



## PREVENTION UPDATE

### Integrating Mental Health Promotion and Substance Abuse Prevention on College Campuses

#### Overview

According to the [American Psychiatric Association](#), college can be an exciting time, though for some it can be overwhelming and stressful. Depression, anxiety, substance use, and eating disorders are common mental health issues on college campuses. The [2010 American College Health Association National College Health Assessment](#) found that 28 percent of college students reported that at some point in the last 12 months they had felt so depressed it was hard to function. And 46 percent reported that, in the same period, they had experienced overwhelming anxiety. In addition, 8 percent of students also reported being diagnosed or treated for depression and almost 6 percent seriously considered suicide.

A study published December 2008 in the [Archives of General Psychiatry](#) found that alcohol disorders affected roughly one in five college students. The next-most-common class of disorders was personality disorders, affecting about 17.7 percent of college students. The American Psychiatric Association points out that major depression increases the likelihood of substance abuse, impairs functioning at school, and influences an individual's subsequent development in negative ways. Depression can also co-occur with other disorders, including physical illnesses and other mental disorders, such as anxiety and eating disorders. It is important to have mental health services available on college campuses for students who need help.

#### What the Evidence Tells Us

A [2004 study](#) from the Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study on patterns of depression and alcohol abuse among young adults in college found that a substantial fraction of college youth are experiencing poor mental health—at any given time approximately 5 percent—and that these students are at high risk for alcohol abuse, with depressed young women at highest risk. Among the study's key findings are that, across the 119 four-year colleges surveyed, the average prevalence of poor mental health or depression was 5.01 percent as self-reported by the students. The survey posed a set of questions in an accepted mental health scale that provides a valid indication but not medical diagnosis of depression. This estimate is consistent with the 5.8 percent prevalence reported among community dwelling adolescents and young adults in the [National Comorbidity Survey](#), an ongoing study supported in part by the National Institute of Mental Health and based at Harvard Medical School. Students with poor mental health/depression who drink reported high levels of harm from alcohol: 29 percent reported falling behind in their school work, 14 percent reported having unsafe sex, 12 percent reported vandalizing property, and 23 percent reported having five or more harms from drinking. These levels are all higher than among their peers who did not have poor mental health.

According to a 2010 [study](#) presented at the 118th annual convention of the American Psychological Association, severe mental illness is more common among college students than it was a decade ago, with more young people arriving on campus with preexisting conditions and a willingness to seek help for emotional distress. A [recent analysis of the Behavioral Health Measure](#) questionnaires from 13,300 students who were treated at campus counseling centers found that those students were, indeed, having significant psychological problems. Just over two-thirds were clinically depressed at some level. Seventeen percent had drug and alcohol problems. About 20 percent were suicidal.



## Lessons Learned From Colleges and Universities

Alcohol and other drug services and mental health and counseling services at colleges and universities are often housed in health services departments. For example, at the [University of Massachusetts Amherst](#) both the Center for Counseling and Psychological Health and the Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Prevention are a part of University Health Services. At the [University of California Santa Cruz](#), students contact Counseling and Psychological Services for a “wide range of reasons, including stress, depression, anxiety, eating and body image concerns, grief and loss, substance abuse, issues related to oppression, discrimination or harassment, personal identity issues, recovery from trauma, relationship concerns, family or academic problems, transitions or simply adjusting to the complex demands of university life. We are here to assist with any personal concerns that affect your well-being and your education. Family, friends, faculty or staff members who are concerned about a student are welcome to call CPS for consultation.”

Cornell University’s Council on Mental Health and Welfare has adopted a [Mental Health Framework](#), which reflects a comprehensive and integrated public health approach that has informed and continues to reflect the best practices represented by the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)-funded [Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#) and [Jed Foundation](#) Model for Comprehensive Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Promotion. That model is drawn primarily from the overall strategic direction of the [U.S. Air Force Suicide Prevention Program](#), a population-based strategy to reduce risk factors and enhance protective factors for suicide. In addition to mental health and counseling services, the framework includes alcohol and other drug education, such as BASICS ([Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students](#)), as well as a [President's Council on Alcohol and Other Drugs \(AOD\)](#).

The George Washington University Medical Center has chartered a new [Center for Integrated Behavioral Health Policy](#), which is dedicated to changing the way that people with mental health and substance use disorders get the help they need. The mission of the Center for Integrated Behavioral Health Policy is to find policy solutions that integrate behavioral health care into overall health care so that people with mental illnesses and substance use disorders get the help they need.

## Higher Education Center and Other Related Resources

### *Publications*

- [After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools](#)
- [Catalyst \(Summer 2010\) Vol. 11 No. 3: Mental Health, Violence Prevention, and Alcohol and Other Drug Issues](#)
- [Depression, Anxiety, and Alcohol or Other Drug Use among College Students](#)
- [Prevention File: Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs \(December 2006\) Special Issue on Treatment and College Students](#)
- [Safeguarding Your Students Against Suicide](#)

### *Web Sites*

- [Suicide Prevention Resource Center: Colleges and Universities](#)
- [SAMHSA’s Prevention of Substance Abuse and Mental Illness](#)

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