

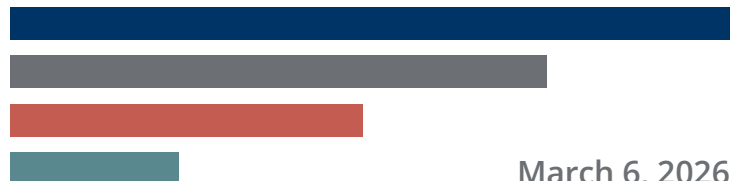
Strengthening College Student Mental Health:

A Practical Playbook for the State of Texas

The Texas Postsecondary Student Mental Health Coalition



RESEARCH INSTITUTE
DALLAS COLLEGE



March 6, 2026

About the Coalition

In fall 2023, the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) and Jed Foundation (JED) launched an inaugural Student Mental Health and Wellness Learning Community, selecting teams of education leaders from five states to receive financial and technical assistance to implement whole student support for *mental health*. Texas was represented by leaders from the Alamo Colleges District, Dallas College, The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs, Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute (Meadows Institute), Texas State University System, and Trellis Strategies. This group, the Texas Postsecondary Mental Health Coalition, authored this playbook, which the Research Institute at Dallas College edited and is sharing as a public resource. For a full list of authors, see the [Acknowledgements](#) section at the end of this document.



Foreword

As a Trustee of Dallas College, I have firsthand experience with the mental health challenges facing college students. What was a concerning situation prior to the pandemic has required direct and sustained attention to this day.

Mental health concerns touch every campus in our state—from urban research universities to rural community colleges, from East Texas to the Panhandle, from the Gulf Coast to West Texas. Despite challenges—including behavioral health issues affecting students, health provider shortages in many counties, fragmented efforts, and the lack of systems-level strategies—I am optimistic about our ability to address these troubling circumstances. Throughout the past year, a coalition of Texas higher education institutions and nonprofit partners have worked assiduously to develop this playbook. This ongoing collaboration reveals promising approaches and effective frameworks that form the foundation for addressing student mental health across higher education institutions in Texas.

The issues transcend traditional dividing lines of geography, institution type, or political affiliation. Our fundamental responsibility is supporting the well-being of our students while they pursue their academic and career goals. Great work is underway, such as the Minding College Minds Postsecondary Mental Health Framework, advanced by the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute—a key partner in this playbook. Many other examples appear throughout, and the playbook provides pragmatic and holistic solutions to problems campuses experience.

We must collectively advocate for policies that elevate the conversation and recognize that mental health deserves the same priority as physical health. I am encouraged by the vigorous efforts to increase awareness of treatment options for mental illness and reduce stigma. Effective solutions require planning and cooperation among campus leaders, students, parents, faculty, staff, health care providers, community organizations, faith-based groups and others. The strategies outlined in this playbook highlight activities that employ this collaborative approach to address student mental health needs.

I applaud those who contributed expertise to this important work. These partners labored diligently to develop this resource that outlines effective approaches to addressing mental health needs across the higher education landscape. Our students deserve comprehensive support, and we can provide it. While the path forward presents challenges, this playbook offers strategies and programs to help our students when they need it most. Together, we can support our students' well-being and create campus environments where all can thrive academically, professionally, and personally.



Phil Ritter

JD, MPA; Elected Trustee,
District 2 - Dallas College

Table of Contents

- About the Coalition 2
- Foreword 3
- Introduction 5
 - A Strategic Path Forward 5
- How To Use This Playbook 6
- Playbook Roadmap 7
 - Key Components 7
- Implementation At a Glance 8
- Adopt a Public Health Approach to Overall Well-Being 9
 - Public Health Approach to Mental Health 9
 - Overview of Guiding Frameworks 10
 - The Minding College Minds Framework 11
 - CORE COMPONENTS 11
 - Universal Supports 12
 - Therapeutic Supports 13
 - Crisis Supports 14
 - Institutional Commitment 15
- Develop a Data-Driven Mental Health Ecosystem 16
 - Population Survey Data 16
 - Service Utilization Data 16
 - Programmatic Data 17
 - Longitudinal Data 18
- Close the Gaps in Student Access and Outcomes 19
 - Expanding Supports 19
 - Reducing Stigma 20
 - Increasing Service Accessibility 21
- Cultivate Caring Campuses and Communities 22
 - Basic Needs Interventions 23
 - A Caring Campus 24
- Maximize the Mental Health Workforce 25
 - Leveraging Current Resources 25
 - Investing in Future Resources 26
- The Role of Regional and State Leadership 27
- Conclusion 28
- Acknowledgments 29
- References 30
- Appendix A: Implementation Assessment Excerpt 32
- Appendix B: In Practice Strategies 34
- Appendix C: Glossary 38
- Appendix D: Mental Health Telehealth Providers 39

Introduction

Texas stands at a critical crossroads in advancing student mental health across its colleges and universities. Over the past decade, the state has made substantial investments in behavioral health. In 2023, the 88th Texas Legislature committed a record \$11.68 billion to behavioral health, marking a 30% increase over the previous biennium. These investments have supported critical programs such as the Mental Health Professionals Loan Repayment Program, child and adolescent care initiatives, and behavioral health workforce training. **Yet, despite these advances, many efforts remain fragmented and lack a systems-level strategy specific to the postsecondary environment.**

The need for focused, sustained investment is urgent. Nearly half of Texas college students report experiencing symptoms of depression or anxiety (The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs, 2024). More than 140 Texas counties lack a licensed psychologist, compounding the disparities (Simpson, 2024). While colleges are doing more than ever to address student mental health, additional coordination, resources, and innovation are needed to close the gaps. **This need is critical and felt strongly on Texas college and university campuses. Institutional leaders must act now to implement unique, campus-based strategies through institutional teams and intentional frameworks.**

A Strategic Path Forward

Five actionable recommendations to transform student mental health in Texas higher education are advanced in this playbook:

- 1. Adopt a Public Health Approach to Overall Well-being**
Select one or more comprehensive organizing frameworks that provide guidance on supports ranging from health promotion to crisis response.
- 2. Develop a Data-Driven Mental Health Ecosystem**
Collect data through multiple avenues and across student groups to measure gaps and barriers in the environment.
- 3. Close Gaps in Student Access and Outcomes**
Close gaps in mental health outcomes by pairing data-informed action with stigma reduction, expanded early supports, peer engagement, and the removal of structural and financial barriers to care.
- 4. Cultivate Caring Campuses and Communities**
Strengthen student well-being by addressing basic needs insecurity, promoting belonging, and building campus-wide networks of faculty, staff, and community partners who help students connect to support.
- 5. Maximize the Mental Health Care Workforce**
Use relevant existing resources to address the mental health care supply and demand gap while developing certificates and credentials that meet institutional, regional, and state needs for mental health professionals.

This playbook translates these recommendations into a practical guide. It is designed to equip college leaders with best practices, tools, and a roadmap to build sustainable mental health ecosystems across Texas campuses.

How To Use This Playbook

This playbook offers numerous effective strategies and a pragmatic outline to improve mental health at Texas colleges and universities. It provides guidance to help colleges and universities address mental health needs.

The playbook contains navigational links allowing movement between different sections and access to resources and recommendations within the guide.

We recommend reading this playbook and the enclosed recommendations in their entirety to get a core understanding of how to support postsecondary mental health and, as a result, student success. After an initial read-through, we recommend revisiting sections that resonate and completing the In Practice strategies included under each recommendation.

