



University of Colorado **Denver**

# Student Health, Well-being, and Advocacy

## Working Group Report

# BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

CU Denver's Student Health, Well-being, and Advocacy (SHWA) unit, which is part of the Student Affairs division, fosters collaboration among key areas supporting students in need of mental health assistance. Under this umbrella, which encompasses the Dean of Students, Case Management, Student and Community Counseling Center, Disability Resources and Services, Student Conduct and Community Standards, and Phoenix Center at Auraria, our goal is to bolster our support services and strengthen a safety net of support to our students facing barriers related to mental and physical health, life circumstances, and academics.

As a diverse urban institution serving a large percentage of first-generation students, SHWA values the opportunity to be a part of the transformational experience of higher education. We also know from recent data that the top three issues that have the greatest negative impact on CU Denver students' academic success are related to mental health (stress, anxiety, and depression). The areas that comprise Student Health, Well-being and Advocacy are areas that are crucial to retaining students as CU Denver supports them in their mental health needs, which we know are increasing in frequency and acuity each year. Student Affairs also helps retain students by helping them build resilience as they develop in maturity and emotional intelligence.

Several areas within SHWA are federal compliance areas, including Student Conduct and Community Standards and Disability Resources and Services. In those departments, CU Denver is legally obligated to provide specific services to students. In the areas of Case Management, Care Team, the Phoenix Center at Auraria and the Counseling Center, CU Denver is met with a moral and ethical obligation of working within an ethic of care to support students of concern. CU Denver wants our students to persist to graduation which often requires mental health support. SHWA works daily to assist in the guidance of a student in crisis while paying special attention to the safety and security needs of community members. This can include addressing suicidal ideation, incidents of self-harm, violence toward others and other concerning behavior. Each of the SHWA areas works toward mitigating the liability and risk to the university that can come from a tragic consequence of a student crisis.

## Where We Are Now

CU Denver prioritizes student mental health and wellness because it is crucial for:

- 1) Academic success
- 2) Student retention
- 3) Holistic development
- 4) Emotional and physical harm prevention
- 5) Social and community impact
- 6) Legal and ethical compliance

In addition, offering mental health and wellness support to CU Denver employees also directly aligns with our 2030 Strategic Goal 5 to be a best place to work.

## CU Denver Challenges and Opportunities

It is a high priority for CU Denver to optimize the service delivery and support of students who seek out and are referred for counseling, case management, academic accommodations, and mental health-related conduct violations.

### Academic success

Mental health issues can significantly impact a student's ability to perform well academically. By providing support and resources for mental health, universities can help students overcome these challenges and promote their overall academic success. The American College Health Assessment administered to CU Denver students in 2021 tells us that:

- 35% of students said stress was a factor that negatively impacted their academic performance.
- 28% endorsed anxiety as having a negative impact on their academic performance.
- Depression was identified by 23% of students as a factor that had a negative impact on their academic performance.

The link between CU Denver staff members who support our students' mental health and the academic success of our students needs to be acknowledged more often. This will help with staff morale and socialize how crucial the relationship is in helping our students persist to graduation.

### Student retention and graduation rates

“During the spring 2023 semester, 76% of U.S. college students reported experiencing enjoyment during much of the prior day. However, majorities also said they felt stress (66%) and worry (51%). In addition, 39% said they endured loneliness and 36% sadness the previous day.”

A [2023 Gallup survey](#) suggests that students who are struggling with mental health issues may be more likely to drop out of their college or university or take longer to complete their degree. By prioritizing student mental health, universities can improve retention rates and increase the likelihood of students successfully graduating.

### Holistic development

Universities have a responsibility to foster the holistic development of their students. By supporting mental health and wellness, universities can contribute to the overall well-being and personal growth of their students, helping them to thrive not just academically but also emotionally and socially. This also applies to the holistic development of our own CU Denver staff in these areas who, to do their work effectively, would benefit from the institution incentivizing those who do this important work with industry-competitive salaries and more flexible work schedules.

### Prevention and early intervention

By promoting mental health and wellness, universities can create a proactive environment that focuses on prevention and early intervention. This can help identify and address mental health concerns before they escalate, reducing the likelihood of more severe issues later in life. This

sort of proactive work takes energy, which SHWA would like to promote within its staff. Student Affairs wants to support staff overall well-being so that staff members can maintain motivation and energy levels to continue to be proactive with CU Denver students.

