



Surveying the Mental Health of Utah's Public College and University Students

Across the country, the mental health of college students has become a prominent concern in the higher education landscape.¹ This issue is also a significant one for Utah, as the state's suicide rate has been consistently higher than the national rate for more than a decade.² In 2017, the legislature passed HCR 16, *Concurrent Resolution Declaring Mental Health Issues to be a Public Health Crisis at Utah Higher Education Institutions*.³

Systemwide mental health survey

To better understand the landscape of mental health issues at Utah's public colleges and universities, the USHE Board of Regents recommended that all USHE institutions administer the same mental health survey during the same year, to ensure comparable results. In spring 2019, USHE institutions administered the American College Health Association–National College Health Assessment⁴ survey (ACHA NCHA). The system office collected and analyzed the survey results for the mental health section.

The systemwide survey delivered compelling data about the mental health of USHE students.⁵ Five thousand two hundred and two students from across USHE institutions responded to the survey. Of those, in the last 12 months:

- 57.8% “felt things were hopeless”
- 89.7% “felt overwhelmed by all they had to do”
- 86.3% felt “exhausted (not from physical activity)”
- 66.1% “felt very lonely”
- 71.1% “felt very sad”
- 45.6% “felt so depressed it was difficult to function”
- 63% “felt overwhelming anxiety”
- 42.7% “felt overwhelming anger”
- 9.3% “intentionally cut, burned, bruised or otherwise injured themselves”
- 14.9% “seriously considered suicide”
- 1.9% “attempted suicide”

As far as seeking treatment, 14.2% said they have received psychological or mental services from their current institution's Counseling or Health Services, and 79.7% indicated they would consider seeking

¹ <https://www.higheredtoday.org/2018/12/17/rise-mental-health-college-campuses-protecting-emotional-health-nations-college-students/>

² <https://health.utah.gov/vipp/topics/suicide/>

³ <https://le.utah.gov/~2017/bills/static/HCR016.html>

⁴ https://www.acha.org/NCHA/NCHA_Home

⁵ https://ushe.edu/wp-content/uploads/pdf/agendas/20190912/TAB_E_2019-9-13.pdf

professional mental health treatment if they were having a personal problem that was “really bothering them” in the future.

Respondent data

Institution	Number of Respondents
University of Utah	680
Utah State University	1157
Weber State University	524
Southern Utah University	687
Snow College	534
Dixie State University	824
Utah Valley University	587
Salt Lake Community College	209
Total Respondents	5202

Background: USHE Board of Regents action on campus mental health issues from 2016 to present

Regents’ Mental Health Working Group

In December 2016, the Regents’ Mental Health Working Group was convened to recommend action to address student mental health needs at USHE institutions and to develop practices and strategies to advance as a system. In addition to Regents, stakeholders and mental health experts throughout the state were also included on the task force.

In September 2017, the Board of Regents approved the following four recommendations⁶ of the Mental Health Working Group:

1. Assess the mental health and wellness needs of USHE students
2. Improve mental health education at USHE institutions
3. Increase access to mental health services
4. Develop institutional five-year mental health implementation plans

In implementing the Regents’ Mental Health Recommendations, it became clear that some of the strategies needed additional clarification and detail. Revisions to the recommendations were adopted by the Board in January 2019.⁷

SafeUT App

In 2018, at the direction of the Board, all USHE institutions launched the SafeUT app on their campuses. This app is a statewide service that provides real-time crisis intervention through live chat and a confidential tip program.

Next steps: Regents’ Mental Health Advisory Committee

In March 2019, the Board formed the Regents’ Mental Health Advisory Committee.⁸ The committee includes Regents, institutional counseling center directors, and other stakeholders. The goals of the committee are to:

1. Assist in creating the institution five-year mental health implementation plans as required by the Regents’ Mental Health Recommendations.

⁶ <https://ushe.edu/wp-content/uploads/pdf/agendas/20170914/Tab%20R%202017-9-15.pdf>

⁷ https://ushe.edu/wp-content/uploads/pdf/agendas/20190125/TABB_2019-01-25.pdf

⁸ <https://ushe.edu/wp-content/uploads/pdf/agendas/20190329/TAB-C-2019-03-29.pdf>

2. Meet yearly to review the system-wide mental health survey data from ACHA NCHA and Healthy Minds Study⁹ and review the progress of the plans.

Institutional five-year mental health implementation plans will be presented before the Board of Regents on November 15, 2019. Improvement will be tracked and reported to the Board every year using the annual mental health surveys across institutions.