This playbook is focused on providing practical steps for building an institutional mental health infrastructure; however, we recognize that implementing the recommendations may require substantial financial investment. Dedicated resources, such as additional

staff capacity, technology, and data resources will be integral to successfully leverage the strategies we have outlined in this document. Institutional leaders will have to identify internal or external funding streams to address the costs associated with enacting some of these strategies. Although the playbook does not explicitly provide a step-by-step guide to identifying and sustaining funding, institutional leaders may find that this is a necessary component of the work.

Institutional stakeholders will also play a vital role in determining the success of leveraging these recommendations. As campuses work to implement these strategies, they will need a group of stakeholders who can assist with campus-based efforts, often defined as a task force or committee. Students should also be involved, as appropriate, to help inform campus-specific needs. This taskforce is the beginning of creating a mental health infrastructure and should include faculty, staff, administrators, and students.



Playbook Roadmap

The playbook outlines a series of strategies to develop sustainable mental health capacity at the institutional level. The playbook integrates both the prevention and treatment of mental health challenges in a manner that involves all departments and infuses mental health supports into every aspect of the campus experience. Selecting one or more frameworks from among several national options will guide and focus campus efforts in implementing a *public health approach* to mental health (see [Overview of Guiding Frameworks](#) section). Once a *guiding framework* is selected, we recommend that campuses conduct an implementation assessment, such as the Meadows Institute's Minding College Minds Implementation Assessment (see example in [Appendix A](#)), to determine their current level of implementation and identify opportunities for growth and development. In the process of performing an implementation assessment, campuses should review existing data and collect new forms of data to better understand strengths and needs (see [Develop a Data-Driven Mental Health Ecosystem](#) section).

From these data, campuses can set goals and strategies and successively implement programs and services meant to increase access and close gaps in student mental health outcomes (see [Close the Gaps in Student Access and Outcomes](#) section). Moreover, institutions can leverage data to establish and implement programming related to factors that can compound mental health challenges, such as basic needs insecurity (see [Cultivate Caring Campuses and Communities](#) section). Given the limited supply and high demand for mental health professionals in Texas, institutions can leverage strategies to strengthen the current workforce and support future growth (see [Maximize the Mental Health Care Workforce](#)). As a part of a comprehensive cycle, the actions taken based on the guiding framework, assessment, and best practices recommended in this playbook should be evaluated for impact and iterated upon.

Key Components

- **In Practice strategies:** The playbook includes a number of In Practice strategies that are not meant to be discrete tasks taken in sequential order, but rather high-level, practical strategies that provide guidance and are flexible enough to be applied across institutional contexts. These strategies can be utilized based on an institution's specific needs and current mental health programming.
 - In [Appendix B: In Practice Strategies](#), we have shared a comprehensive list of the In Practice strategies in a worksheet that can be used by stakeholders



Implementation at a Glance

The Implementation Timeline (Figure 1) below is an outline to support student mental health at your institution. Using the timeline requires integrating details from the recommendations and a careful and strategic review of your own institutional infrastructure, assets, and program development.

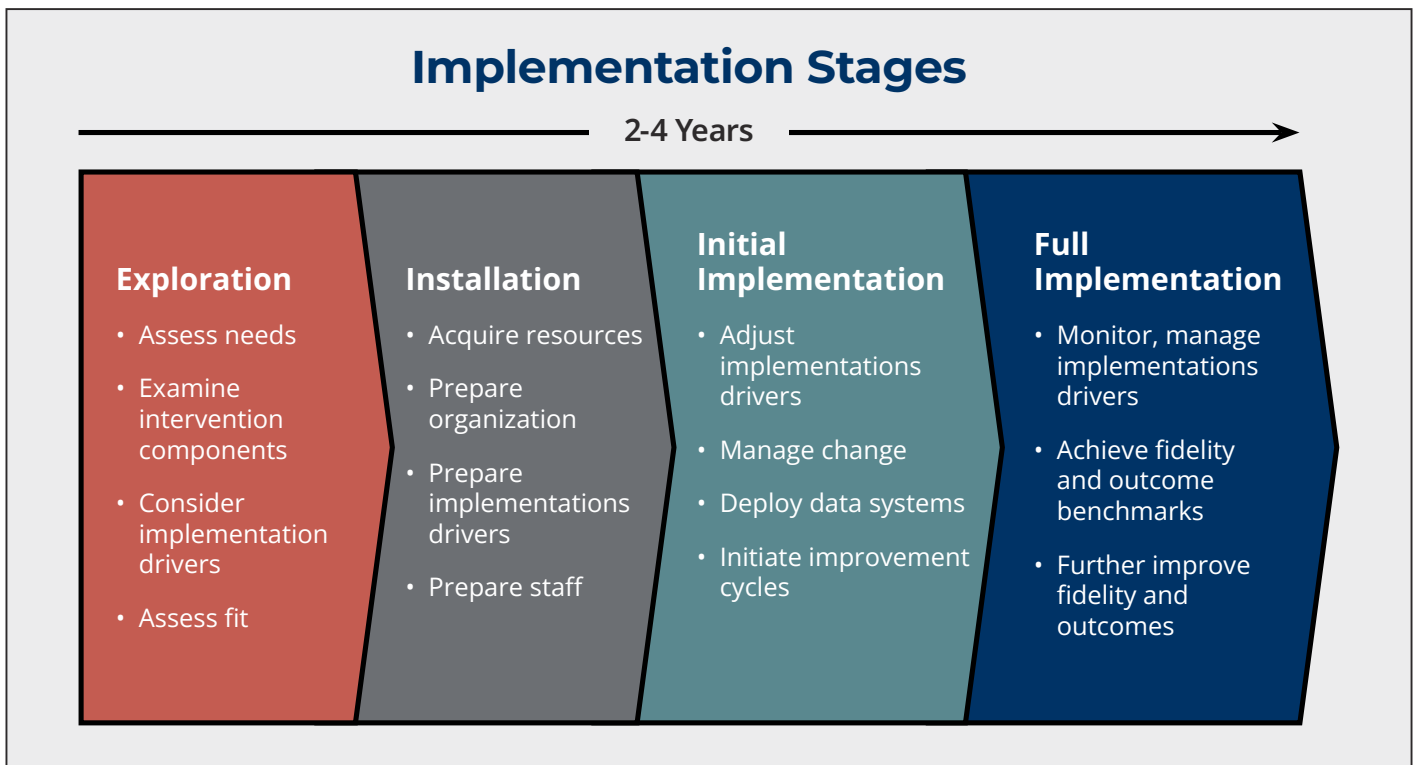
We recommend that the timeline be built from a comprehensive review of the institutional context and using a process that includes several years of progressive investment. This may include an Exploration stage assessing needs; an Installation stage, where resources are gathered; an Initial

Implementation stage where changes begin to be implemented; and a Full Implementation stage where fidelity to goals and outcomes are monitored. The latter will be essential to fully implement and realize the *return on investment (ROI)* associated with the recommendations.

Many institution-specific factors will guide your process, with no one-size-fits-all process prescribed. Approaches and program development will be contingent upon institutional budgets, staffing considerations, policies and practices, and other investments like technology, scalability, and capacity.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

Figure 1. Practice models, implementations, and outcomes



Note. Adapted from Bertram et al., 2014.

Adopt a Public Health Approach to Overall Well-Being

As institutions develop a mental health foundation, it is important to recognize that implementing effective mental health programming in higher education requires a comprehensive, cross-system, public health approach.