### **Social and community impact**

Student mental health issues can have a ripple effect on campus communities. By prioritizing mental health and wellness, CU Denver can create a supportive environment that fosters positive relationships, reduces stigma, and promotes a culture of well-being. This, in turn, can have a positive impact on the overall campus and local communities and its members. The same is true for staff mental health and wellness: our community thrives when there is a culture of well-being for everyone.

### **Legal and ethical obligations**

Universities have legal and ethical obligations to ensure the well-being and welfare of their students. By supporting mental health and wellness, CU Denver fulfills these obligations and demonstrates their commitment to the health and safety of their student population. SHWA staff members who work in mental health and support are bound by a care ethic upheld by courts over time to demonstrate that universities have a special relationship with their students. SHWA believes the university is at risk if it does not ensure SHWA staffing levels are appropriate and staff can practice emotional wellness.

In each of the areas listed above, there are crucial staff members whose dedication and commitment to students' mental health is heroic. Over the past few years, the areas in SHWA have lost many valuable staff based on work levels, the emotional toll of the work, and the low salaries. One of CU Denver's goals in the 2030 Strategic Plan is to make our campus a "people-centered best place to work." To do this for CU Denver staff in the mental health support areas, campus needs to understand the work they do and create systems that will provide support when things become a crisis. For example, campus can approve a specific leave time-coded for when a student dies by suicide so that the impacted staff member can take a break for their own emotional health. (More detail is provided under Recommendation 2.)

## **Working Group Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1:** Remove barriers and build on supportive mental health and well-being resources by implementing a Student Wellness Fee.

**Recommendation 2:** Transition the current working group into an ongoing advisory group. This advisory group will develop a structure within Student Affairs to provide processes and guidelines for organizational structures, pursue integrated approaches with internal/external partners, evaluate national trends and higher ed best practices, and review technology supports and efficiency.

**Recommendation 3:** Re-examine the Mental Health Strategic Plan and propose opportunities to operationalize a culture of well-being at CU Denver.

## **Supporting Strategies and Initiatives**

**Recommendation 1:** Remove barriers and build on supportive mental health and well-being resources by implementing a Student Wellness Fee.

Higher education institutions are beginning to assess additional fees for students seeking mental health and well-being services from campus resources. Implementation varies by campus. Below is a table showing approaches taken by some of CU Denver's peer institutions. It would be the work of this subcommittee to evaluate trends and practices at other institutions that may best fit CU Denver.

<b>CU DENVER PEER INSTITUTION</b>	<b>STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND/OR WELL-BEING FEE</b>	<b>ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>
Cleveland State University	No	Charges per visit for psychiatric appointments
Northern Arizona University	Included in Health and Wellness Fee	Charges per visit for all counseling appointments. Additional fee for students that do not pay the Health and Wellness fee.
Portland State University	\$202 per term	The Student Health Center Fee is a mandatory fee assessed to all students taking 5 or more in-load, non-Restricted Differential Tuition credit hours.
University of Massachusetts - Lowell	\$2,401 per year	Required Student Health Insurance with waivable fee options.
University of Massachusetts - Boston	\$3,177 per year	Required Student Health Insurance with waivable fee options.
University of Memphis	Access Fee	Students may pay an access fee between the Fall and Spring or Spring and Fall semester breaks. Additional service fees may apply.
University of Missouri - St. Louis	No	Students charged a fee by appointment.
University of North Carolina - Greensboro	No	The standard fee for therapy services is \$105 per hour, though financial assistance is available
Wichita State University	Yes	Student Engagement, Advocacy and Leadership \$28.46. Student Affairs Assessment and Retention \$4.52. Counseling and Prevention Services \$16.15. Office of Disability Services \$0.40.

CU Denver currently does not apply a wellness or well-being fee for admitted students. This fee would be used to help sustain resources for student mental health and well-being services, programs and supportive technologies.

In line with the existing annual fee-review process, this committee will evaluate well-being/mental health student fees at other institutions for comparison and to inform our assessment. These findings along with other research and budget analysis will determine our approach and the amount of fee required to sustain the necessary services for students.

