

## A Message from BHAC Board President

### Supporting Well-Being for Health Sciences Students: The National Wellness Action Alliance Workgroup Faculty Toolkit

The current state of college student mental health is still one of crisis. COVID-19 pandemic-era restrictions and associated fears exacerbated the already existing problem. Yet, even with such restrictions and concerns waning, increased rates of anxiety and depression in student populations remain. In the most recent Healthy Minds Study (2022), 44% of students screened positive for depression and 37% screened positive for anxiety. Untreated mental health conditions can result in suicide, which is now the third leading cause of death in those between the ages of 15-24 years (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). Mental health conditions can also keep students from enrolling in higher education or lead them to discontinue their studies. The GALLUP and Lumina Foundation State of Higher Education study (2023) found that 63% adults decided not to enroll in higher education due to emotional stress, while 59% of bachelor's degree students considered stopping their course work due to personal mental health reasons. The same study found that bachelor's students who felt support by faculty, mentors, and peers were less likely to frequently experience emotional stress.

With increased rates of mental health conditions occurring across campuses nationwide, faculty are beginning to play a larger role supporting students' well-being. Roughly 87% of faculty believe that student mental health has worsened since COVID-19, and over the past 12 months, almost 80% have had one-on-one conversations with students regarding their mental health (Boston University School of Public Health et al., 2021). When compared to social science, public policy, education/humanities, arts, and cross-disciplinary program faculty, business, law, science, and math faculty reached out to students about their mental health less frequently (Boston University School of Public Health et al., 2021). Health sciences faculty need tools to integrate into their academic programming and implement cultures of wellness that prioritize student health and well-being to ultimately improve student population health outcomes. The National Wellness Action Alliance (NWAA), established in 2021, has created the evidence-based Faculty Toolkit of Teaching Strategies to Support Well-Being for Health Sciences Students. This resource, also applicable to all students, can be accessed for free at:

<https://healthyacademics.org/news/2023-04-04/faculty-wellness-toolkit-strategies-support-students>

The toolkit teaches faculty how to (1) identify the impact of well-being initiatives on student learning and academic outcomes; (2) analyze the characteristics of organizational and professional culture that facilitate or limit student well-being and success; (3) identify programmatic and curricular strategies that can be employed to support student wellness and build resilience; and (4) identify teaching strategies that can be implemented into learning environments (e.g. synchronous classroom, asynchronous classroom, lab, and clinical settings) to improve student well-being and subsequent success.

It is my hope that you will access and use the toolkit to improve your students' health and well-being outcomes. We must continue to shift our current paradigm from one of crisis/sick care to wellness and prevention.

Best wishes and stay well!

Fond regards,

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