Despite growing recognition of mental health's impact on student success, persistence, and *well-being*, many colleges' mental health initiatives are siloed in counseling centers and student services divisions. A public health approach involves pursuing mental health promotion and prevention alongside treatment. In other words, it means ensuring that students who will benefit from treatment receive it but also working to prevent mental health problems from developing among students who are at risk or showing early signs of potential trouble. When institutions treat mental health support as the sole responsibility of just one or two departments, they miss valuable opportunities for early intervention that could naturally occur across touchpoints in a student's educational journey. The most effective mental health programs are those that take a cross-system approach, connecting efforts across student services, academic affairs, executive leadership, and more. However, a cross-system approach to mental health is not something that happens overnight.

A public health approach requires planning, a strong framework, and collaboration by multiple stakeholders.

Though tempting, institutions should resist the urge to change all systems simultaneously, which can lead to initiative fatigue and superficial change. Instead, institutions should identify core priorities based on their unique context, student population, and existing resources. By first moving the needle on a few strategic priorities, institutions can build momentum and create a foundation for broader systemic change. To identify these priorities, institutions can leverage a postsecondary mental health guiding framework built upon a public health approach to mental health and well-being.

Public Health Approach to Mental Health

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, n.d.) a public health approach to mental health collects and uses data, promotes well-being, prevents mental distress, educates and informs about mental health and public health, strengthens mental health systems, supports providers, and engages and empowers partners and communities to improve mental health.



Overview of Guiding Frameworks

In this context, a guiding framework is a set of principles or guidelines that serve as a roadmap for postsecondary mental health change efforts. It provides institutions with a structured approach to designing comprehensive support systems, while anchoring their efforts in principles that streamline problem solving, decision making, and the organization of complex information. Without a guiding framework and cross-system partnerships, campus mental health initiatives typically evolve haphazardly, with student services and other departments operating in isolation, leading to poor coordination and duplicated efforts. Students experience this fragmentation through confusing service gaps, redundant processes, and inconsistent support.

A guiding framework provides campus-wide shared language and goals, dismantles silos, and fosters collaboration. A good framework does not just connect existing programs—it transforms how an institution thinks about student mental health—by helping every department recognize their role in supporting student well-being throughout the college experience. Several established frameworks exist to guide college mental health efforts using a public health approach, some of which include:

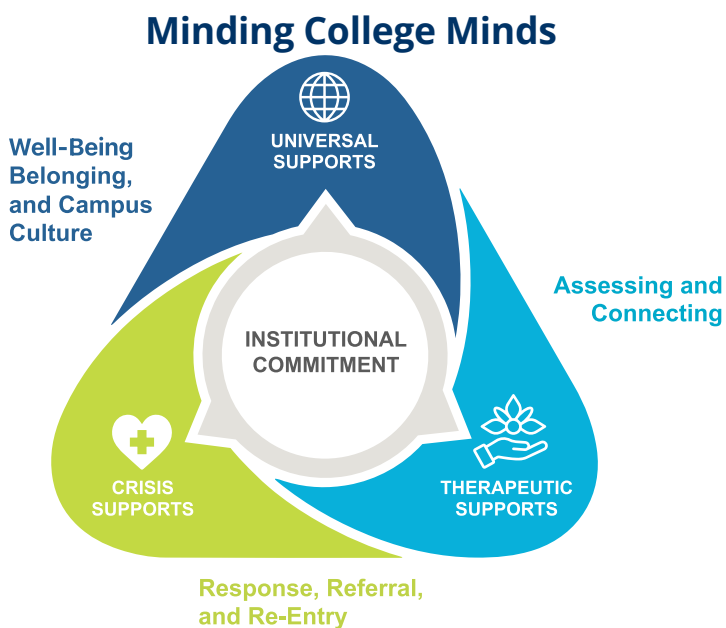
- [American College Health Association’s Healthy Campus Framework](#)
- [The Jed Foundation’s Comprehensive Approach to Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention](#)
- [Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute’s Minding College Minds Postsecondary Mental Health Framework \(Minding College Minds Framework\)](#)
- [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s MAP-IT Framework](#)

The most effective framework for any college is the one that best helps translate theory into practice within their unique context. Institutions may also utilize multiple frameworks depending on their needs, and many often do. For example, an institution may leverage one guiding framework for their system as a whole and utilize another designed for a specific element of that system, such as building *belonging*. The framework(s) selected should provide practical guidance while remaining adaptable to the institution’s specific needs, resources, and campus communities. To implement a framework, it will be important to designate a cross-functional task force that includes counseling staff, academic leaders, faculty, student representatives, and basic needs coordinators. This team will guide planning, implementation, and continuous improvement of mental health efforts.

Colleges and universities can use their chosen framework(s) to assess their current mental health services, utilization data, staffing, barriers to care, and demographic-specific gaps. Many frameworks offer an assessment tool to facilitate this process, like the Meadows Institute’s Implementation Assessment (an element of the Minding College Minds Framework). These assessments help colleges identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities to enhance their existing postsecondary mental health services and supports.

The Minding College Minds Framework

The Meadows Institute and Texas Success Center at the Texas Association of Community Colleges partnered to support colleges statewide with implementing the Minding College Minds Framework. This collaboration has helped institutions across Texas successfully embed mental health strategies into their broader student success initiatives, recognizing that mental well-being is fundamental to academic achievement.



For more information about this image and the Minding College Minds framework visit [Meadows Institute website](#).

The Minding College Minds Framework is:

- Comprehensive and systematic, addressing mental health across a continuum from prevention to intervention
- Evidence-based, drawing from research on effective practices in higher education settings
- Implementation-focused, with concrete practices that institutions can adapt and apply
- Holistic, addressing mental health through multiple campus systems and touchpoints