The timeline for this working group is as follows:

- April 2024: Committee is formalized, and endorsement is voted on and approved by SGA
- May 2024: Working group convenes and reviews existing and available research commits to a shared timeline that supports a vote by the Regents in February/March 2025 and implementation in fall 2025.
- June 2024: Committee outlines elements of this specific Student Purpose Fee

Student Purpose Fees are applied to an entire campus, combined campuses, or a specified cohort of a campus student body (such as all CU Anschutz students in clinically based professional training programs). In all cases, this fee is not confined to a particular school, program, or course. Student Purpose Fees include support for student centers, recreation facilities, parking lots, intercollegiate athletics, childcare centers, campus health clinics, contract health services, student government, and student activities. This fee process addresses Student Purpose/Activity fees that fund student government, student clubs and organizations (which have university advisors), and student-directed programs (which do not have student advisors). For CU Denver-only fees, proposals are reviewed by the CU Denver Student Fee Review Committee, which includes at a minimum, members representing the schools and colleges and members representing central administration. For CU Anschutz-only fees, proposals are reviewed by the Academic and Student Affairs Leadership Committee.

- August 2024: Committee presents report to the advisory group for the purposes of feedback and next steps in the process
- September/October 2024: Committee will present to Student Success Review Committee (SSRC) and submit to Management Fee Review Team (MFRT) and the budget/finance team for approval by executive leadership, as required for approval vote by Regents
- February 2025: Regent Vote
- March-August 2025: Implementation of fee within systems and communications to students

The above timeline will be further detailed upon receipt of information from our partners in Budget and Finance and confirmation of review dates for the 24-25 academic year cycle.

***Recommendation 2:*** *Transition of the current working group into an ongoing advisory group. This advisory group will develop a structure within Student Affairs to provide processes and guidelines for organizational structures, pursue integrated approaches with internal/external partners, evaluate national trends and higher ed best practices, and review technology supports and efficiency.*

The work done by the Student Mental Health and Well-being Working group during Spring 2024 reinforces the need for an ongoing infrastructure to address, support, and provide guidance at CU Denver. In consult with CU Denver administrative units in Human Resources, Legal and Budget/Finance, a representative group within Student Health, Well-being and Advocacy should begin work immediately in the below areas of development:

- a) Review of organizational structures within Student Health, Well-being and Advocacy
- b) Develop/propose and integrated approach to engage CU System employees
- c) Develop methods for evaluating, assessing and/or operationalizing national trends
- d) Student Affairs technology supports and review

***Recommendation 2a: Review of organizational structures within Student Health, Well-being and Advocacy.***

The Student Health, Well-being, and Advocacy Working Group recommends reviewing the current organizational structures in place to develop effective processes, infrastructure, and standards to which all SHWA staff are held. These recommendations are intended to support and equip SHWA staff in their work with students who present with mental health concerns or are experiencing a mental health crisis. The working group recommends the following:

- Create an Institutional Care Policy, review job codes and responsibilities of all SHWA positions
- Develop a universal SHWA employee training goal guide
- Increase staff well-being incentives to promote employee well-being

### **Institutional care policy**

An institutional care policy should be in place to provide clear supports and job expectations after a CU Denver employee is impacted by a sudden or tragic student death, such as by suicide. An institutional care policy should include protocol for bereavement leave/distress days, a phased return to work policy housed in Human Resources, and a contracted mental health support team.

### **Job code review of all SHWA positions**

In collaboration with Human Resources and in tandem with the HR review, a job code review of all SHWA positions is recommended to ensure that all student-facing roles are properly coded in the system and receive industry-competitive salaries. This may result in increasing salaries; thus, budget will also need to be consulted.

### **Required trainings/badging as a part of onboarding/first-year employment goals**

With updated job descriptions and coding, SHWA employees must be trained on mental health support. It is recommended to develop a universal training goal guide that all SHWA employees complete. Current recommended trainings include Mental Health First Aid, Safe Zone Ally training, accessibility, anti-racism, unconscious bias, and microaggression training.

New SHWA employees should also be made aware of all legal obligations, such as ADA and Title IX, reporting duties such as CARE, Office of Equity, and Campus Security Authority, as well as campus resources, referral processes, and current protocols, such as a suicide protocol.

### **Staff well-being incentives**

In efforts to support and promote the well-being of SHWA employees to best serve students, it is recommended to promote holistic well-being and provide resources and respite for staff. Some examples of this may be: a “Thank a colleague” program, a discounted Wellness Center membership on campus or free visits each semester, flexible/alternative work schedules, differing summer hours (i.e. shorter open office hours or no physical office hours on Fridays), having an official policy and normalizing the use of sick time for mental health days, and staff sabbaticals to engage in professional development/attending conferences/deep-diving into discipline while stepping away from the day-to-day work.

