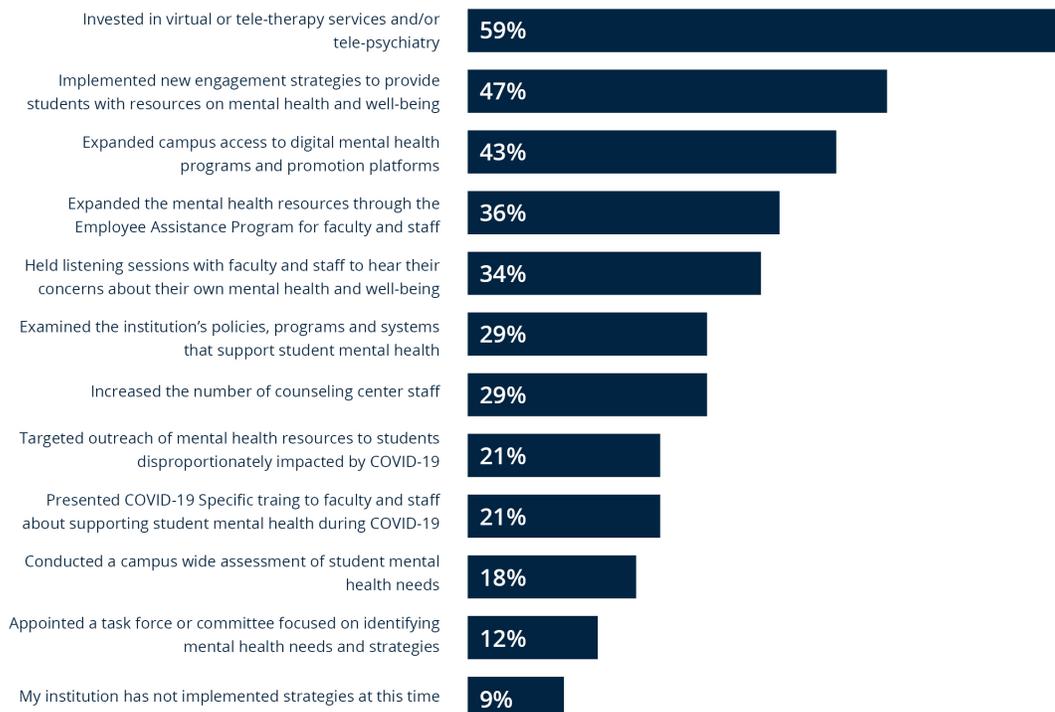
- Students' mental health
- Faculty and staff mental health
- Enrollment numbers for the spring
- Long-term financial viability

Leadership is observing the negative effects COVID-19 has on employees' mental health, and the fact that it surpasses financial concerns as the most pressing issue demonstrates the significant demand for employers to enhance mental health support and resources.

The financial challenge caused by this pandemic have caused both public and private institutions to implement hiring freezes, freezing employee compensation/salary increases, and employee layoffs and furloughs. On top of these worries people are navigating family, home and school struggles, so it's no wonder employees' mental wellbeing is being tested.

ACE's survey asked college and university presidents which strategies they're implementing to support mental health as a result of COVID-19, as demonstrated below:

Strategies Implemented To Support Mental Health, As A Result Of The Covid-19 Pandemic



Pulse Point Survey of College and University Presidents on COVID-19: November 2020, American Council on Education, 2020.

Many organizations struggle with finding a place to start when understanding how they can make a positive impact on employees' mental wellbeing. Below are some ways to get things going.



ESTABLISH YOUR GOALS

Start by answering these questions:

What do we want out of a mental health program within our organization?

How do we want employees to feel, knowing they have access to mental health support sponsored by our organization?

How will we ensure employees know we are supporting their mental wellbeing?

How will we define success with our mental health initiatives?
How can we measure that success?



TAKE INVENTORY

What resources, programs and solutions do you currently offer?

List everything you have in place today (EAP, behavioral health virtual visits in your plan, mindfulness/meditation tools, etc.)

Once you see your current offerings, determine any gaps you could fill in by asking the following questions:

- How can our suite of benefits be enhanced to meet employees' needs?
- Can these solutions benefit the majority of our employees or only a certain population?
- Do these solutions provide 24/7, easy-to-access care?
- Can any of these solutions be implemented or enhanced this year?
- Are there any budgetary considerations that need to be factored in?



COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE

Two things that may benefit you:

Develop a one-pager that lists all your mental health benefits. Include short blurbs about how the tools support employees and how employees can access these tools. Put it on your intranet, in new hire paperwork, in your benefits guide, posted in common areas – anywhere people look to for help, so they don't need to go to HR asking for it.

Create a year-long mental health communications campaign. You may already have a communications campaign set in place, so maybe it's as simple as adding a mental health component to that existing plan. But if not, develop a 12-month campaign that aligns with national health observances and covers various topics of communication. The sample below may provide a starting point.



BUILD A SUPPORTIVE CULTURE

Culture is the shared values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors that characterize members of an organization and define its nature. It's implied, not really defined, and develops organically over time from the cumulative traits of the people you hire.

Ways to build a supportive culture:

- Remove any stigma around mental health
- Address job-related stress, employee burnout and workplace fatigue
- Build a zero-tolerance policy for bullying and discrimination
- Provide training for managers (Mental Health First Aid is a good place to start)
- Ensure employees know where and how to access any mental health resources and support you provide

The ultimate goal is to mitigate all barriers so employees understand their options and get the care they need when they need it. This is truly a big undertaking, but if you can set a goal to build a suite of solutions that employees can easily access that help them navigate life's challenges, you'll create a supportive environment that allows employees to show up to work every day energized, happy and thriving, which in turn, will only help your bottom line.

If you have any questions, please contact:

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