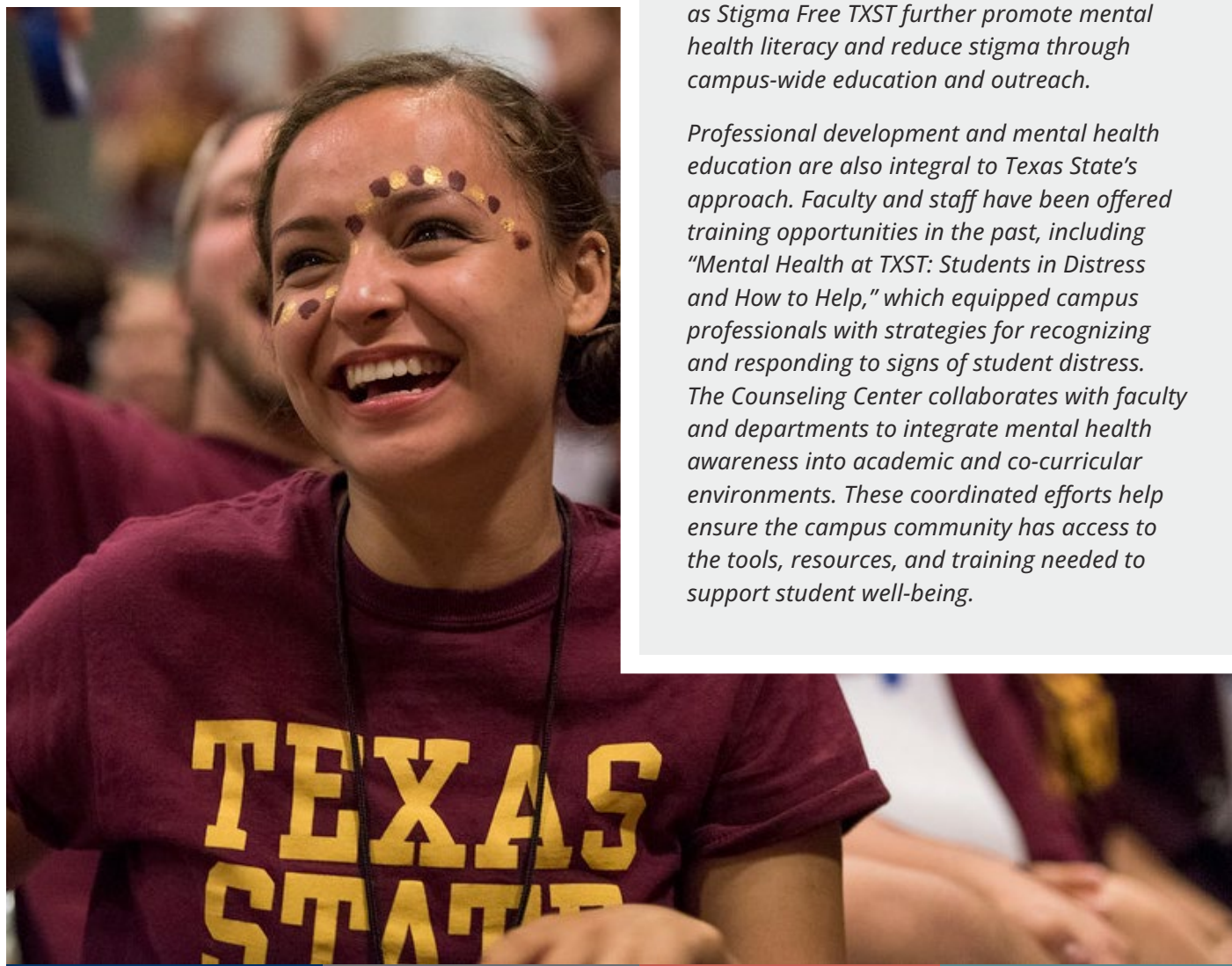
Core Components

The framework includes three components: Universal Supports, Therapeutic Supports, and Crisis Supports, all centered by a core of Institutional Commitment. Designed for use by two- and four-year institutions, the Minding College Minds Framework builds on the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) model used widely in K-12 education to create a seamless transition into postsecondary institutions with the needs of a higher education student in mind (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). This comprehensive approach spans the full continuum of mental health, from health promotion and prevention strategies to crisis response and return-to-campus policies. It also includes an Implementation Assessment (see example in [Appendix A](#)) that colleges can use to assess their current systems and identify priorities for improvement. This assessment provides concrete practices under each component of the Minding College Minds Framework, offering an adaptable approach to implementation that aligns with an institution's unique contexts, resources, and community needs.

Applying the Minding College Minds Framework is inherently iterative. Institutions typically begin by identifying practices from the Implementation Assessment that they want to advance from pre-implementation into partial implementation, gradually moving toward full implementation and continuous improvement across all domains. This phased approach allows colleges to build capacity, measure impact, and adjust strategies based on outcomes.

Universal Supports

Universal Supports are policies, programs, and interventions that promote belonging and a campus culture that prioritizes well-being. These supports benefit the entire campus community through mental health promotion, prevention, screening, and early identification. Examples include professional development for faculty and staff on recognizing signs of distress, mental health literacy campaigns, workshops for developing coping skills and resilience, self-help resources accessible to all students, and data collection and analysis to understand the most prevalent mental health needs on campus. A good system of Universal Supports can equip campus stakeholders with the tools and resources needed to more effectively manage stress, meet basic needs, and identify when additional help is warranted.



Universal Supports

TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Texas State University offers a broad range of campus-wide mental health supports designed to foster mental health awareness, promote early intervention, and create a supportive campus culture for all students, faculty, and staff. The University provides access to self-help tools and digital resources, including curated well-being apps, mental health resource directories, and online access to services through platforms such as TimelyCare and Therapy Assistance Online. These resources support self-guided strategies such as mindfulness, emotional regulation, and stress management, which are key components of preventive mental health care. Initiatives such as Stigma Free TXST further promote mental health literacy and reduce stigma through campus-wide education and outreach.

Professional development and mental health education are also integral to Texas State's approach. Faculty and staff have been offered training opportunities in the past, including "Mental Health at TXST: Students in Distress and How to Help," which equipped campus professionals with strategies for recognizing and responding to signs of student distress. The Counseling Center collaborates with faculty and departments to integrate mental health awareness into academic and co-curricular environments. These coordinated efforts help ensure the campus community has access to the tools, resources, and training needed to support student well-being.

Therapeutic Supports

Some students will have needs beyond what can be offered through a college's Universal Supports strategies. **Therapeutic Supports are the policies, procedures, programs, and partnerships that ensure students have access to the services that meet their unique needs.** Therapeutic Supports can be offered through campus providers for short-term and mild-to-moderate needs or through community providers for more specialized needs. A good system of Therapeutic Supports ensures timely access to appropriate services for students identified as needing an additional level of intervention, regardless of whether the college formally offers counseling services or provides referrals to community-based partners. Effective Therapeutic Supports include clear scope-of-practice documentation, evidence-based interventions, and established referral pathways to community resources, responsive to the most prevalent student needs.

Therapeutic Supports DALLAS COLLEGE

Dallas College Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) delivers a comprehensive and student-centered approach to the provision of therapeutic services, ensuring that enrolled students have timely access to effective, ethically-delivered mental health services that align with their needs. These supports are grounded in evidence-based practices and designed to assist students with mild-to-moderate mental health concerns within the scope of a short-term care model, while also facilitating connections to external resources for students requiring specialized or long-term care. CAPS offers individual counseling, group counseling, support/discussion groups, clinical consultation, psychoeducational programming, and crisis response services. Services are provided both in-person and through telehealth to increase accessibility across Dallas College's seven campuses. Students presenting with common concerns such as anxiety, depression, academic stress, grief, relationship difficulties, loneliness, identity development, or time management are supported through goal-oriented therapy plans developed in collaboration with licensed counselors.



Crisis Supports

Crisis Supports represent the safety net and spectrum of supports intended for students who are experiencing mental health emergencies. This component emphasizes rapid response during crises, procedures for connecting students to appropriate providers, and policies guiding a student's return to campus following a mental health leave of absence. Effective Crisis Supports include documented response protocols, training for key stakeholders, and clear communication pathways between responders and campus services. A good system of Crisis Supports ensures timely and compassionate response to mental health emergencies, including supporting students who wish to return to campus.



Crisis Supports

GRAYSON COLLEGE

Mental health emergencies do not follow a 9-to-5 schedule, a truth that is especially relevant at colleges that provide on-campus housing. Recognizing this, Grayson College set out to strengthen their existing Crisis Supports by developing a comprehensive after-hours crisis response plan. This plan includes clear crisis definitions with appropriate response protocols for different scenarios, specialized training for key stakeholders such as residential staff and first responders, and established partnerships with regional mental health providers. A key component involves structured communications protocols that ensure seamless handoffs between after-hours responders and college counseling staff to allow for follow-up. This comprehensive approach ensures that students and staff experiencing mental health crises receive consistent, coordinated support regardless of when the emergency occurs, while providing clear guidance for those responding to a crisis outside regular service hours. Grayson College demonstrates its commitment to its campus community through efforts like these and the wider Grayson Cares program, promoting student success by supporting students.

Institutional Commitment

At the heart of the Minding College Minds Framework—and indeed any successful mental health system—lies Institutional Commitment. This foundational element supports all components of the framework and determines how effectively a college can implement the Universal, Therapeutic, and Crisis Supports described previously. When mental health is a priority, it is treated as fundamental to the institution’s mission to support student success, not as a secondary commitment that receives attention only during crises. The systematic, cross-functional approach can only succeed when it is backed by genuine Institutional Commitment that spans departments and endures beyond individual champions.

