

# Inside the College Mental Health Crisis: Evidence from the Healthy Minds Survey

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College students are particularly vulnerable to mental health challenges that can significantly impede their academic performance, social lives, and cognitive abilities. While mental and emotional health concerns have long been present on college campuses, research suggests certain disorders and behaviors have worsened since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic.

One of the leading sources on student mental health is the Healthy Minds Study (HMS)—an annual, web-based study conducted by the Healthy Minds Network. Since 2013, the HMS has been fielded at over 450 institutions and received responses from more than 500,000 students. This brief examines select data points from the HMS National Data Reports from 2018-2019 (pre-pandemic), 2020-2021 and 2021-2022.

According to the HMS, 60 percent of surveyed students had a positive screen for at least one mental health problem during the 2020-2021 school year.<sup>1</sup> While this is a slight increase from the 58 percent measured in 2018-2019, all of the disorders featured below (see Table 1) grew in prevalence in 2021-2022, including major depressive disorder (MDD), generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), eating disorders, and suicidal ideation.

The largest increase was in the prevalence of overall depression, which grew from 36 percent to 44 percent. Unsurprisingly, reports of positive mental health also declined by a magnitude of eight percentage points.

**Table 1. Prevalence of Certain Conditions, by Year**

	2018-2019 (Pre-Pandemic)	2021-2022
Major depression (PHQ-9)	17%	23%
Depression, overall (PHQ-9)	36%	44%
Anxiety disorder (GAD-7)	31%	37%
Suicidal ideation (past year)	14%	15%
Eating disorder (SCOFF)	11%	14%
Positive mental health (Flourishing Scale)	40%	32%

Source: Healthy Minds Network (2023). Healthy Minds Study among Colleges and Universities [National Data Reports: 2018-2019, 2021-2022]. Healthy Minds Network, University of Michigan, University of California Los Angeles, Boston University, and Wayne State University. <https://healthymindsnetwork.org/research/data-for-researchers>

<sup>1</sup> The datapoint on overall mental health challenges is not yet publicly available for the 2021-2022 HMS dataset.



Data from the HMS and similar studies indicate that some students, including Asian students, students of color, and LGBTQIA+ students, are particularly at risk of experiencing poor mental health in recent years. These students are more likely to see their mental health disproportionately affected by discrimination, structural racism, and financial stress—all of which have been exacerbated by the pandemic and its resulting issues.

Although mental health concerns are more common than ever on college campuses, certain groups of students, notably racial/ethnic minority students, are less likely to seek help from professionals. In the 2020-2021 HMS, Arab American students, Black students, and American Indian/Alaskan Native students with at least one mental health concern reported decreased help-seeking behaviors. As one of the HMS researchers, Jasmine Morigney, explained in a [recent publication](#), “[This] treatment gap highlights a number of systemic issues related to health disparities,

stigma, and the shortage of mental health professionals. Such barriers to the use of mental health services can be quite daunting for students of color.”

With such high percentages of students facing mental health crises—especially among vulnerable populations that are less likely to seek assistance on their own—institutions must make quick interventions to keep these students in school. To better address the needs of these students, schools can provide targeted mental health supports, such as access to free or reduced-cost mental health services, medical counseling, and support groups. Colleges and universities can also enhance existing on-campus offerings or leverage partnerships with community organizations to provide these services. For more suggestions to improve mental health on campus, see the [College Student Mental Health Action Toolkit](#) developed by the Healthy Minds Network, Active Minds, and the Jed Foundation.

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## Recent Trellis Research publications

### Financial Experiences of Students Who Don't Complete The FAFSA

Barone, S., Knaff, C., & Fletcher, C. (2023). Financial Experiences of Students Who Don't Complete The FAFSA. Trellis Company. Retrieved from: <https://www.trelliscompany.org/portfolio-items/financial-experiences-of-students-who-dont-complete-the-fafsa/>

### Student Financial Wellness Survey Report: Fall 2021

Fletcher, C., Webster, J., Cornett, A., Niznik, A., Gardner, T., & Knaff, C. (2022). *Student Financial Wellness Survey report: Fall 2021*. Trellis Company. Retrieved from: <https://www.trelliscompany.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SFWS-Report-Fall-2021.pdf>

### No food for thought: Insights on basic needs insecurities and mental health challenges from Trellis' Fall 2020 Student Financial Wellness Survey

Cornett, A., & Fletcher, C. (2022). No food for thought: Insights on basic needs insecurities and mental health challenges from Trellis' Fall 2020 Student Financial Wellness Survey. Trellis Company. Retrieved from: <https://www.trelliscompany.org/portfolio-items/no-food-for-thought-insights-on-basic-needs-insecurities-and-mental-health-challenges/>

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Interested in collaborations or need research expertise? Trellis Research welcomes opportunities to inform policymakers and help organizations address their analytical needs. For more information, please contact Trellis Research at [Trellisresearch@trelliscompany.org](mailto:Trellisresearch@trelliscompany.org) or visit us on Twitter ([@TrellisResearch](https://twitter.com/TrellisResearch)).

The Student Financial Wellness Survey is a free national survey offered by Trellis Company that explores the connections between student finances, academic success, and more. Interested in participating in the Fall 2023 implementation of SFWS? Learn more here: [www.trelliscompany.org/SFWS-get-started](https://www.trelliscompany.org/SFWS-get-started)

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