

A Message from BHAC Board President Promoting Mental Health Across the U.S. by Banding Together

Academic administrators and faculty are increasingly concerned with the well-being of college students. Eight out of 10 university presidents specify that student mental health has now become a major priority on their campus (Chessman & Taylor, 2019). Stressors from the COVID-19 pandemic have heightened an already existing mental health epidemic in young adults. In the decade prior to COVID-19, suicidal ideation in students had increased from 5.8% to 10.8%, and lifetime mental health diagnoses had increased from 22% to 36% (Lipson, Lattie, & Eisenberg, 2019). As of 2020, a quarter of college-aged adults have considered suicide (Czeisler et al., 2020), while 40% report a lifetime mental health diagnosis (Health Minds Network, 2021). Between August 2020 and February 2021, young adults (18-29 years of age) had the largest increase in anxiety and depressive disorders when compared to other age groups (Vahratian, Blumberg, Terlizzi, & Schiller, 2021).

Addressing student mental health via leadership support and resource prioritization is a paramount matter because student mental health is strongly associated with retention, academic success, and future career realization (Bruffaerts et al., 2018; Lipson, Abelson, Ceglarek, Phillips, & Eisenberg, 2019). Even with more students seeking mental health service support than ever reported, most students with mental health struggles will not receive evidence-based mental health treatment. Students report that perceived stigma, inability to recognize symptoms, lack of knowledge about mental health services, and a preference for handling the problem on their own or with family and friends keeps them from accessing care (Cadigan, Lee, & Larimer, 2019; Ebert et al., 2019).

To help address mental health treatment barriers in college students, the National Consortium for Building Healthy Academic Communities (BHAC), in collaboration with The Ohio State University, is launching the *Banding Together Across America for Mental Health and Wellbeing* initiative in Fall of 2022. The initiative will focus on building a fellowship of both students and faculty who are prepared to provide support and resources to students who may be struggling. Learning modules are currently being produced to educate students about mental health problems, how best to help prevent and deal with them, and steps to provide peer-to-peer support. Micro-learning modules to enhance evidence-based skills that build mental health resilience also will be included. Those who complete the modules will become mental health advocates on their campuses. Faculty will learn about common mental health problems in students, strategies to integrate well-being into their curricula, and available resources to share with students. BHAC will empower students and faculty to *Band Together* to reduce mental health stigma, prevent and get help early for mental health problems, reach out to their peers, and enhance cultures of wellness on campus. Stay tuned for specific information on how to participate and please join us in this very important national action initiative.

Best wishes and stay well!

Fond regards,
Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk, PhD, APRN-CNP, FAAN
President and Founder, the National Consortium for BHAC
Vice President for Health Promotion
University Chief Wellness Officer
Dean and Helene Fuld Health Trust Professor of Evidence-based Practice, College of Nursing
Professor of Pediatrics and Psychiatry, College of Medicine
Executive Director the Helene Fuld Health Trust National Institute for Evidence-based Practice
The Ohio State University



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