One of the strongest examples of Institutional Commitment is support from a college’s executive leadership. When Presidents, Chancellors, and other senior leaders recognize mental health as integral to student success, it sends a powerful message throughout the institution that this work is not optional or peripheral—it is central to the college’s mission. This endorsement creates permission and

momentum for faculty, staff, and administrators across all departments to prioritize mental health initiatives within their own spheres of influence. While support from executive leadership is not the only measure of a college’s Institutional Commitment, it is among the most powerful. Without it, mental health efforts often remain siloed within counseling centers or student affairs, limiting their impact and sustainability.

Institutional Commitment is central to the framework because it is the foundation upon which a successful postsecondary mental health system can be built. Ultimately, mental health programming—like academic programming—hinges on the ongoing investment of time, sustainable funding streams, and a strategic commitment to campus mental health and well-being. Colleges that recognize mental health as fundamental to student success demonstrate this commitment not just through words but by investing in and aligning the people, policies, processes, and practices critical to building mental health systems that meet the needs of today’s students.

IN PRACTICE

- Select one or more evidence-based frameworks to help guide your institution’s activities and decision-making (see [Overview of Guiding Frameworks](#) subsection).
- Convene a cross-sector team of stakeholders at your institution to lead efforts to support postsecondary mental health.
- Assess your postsecondary mental health system to identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities to address (see [Appendix A](#)).

Develop a Data-Driven Mental Health Ecosystem

A data-driven mental health ecosystem leverages multiple data sources to craft a set of services and programs that are responsive to students' evolving mental health needs. Evidence indicates that college student mental health needs and service-use are changing over time and vary across Texas's colleges and universities (Cruz Ojeda et al., 2023, Lipson et al., 2019, 2022; Kosiewicz et al., 2024). To design effective mental health systems that respond to students' needs, institutions need comprehensive, representative data that provide insights on:

- Student mental health needs and variation between student populations, assessed with clinically validated screening instruments (e.g., PHQ-9, GAD-7)
- Student service use, barriers to care, and levels of unmet need
- The mental health programs, practices, and services provided at an institution
- Impact on student outcomes over time

Population Survey Data

To build a comprehensive mental health ecosystem, institutions must leverage data collection tools that seek to understand the mental health needs of the entire student population, while offering insights related to specific student groups. Institutions in the state of Texas build on considerable strengths in developing a data-driven mental health ecosystem. Many Texas colleges already collect data on student mental health through surveys such as [the Healthy Minds Study](#), [the Hope Center Student Basic Needs Survey](#), [the Trellis Student Financial Wellness Survey](#), [the National College Health Assessment](#), and [the Community College Survey of Student Engagement](#). These population surveys and assessments offer a direct perspective from students, including those who

have not utilized treatment, and allow institutions to see differences between student populations by providing disaggregated results. Institutions can leverage the resources listed above or craft and field a survey that integrates clinically validated screening instruments tailored to their institutional context.

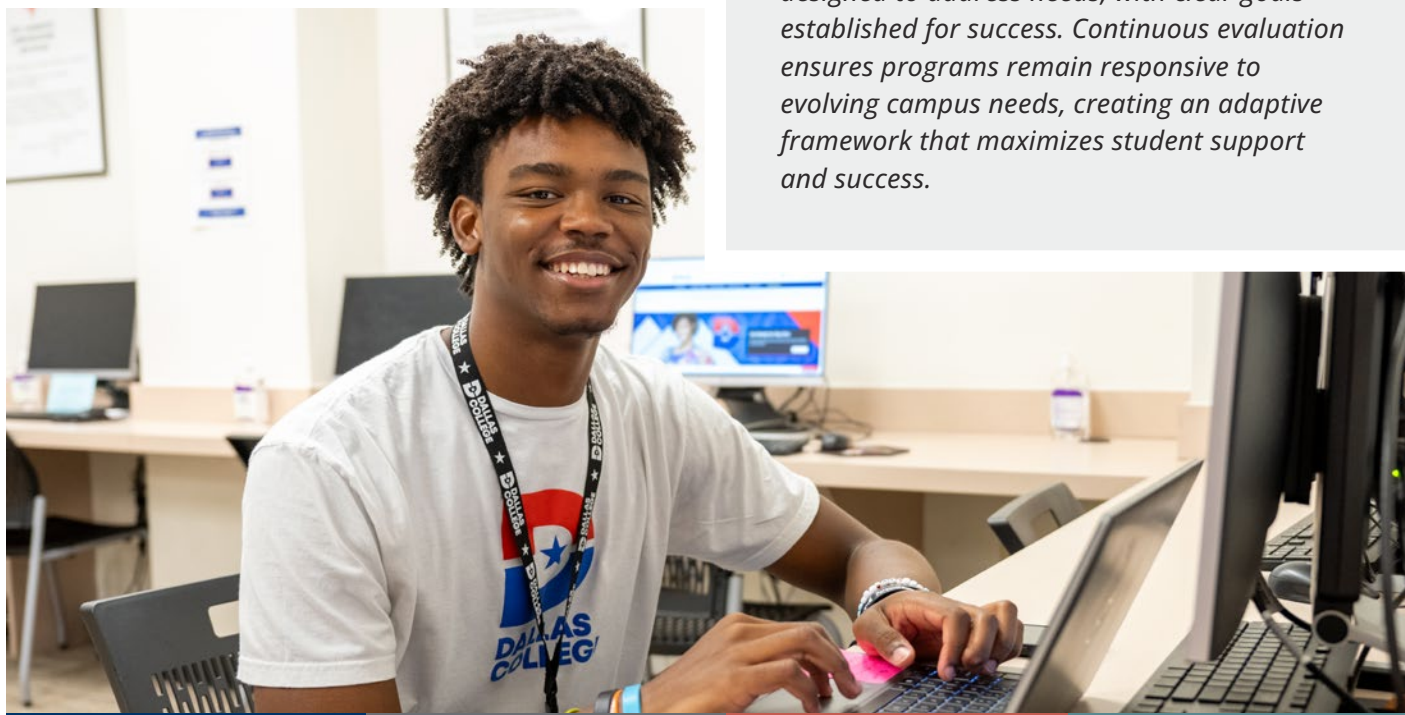
Conducting a population survey with clinically validated screening tools enables colleges to know how many students have a need for, or would benefit from, treatment. Implementing such surveys over time allows colleges to track changes in symptom rates, student experiences, access to care, and campus climate.

Service Utilization Data

Clinical data on students who utilize campus counseling centers is an essential component of designing effective counseling services. These data can provide insights into which students are coming in for care, how they engage over time, and what mental health conditions they face. Many institutions are tracking the needs of these students to understand how they engage and improve over time. When conceptualizing the best clinical data to utilize, it might be helpful to consider the [Texas Behavioral Health Executive Council's](#) guidelines around client information. This will help clinicians feel more comfortable with contributing to data analysis efforts. Many colleges and universities use electronic medical records. [The Center for Collegiate Mental Health](#) helps colleges leverage the aggregate of these records to analyze their utilization data and compare themselves to other institutions. When institutions use student service data to guide programming, they are able to provide offerings that meet the evolving needs of students.

