

UNC System To Expand Student Mental Health Services

By Administrator
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The University of North Carolina System will rapidly expand mental health services for students statewide with a \$5 million grant from the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund.

The announcement comes alongside the release of the UNC System's report, "Healthy Minds, Strong Universities: Charting a Course to More Sustainable Student Mental Health Care."

Eight in 10 students say their mental health has been negatively impacted by the pandemic, the report shows. Surveys also indicate that 10-15% of college students have had serious thoughts of suicide within the past 12 months. Nationwide data show that 20-30% of incoming college students are arriving with a previous mental health diagnosis.

In addition to promoting and ensuring student health and wellbeing, addressing student mental health challenges has far-reaching implications for student success and educational attainment, the report says. For example, mental illness is one of the most cited reasons for why students drop out of college, according to research from the World Health Organization.

Last fall, the System provided its 17 institutions access to a 24-hour crisis hotline, a resource for students who needed professional care. But more work must be done, especially as campuses focus attention on those struggling to cope with the stressors of the past year.

"Many of our campuses have seen their counseling and outreach services strained to the breaking point, and I think it's clear to all of us that we need a better approach to both helping students in need and creating a more supportive environment that addresses student mental health before it becomes a crisis," said UNC System President Peter Hans.

The System Office will use the \$5 million in GEER funds to increase training, resources and expertise to better support its students, faculty and staff. Additionally, the UNC System will extend access to training and shared services to outside institutions in consultation with North Carolina's community colleges and independent colleges and universities. Examples of potential investments include the establishment of electronic medical record systems at counseling centers, development of a shared pool of psychiatric providers across the UNC

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System and implementation of a system-wide off-campus referral tracking system.

GEER funding consists of federal dollars that aim to help school districts, postsecondary institutions or other education-related entities address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. On May 24, Gov. Roy Cooper directed \$51.4 million in new GEER funding to help students access and complete postsecondary education as the state recovers from the pandemic.

“The UNC System appreciates the Governor’s support to keep our students on track towards on-time graduation through completion grants and to address urgent mental health needs, especially for at-risk students,” Hans said. “The Governor’s emphasis on helping those most vulnerable during the pandemic is reflected by his leadership on these issues.”