There is also a need to develop a consistent protocol when staff or faculty experience a student death. Adopting best practices from our partners in law enforcement and the medical field, such as when an officer is involved in a shooting or significant case or when a medical professional loses a patient, we need to establish a care and support protocol for our front-line teams and faculty. Some of these recommendations should also be considered as part of the well-being culture at CU Denver that is promoted in the mental health strategic plan and not specifically reserved for SHWA staff.

To effectively implement these recommendations, campus partners like Human Resources, Finance/Budget, Office of Equity, Phoenix Center, Compliance offices, Staff Council, and Recreation and Wellness should be consulted and potentially serve on the subgroup committee.

An outline of this recommendation set is below:

- 1) Institutional Care Policy
  - a. Bereavement leave/distress days
  - b. Return to work policy housed in HR for faculty/staff who work closely with a student who dies
  - c. Contracted mental health support for staff impacted by a student death
- 2) Job Code Review of all SHWA positions
  - a. HR
  - b. Budget
- 3) Required trainings/badging as a part of onboarding/first year employment goals
  - a. House some trainings in Skillsoft?
  - b. Within the first year
    - i. Accessibility training
    - ii. Mental Health First Aid
    - iii. Safe Zone Ally training
    - iv. Anti-racism, unconscious bias, microaggression training
  - c. Onboarding
    - i. Suicide protocol
    - ii. Campus resources, referral processes, and reporting duties such as CARE, OE, CSA trainings
    - iii. Legal Overview
      1. ADA

## 2. Title IX

- 4) Staff well-being incentives
  - a. “Thank a colleague” program
  - b. Discounted Wellness Center membership on campus or free visits each semester
  - c. Flexible/alternative work schedules, differing summer hours (i.e. shorter open office hours or no physical office hours on Fridays)
  - d. Normalizing Sick time for mental health days
  - e. Staff sabbaticals- professional development/attending conferences/deep diving into discipline while stepping away from the day-to-day work

***Recommendation 2b:*** *Develop/propose an integrated approach to engage institutional campus partners, CU System-wide.*

Developing an integrated approach to student mental health is crucial for fostering well-being and academic success. Here are some steps to consider for engaging University of Colorado employees systemwide:

- 1) For collaboration and coordination efforts, propose establishing a cross-functional team comprising mental health professionals, educators, administrators, and students. This team would convene regularly to discuss strategies, share insights, and align efforts. This team should prioritize an assessment and needs analysis that includes conducting a comprehensive assessment of mental health needs across all campuses. This assessment will collect data on student demographics, prevalent mental health issues, and existing resources. It will be important to engage employees in this process to gain diverse perspectives.
- 2) Consider the development of a centralized mental health hub accessible to all students and employees. Collaborate with existing programs such as SCCC, Case Management, DRS, and Wellness to offer a range of holistic services including workshops and training.
- 3) Consider providing mental health related training to faculty, staff, and students. Consider employing mental health awareness campaigns using a public health approach. Raise awareness about available resources through workshops, seminars, and the inclusion of standard language on syllabi and/or in Canvas. Train all employees to recognize the signs of distress and to refer students to appropriate resources.
- 4) Explore community partnerships by collaborating with local mental health organizations, community clinics and hospitals. Establish/strengthen referral pathways for specialized care.
- 5) Engage employees and students in the promotion of a self-care culture. Encourage employees to model self-care practices. Organize wellness challenges, mindfulness sessions, and stress reduction activities throughout the academic year. Continue to foster a culture in which seeking help is normalized, without pathologizing normal emotions.
- 6) Review system funding that considers both short term and long-term needs. Engage faculty and staff organization in advocating for mental health funding. Their endorsement carries weight and can influence decision makers. Consider including mental health provisions in collective bargaining agreements. Prioritize employee well-being.

In addition to a proposed increase in funding specifically dedicated to mental health initiatives, collaborate within the system and university research offices to explore external grant opportunities. Consider the establishment of mental health endowment fund(s) for additional sustained support and encourage alumni and community members to contribute.