Programmatic Data

In addition to collecting and making use of student-level data, inventorying campus programs, services, and supports will help identify strengths to build on and gaps to address (see [Overview of Guiding Frameworks](#) for more information about why programmatic data is an important component of institutional change). This process should consider all campus efforts, including mental health promotion, prevention, intervention, and treatment. Knowing what is taking place, where, and by whom, helps coordinate services. This can allow institutions to direct faculty, students, and staff to the most appropriate supports and scale innovative and effective practices. Existing tools from the [Hope Center for Student Basic Needs](#) (available through Hope Impact Partnerships), [American College Health Association](#), and [Texas Success Center](#) are available to help colleges take stock of their current programming and areas for growth. Institutions will benefit from defining priorities based on their campus needs and data. This includes setting service goals (e.g., reducing average wait times), identifying underrepresented students who need tailored outreach, and choosing tools (e.g., peer support programs, course-embedded supports) that are evidence-based and feasible to implement.



Data-Driven Services

DALLAS COLLEGE

At Dallas College, the Student Care Network engages in comprehensive data collection to support student success. This unit focuses on health and well-being and utilizes data-driven approaches to identify student needs, implement targeted interventions, and measure program effectiveness. The Student Care Network utilizes needs assessments to analyze outcomes for students receiving services from the constituent units (Counseling and Psychological Services, Health Services and Promotion, and Basic Needs & Community Connections). Partnerships with the College's institutional research office, Strategic Research and Analytics, and other external partners (e.g., The Hope Center) enable analysis of student demographics, health indicators, and utilization rates. Internally, student engagement is measured in relation to persistence, retention, and completion outcomes.

This information reveals consistent challenges such as basic needs insecurities, mental health struggles, and health disparities that affect Dallas College students. Programs are then designed to address needs, with clear goals established for success. Continuous evaluation ensures programs remain responsive to evolving campus needs, creating an adaptive framework that maximizes student support and success.

Longitudinal Data

Finally, institutions benefit from evaluating their mental health investments and efforts over time. Understanding the impact of programming and initiatives, institutions can dedicate resources to supports that work for students and propel student success. Measuring impact is also a powerful tool for garnering buy-in across the institution, especially from executive leadership, and from relevant external stakeholders. Researchers have identified gaps in the current literature surrounding college student mental health programs; this includes needing to better understand what works and for whom (Abelson et al., 2022). Institutions should track whether interventions improve mental health and academic outcomes and if campus services and supports are associated with benefits for students. In addition to using randomized controlled trials and quasi-experimental designs to study the impact of specific mental health interventions,

colleges can assess the long-term progress of campus-wide efforts by measuring changes in:

- Perceptions of the institutional climate with respect to mental health
- Sense of belonging
- Awareness, usage, and satisfaction rates for services
- Helping behaviors (e.g., referring a friend in need)
- Key risk factors like student financial stress

It is ideal to use both quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate what is working. Linking student mental health data to academic and workforce outcomes is key to measuring the long-term impact of mental health investments, services, and programs.

IN PRACTICE

- Collect and disaggregate population-level survey data on student needs as well as access to and preferences for supports (see [Population Survey](#) subsection).
- Harness data iteratively to inform action, shape implementation, drive evaluation, and strengthen efforts over time.
- Inventory campus programs, services, and supports to help identify strengths to build on and gaps to address (see [Programmatic Data](#) subsection).
- Collect and monitor data on students utilizing campus supports and services (see [Service Utilization Data](#) subsection).
- Evaluate impact by linking student mental health data to academic and workforce outcomes.

Close the Gaps in Student Access and Outcomes

Closing gaps in student access and outcomes requires a multi-pronged strategy that builds on data and a public health approach to mental health. In addition to expanding services, it calls for reducing *stigma* and ensuring that services are accessible to all students who need them. Thus far, the playbook has underscored the need for efforts to foster campus environments that promote mental well-being through expanded supports, stronger institutional commitment, and coordinated strategies that reach across all aspects of college life. At its core, this means developing a comprehensive institutional strategy to improve mental health access and outcomes. These broad efforts are essential to addressing the complex factors that impact student mental health and well-being.

Considerable gaps and differences exist at most institutions, including symptom burden, access to care, and insurance access. These gaps are especially evident among historically underserved student populations who experience distress but are less likely to seek support, or students at rural institutions who face limited resources compared to their urban peers (Lipson et al., 2018; Mongelli et al., 2020). Even within a single campus, different student groups may encounter unique barriers that contribute to unequal access and outcomes. However, institutions can take steps to increase access and improve outcomes, especially for low-income, first-generation, and rural students.

Expanding Supports

Beyond making existing offerings more appealing, institutions can reimagine mental health support by fostering preventive and early intervention supports in addition to more traditional treatment options. Effective strategies include skills training programs to help students manage stress, regulate emotions, and build resilience (Abelson et al., 2022). Universal mental health screenings allow for early identification of students in distress to direct them

to appropriate care. Embedding mental health content into academics through workshops, class discussions, or faculty referrals ensures that well-being is not confined to student affairs offices but becomes a shared responsibility. Engaging and training students, student leaders, resident advisors, faculty, and staff in [Mental Health First Aid](#) and other responsive approaches can help to enhance support and referrals.

Students often serve as first responders to their peers' mental health concerns, making them key partners in a comprehensive support system. Peer intervention programs train student leaders to identify warning signs, reduce isolation, and connect peers with resources. Institutions can develop structured peer programs that equip student representatives with the knowledge and skills they need to appropriately support their peers. Launching and scaling peer-to-peer programs like [Active Minds](#), can support a culture of caring when training and supervision are effectively provided (Sontag-Padilla et al., 2018). These programs may help reduce the number of students requiring clinical intervention while fostering a campus culture that is supportive of mental health. Overall, expanding supports requires leveraging a mental health model that provides students with resources that reach beyond more traditional counseling support.

Consideration for expanding supports

When integrating non-clinical staff into an institution's mental health infrastructure, it is important to be mindful of the Texas Behavioral Health Executive Council's guidelines and HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) regulations. Doing so protects both those offering the supports and those receiving them.

Reducing Stigma

Mental health stigma remains a major perceived barrier to service utilization, especially for groups facing differences in treatment access. To help circumvent this barrier, institutions can launch stigma-reduction campaigns to normalize help-seeking behavior. This can include sharing personal stories, publishing mental health data to dispel myths, and organizing campus events that highlight well-being as a community priority. Promoting positive conceptions of counseling staff by increasing visibility and offering informal engagement opportunities can make services feel more approachable. Mental health conversations can be normalized through multi-channel campaigns that include testimonials, posters, class announcements, and social media content. Messages should also be promoted to students who are part-time, online, or adult learners who may not engage through traditional channels. These strategies can make the mental health services offered by an institution more inviting.

Stigma Reduction Programming

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS RIO GRANDE VALLEY

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's (UTRGV) Front Line Mental Health Support Project is an exemplary approach to stigma reduction and connecting students to care. The project is built on the premise that staff who have close contact with at-risk students can form the most effective front line for connecting those students to needed supports and resources they may not otherwise access.

This initiative normalizes mental health conversations across campus by strategically training campus community members in ASK & Refer, which leverages Active Minds' innovative Acknowledge, Support, Keep-in-Touch (A.S.K.) approach. Through this, UTRGV creates a robust front line where everyone—student advisors, athletic personnel, teaching assistants, peer leaders, and more—is trained to identify warning signs, reduce isolation, and confidently refer others to appropriate care.

By partnering across departments and leveraging student leadership, UTRGV demonstrates how institutions can move beyond siloing mental health in counseling centers, and instead, embed it throughout campus life.



Increasing Service Accessibility

Like stigma, barriers such as lack of affordability, transportation, and scheduling, can also keep mental health care out of students' reach. Texas faces a shortage of licensed mental health professionals, especially in rural areas (see [Maximize the Mental Health Workforce](#) section). Telehealth can close this gap. Institutions can increase access to telehealth through their own counseling center and/or investment in virtual mental health platforms (see list of examples in [Appendix D](#)). Hybrid models, which offer the combination of synchronous in-person or telehealth appointments with asynchronous digital tools, can also provide increased access, engagement, and efficacy (Chen et al., 2024).

Low-income and first-generation students often face compounded challenges, such as limited health insurance, housing instability, and lack of time or

transportation (see [Cultivate Caring Campuses and Communities](#) for information about holistic student basic needs support). Institutions should direct funding to partners for free or low-cost counseling, transportation support, outreach to adult learners, and bilingual services. Programs should be tailored to students who face higher risks of untreated mental health conditions. Institutions can address these concerns by directing efforts toward system-based approaches, including partnerships to co-locate services on campus, working with other organizations to promote greater health care enrollment, and other structural approaches.

By implementing these strategies, Texas institutions of higher education can remove long-standing access barriers and ensure that all students receive timely, responsive, and life-changing mental health support.

IN PRACTICE

- Develop a mental health access plan that provides clear pathways and on-ramps, especially for those less likely to access services.
- Reduce stigma through campus-wide initiatives (see [Reducing Stigma](#) subsection).
- Introduce tools that promote prevention and early intervention (see [Expanding Supports](#) subsection).
- Expand telehealth and flexible service models.
- Fund targeted programs to address differential needs.

Cultivate Caring Campuses and Communities

Colleges and universities enhance student mental health outcomes when they consistently communicate with students and comprehensively support *basic needs security* through intentional service delivery. Basic needs insecurities are correlated with negative mental health outcomes, such as anxiety and depression (Broton et al., 2022; Coakley et al., 2022). Challenges related to basic needs, housing insecurity, food insecurity, and lack of health care can have a compounding impact on mental well-being. Colleges and universities can proactively address these difficulties by cultivating caring campuses, providing responsive and holistic basic needs support, and making students aware of the supports available to them.

Basic needs, mental health, and achievement are inextricably linked, as evidenced by data from The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs (2025): 79% of

students who had previously stopped out of college and subsequently re-enrolled, or were considering stopping out, stated it was due to basic needs insecurities (BNI) (e.g., emotional stress/mental health, lacking money for living expenses, childcare/caregiver responsibilities, lack of transportation, lack of access to the Internet/technology) or financial reasons (e.g., cost of attendance, insufficient financial aid, cost of textbooks or course materials, unexpected expenses, or emergencies). Additionally, according to survey data from Texas (The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs, 2024), mental health and basic needs are interconnected. Of the Texas students surveyed, 74% of students experiencing significant mental health symptoms also faced basic needs insecurity. Supporting basic needs security is a key component of student success and building a comprehensive mental health framework.

Supporting Basic Needs Security

For institutions wanting to strengthen their supports for student basic needs, [The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs](#) provides coaching, training, resources, and data for administrators, faculty, and staff.



Basic Needs Interventions

Providing holistic basic needs support is emerging nationally as a promising practice to increase student retention and completion and ensure a caring culture and environment. In response, the core services offered by some colleges include food pantries, clothing closets, emergency grants, transportation and childcare referrals, state aid application assistance, mental health counseling, and financial well-being opportunities. Although many institutions are making these supports available to students, according to The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs (2024), awareness plays a critical role in impacting student utilization of basic needs supports:

A key step to making resources available to more students is dismantling barriers to access. Across colleges, lack of awareness of resources was identified by students as the primary barrier to accessing supports. We assessed a wide range of barriers. We asked students whether awareness, application, time, transportation, finding childcare, concerns about resource limitations, privacy or stigma prevented them from accessing supports. The top barrier (cited by 66% of students) was awareness, including being unaware of the existence of supports, how to access them, or whether they were eligible. (p. 21)

It is therefore essential that colleges communicate with students through effective means including email, texts, online learning management systems, and other platforms. In addition to communications campaigns and other awareness strategies, many colleges were successful through the expansion of such basic needs supports (The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs, 2024). Colleges indicate that community partnerships, learning communities, and engaging student champions also help move the needle on these efforts. Promising basic need support models include those that use assessment and open communication to provide students with the resources they need.

Basic Needs Security Strategy ALAMO COLLEGES DISTRICT

The Alamo Colleges define advocacy as identifying and providing resources to students that help them overcome basic needs insecurity through support, access, and improved self-efficacy. This definition as well as the associated conceptual framework the district developed are based on a case management model using holistic assessment to serve students who access services within the advocacy centers. The case management model includes a single point of entry, a dedicated point of contact for each student, an assessment of individualized student needs, and monitoring/outreach on an ongoing basis to ensure students' needs are met throughout their education journeys.

As part of a district-wide commitment to student success and meeting the basic needs of students experiencing poverty, on-campus advocacy centers have been implemented across all five of the Alamo Colleges. The five core services provided by the advocacy centers are food, shelter, clothing, mental health, and physical health.



A Caring Campus

The Caring Campus concept (Institute for Evidence Based Change, 2020) is based on research that shows students who feel more connected to their college are more likely to be retained, persist from semester to semester, and complete a credential. Increasing connectedness, therefore, can go a long way toward increasing the likelihood that enrollment will be maintained.

It also plays a key role in increasing student awareness of resources available to them. This connection is facilitated through intentional and consistent communication. It is worth noting that students are often overwhelmed with the amount of information they need to sift through to access the resources that are beneficial for them. To facilitate effective and meaningful communication and help students prioritize the information that is vital to their success, campuses must provide focused, targeted, well-timed, and concise communication with students. This is especially necessary when communicating essential resources associated with basic needs and mental health supports. Institutions can engage with students to learn what is most helpful for them, when, and in what format.

Professional staff ensure student connectedness by making the following commitments:

- They take time to fully understand the students' needs/concerns and ensure that they have been addressed.
- They greet students, and when they see those who need help, they offer assistance and take students where they need to go.
- They commit to a standard and reasonable response time for voicemails, emails, and texts.
- They maintain information on webpages, directories, email signatures, etc.
- They understand what campus and community resources are available, so that they make accurate referrals.

When institutions commit to strategies like those outlined above, it creates a dialogue that can increase student awareness of basic needs programming that may benefit them and builds institutional capacity to implement meaningful basic needs interventions in a timely manner.

Through activities which enhance belonging, institutions of higher education in Texas can enhance the mental health outcomes and holistic supports for students on their campuses. More specifically, they can move beyond counseling interventions and involve the entire campus in ensuring students have their basic needs met and the holistic supports necessary not just to survive but to thrive.

IN PRACTICE

- Create a Caring Campus approach with faculty and professional staff.
- Meet the basic needs of students through holistic student supports (see [Basic Needs Interventions](#) subsection).
- Amplify student communications to enhance awareness of supports (see [Basic Needs Interventions](#) subsection).



Maximize the Mental Health Workforce

As we strive to create caring communities and improve the mental health of students, investing in the behavioral health workforce will be a critical challenge and opportunity for Texas.

In 2023, 98% of the 254 counties in Texas were designated as mental health professional shortage areas by the federal government, defined as more than 30,000 residents per clinician (Simpson, 2023). For colleges and universities, this shortage creates obstacles in providing adequate mental health support to students at a time when such services are increasingly in demand. However, institutions can implement strategies at all levels of their campus mental health system to navigate these constraints while maintaining quality support for students and investing in the future.