**Recommendation 2c:** *Develop method for evaluating, assessing and/or operationalizing national trends.*

Evaluating, assessing, and operationalizing national trends in college student mental health is essential for effective intervention and support. Here are some strategies to achieve this:

1) **National Trends Assessment:**

- **Methodology:** Conduct regular surveys or studies across colleges and universities to assess mental health trends. Utilize data from the most recently administered NCHA data, Use data from the Collegiate Center for Mental Health (CCMH) annual report to which SCCC contributes. Use Healthy Minds Study annual report.
- **Purpose:** Understand prevalence rates, emerging issues, and variations across student populations.
- **Application:** Use data to inform policies, allocate resources, and design targeted interventions.

2) **Data Collection and Analysis:**

- **Methodology:** Use already-established data collection system(s), such as data collected by SCCC from students who utilize those services and from Case Management and DRS
- **Purpose:** Gather information on student mental health utilization, demographics, and outcomes.
- **Application:** Analyze trends, identify risk factors, and tailor services accordingly.

3) **Collaboration among Departments on Campus**

- **Methodology:** Collaborate with SCCC, DRS, Care Team, Conduct, Wellness, etc.
- **Purpose:** Share data, identify common challenges, and develop evidence-based practices.
- **Application:** Implement joint initiatives, track outcomes, and adapt strategies.

4) **Promising Campus Interventions:**

- **Methodology:** Explore evidence-based programs and policies.
- **Purpose:** Improve student mental health outcomes.
- **Application:** Implement interventions such as peer support networks, stress reduction workshops, and mental health awareness campaigns, mental health outreach, etc.

5) **Race/Ethnicity-Specific Trends:**

- **Methodology:** Examine annual trends by race/ethnicity.
- **Purpose:** Understand disparities and tailor interventions.
- **Application:** Develop culturally competent services and care. Educate faculty and staff with knowledge about mental health disparities and culturally sensitive approaches. Develop inclusive policies and programs.

**Recommendation 2d:** *Assess and review technology support within Student Affairs and Student Health, Well-being and Advocacy.*

The advisory group will review the current usage and efficacy of TELUS Health in supporting CU Denver students outside of Counseling Center hours and availability. The advisory group will also look closely at a more comprehensive service that provides intensive outpatient treatment and a conduit for communication with our Care Team in crisis situations. In conjunction with Finance and Budget, OIT and Registrar/Bursar, the advisory group will assess whether the student fee can and/or should cover this level of service.

In looking at all technology supports for these areas, the advisory group will assess whether the current technology is still operating at its peak effectiveness. We know that efficient systems will free up work time to help us spend more focused time with the students that need our support.

**Recommendation 3:** *Reexamine the Mental Health Strategic Plan and propose opportunities to functionalize a culture of well-being on the CU Denver campus.*

In fall of 2018, former Chancellor Dorothy Horrell initiated the development of a campus-wide Mental Health Strategic Plan. The vision was for CU Denver to serve as the *model urban university* for mental wellness by creating a caring and welcoming environment that transforms the mental well-being of all CU Denver students.

As part of this effort, this working group would evaluate the previously proposed plan and determine a process to recommend and administer modifications to the current plan to ensure our approach to mental health, suicide, and substance abuse prevention and education efforts are effective and sustained as part of the CU Denver culture. This group will conduct a thorough evaluation of policies, systems, and programming needs, as well as an examination of how both personnel and financial resources are deployed to address challenges, coordinate efforts across campus, and evaluate program effectiveness.

## **Next Steps**

These recommendations will serve as the foundation for the roadmap for CU Denver's Student Health, Well-being and Advocacy initiatives. To address these recommendations, many different constituents will be engaged, including schools/colleges and various campus departments (such as the registrar and the budget office), Staff Council, and Student Government representatives. These constituents will also be engaged as the topics covered in this report continue to evolve over time, and as the processes, guidance, and supports recommended here are developed for CU Denver's improved mental health and well-being and will be managed by this founding committee who will transition to an advisory council for management of these recommendations and to ensure momentum and implementation.

## Resources Utilized By This Working Group

Various reports from consultants that include Keeling, AHEAD and JED

Support and counsel from system campus partners

2018 Mental Health Strategic Plan

NCHA Survey Results

[UDL: The UDL Guidelines \(cast.org\)](https://www.cast.org/udl)

National Association for Behavioral Intervention and Threat Assessment. (2023). *NABITA Industry Standards for Behavioral Intervention Teams*. [Whitepaper]. Retrieved from: <https://www.nabita.org/resources/2023-whitepaper-nabita-standards-for-behavioral-intervention-teams/>