Leveraging Current Resources

Despite limited capacity of mental health professionals, institutions can optimize current staffing and resources by expanding peer supports, leveraging non-clinical staff, and reimagining clinical roles and compensation for on-campus providers. These strategies bolster both the Universal Supports and Therapeutic Supports strategies noted above (see [Adopt A Public Health Approach to Overall Well-being](#)), which are important for prevention and early intervention, including averting costly crises. As noted previously, the Texas Behavioral Health Executive Council guidelines and HIPAA regulations are key considerations for institutions when looking to utilize non-clinical staff. Nevertheless, some tasks often performed by licensed clinicians could be reassigned to trained non-clinical staff, including:

- Managing referrals to community partners
- Handling scheduling and administrative functions
- Working with insurance providers
- Facilitating certain support groups

Colleges and universities can also equip students with the necessary mental health knowledge, skills, and, when appropriate, certifications to support their peers. With the right training, students can act as ambassadors, sharing best practices or resources as peer counselors providing real-time support (Mowreader, 2024).

Institutions can also attract and retain more behavioral health professionals by reconfiguring what campus clinical roles look like. While campuses may not always be able to compete with private practice compensation, they can address burnout and increase job satisfaction by offering more autonomy related to defining role responsibilities, such as balancing the provision of therapy with fulfilling outreach and engagement opportunities.

Investing in Future Resources

Additionally, there are numerous ways that Texas colleges and universities can be and are educating the next behavioral health workforce.

From certificate programs to associate, bachelor's and master's degree programs, institutions of higher education are actively investing in programs that meet local and regional needs. For example, [the Behavioral Health Care Management Advanced Technical Certificate](#) equips individuals with an associate or baccalaureate degree in any discipline

to work in behavioral health management. Colleges and universities can raise awareness around these credential opportunities as well as specific loan forgiveness and financial incentives in Texas that enable students to pursue these unique and emerging roles. Institutions can also serve as practicum and internship sites, simultaneously expanding service capacity while building relationships with future clinicians who might later join the campus workforce.

Investing in Future Resources

TEXAS'S PSYCHOLOGY FIELD OF STUDY

The revised Psychology Field of Study (FOS) in Texas provides a unified academic framework that strengthens transfer pathways from community colleges to four-year universities, ultimately supporting careers in mental health and professional counseling. By standardizing 18 semester credit hours—including foundational courses like General Psychology, Lifespan Development, Social Psychology, and Statistical Methods—students can transfer their coursework seamlessly into bachelor's programs across the state. Participating universities also accept directed electives such as Abnormal Psychology, Child

Psychology, and Biological Psychology, aligning with the academic foundations required for graduate study in counseling. Through Texas Direct and the FOS agreement, students pursuing Associate of Arts or Science degrees in Psychology are better positioned to enter bachelor's, and later, master's programs that lead to professional licensure, such as the Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) pathway. This coordinated effort supports academic continuity, reduces excess credit accumulation, and helps meet Texas's growing demand for qualified mental health professionals.

These approaches offer institutional and workforce solutions to the needs associated with educating the behavioral health workforce. While many institutions offer direct, immediate solutions, long-term solutions will require engagement from beyond institutions

and institutional leaders to policymakers, licensing boards, and others to address the fundamental workforce shortage through initiatives like expanded funding, financial incentives for new practitioners, and integrated campus health systems.

IN PRACTICE

- Leverage non-clinical staff (see [Leveraging Current Resources](#) subsection).
- Expand peer support programs (see [Leveraging Current Resources](#) subsection).
- Invest in credentials, certificates, and new academic programs.
- Build relationships with interns to incentivize return to campus once a clinician.

The Role of Regional and State Leadership

While so much of the playbook's emphasis falls to institutions to implement, state and regional leaders are essential to realizing this vision. The Texas Postsecondary Student Mental Health Coalition recommends a sustained, statewide effort with a clear goal to integrate institutions of higher education, nonprofit organizations, public agencies, and community and university systems in ways that align efforts and scale impact.

As momentum continues to grow, state and regional leaders can play a catalytic role by:

- Advocating for policy and practice changes at the system or legislative level
- Supporting increased and sustained funding for student mental health services
- Engaging nonprofits, foundations, and community partners to support campus efforts

State and regional leaders can help to coordinate learning communities, regional collaboratives, and broad, statewide technical assistance. Learning communities like those that have been led by The Jed Foundation, The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs, and the Meadows Institute support institutions in developing individualized action plans aligned with statewide goals.

These leaders can:

- Host statewide and regional meetings to foster dialogue and alignment.
- Provide technical assistance to institutions and communities.
- Advocate for integrated, cross-agency support.
- Facilitate ongoing data collection, sharing, and evaluation to track outcomes.

Having shared data collection and coordinated evaluation across the state will be critical to creating an evidence base and strategic investment. By defining consistent goals and metrics across institutions, Texas can build a statewide system that links improvements in student well-being with credential attainment and economic mobility. This type of data will enable real-time learning, support evidence-based practices, and inform continuous improvement.

Through this playbook, the Texas Postsecondary Student Mental Health Coalition has committed to amplifying promising and effective practices across the state. By grounding institutional and state action in evidence-based strategies and centering student voices and experiences, Texas can lead the nation in student mental health reform.



Conclusion

Texas stands at a defining moment in addressing college student mental health. While the challenges are complex and deeply rooted, this playbook demonstrates that practical and scalable solutions are within reach. By building on successful frameworks like the Meadows Institute’s Minding College Minds Framework, institutions can develop a comprehensive approach through five key strategies:

1. Adopt a Public Health Approach to Overall Well-being

Select one or more comprehensive organizing frameworks that provides guidance on supports ranging from health promotion to crisis response.

2. Develop a Data-Driven Mental Health Ecosystem

Collect data through multiple avenues and across student groups to measure gaps and barriers in the environment.

3. Close Gaps in Student Access and Outcomes

Close gaps in mental health outcomes by pairing data-informed action with stigma reduction, expanded early supports, peer engagement, and the removal of structural and financial barriers to care.

4. Cultivate Caring Campuses and Communities

Strengthen student well-being by addressing basic needs insecurity, promoting belonging, and building campus-wide networks of faculty, staff, and community partners who help students connect to support.

5. Maximize the Mental Health Care Workforce

Use relevant existing resources to address the mental health care supply and demand gap while developing certificates and credentials that enhance abilities to meet institutional, regional, and state needs.

The data are clear: too many students are struggling in silence. These realities call us to act with compassion, urgency, and accountability. Institutions must move from isolated interventions to coordinated, integrated systems grounded in shared responsibility and student-centered design.

As such, institutions looking to build a mental health ecosystem of supports can use the recommendations outlined throughout this playbook as a starting point, but they must look to students to understand their needs. Staff, administrators, and leaders must be intentional about consistently incorporating student feedback and genuinely engaging students with kindness and curiosity.

This playbook offers more than strategies—it is a practical toolkit for building a future where every Texas student has access to the support they need to flourish emotionally, academically, and professionally.

Now is the time to lead boldly, invest strategically, and build the campus mental health ecosystems our students deserve. Together, we can create a stronger, healthier, and more hopeful Texas—one student at a time.

Acknowledgments

Authors

Members of the Texas Postsecondary Student Mental Health Coalition authored this playbook, including:

Sara Abelson, PhD, MPH

Assistant Professor and Senior Director, Education & Training, The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs, Temple University School of Medicine

Allyson Cornett, CPH, MPH

Director of Research, Trellis Strategies

Carlos Cruz, EdD

Associate Vice Chancellor, Student Well-Being and Social Support, Dallas College

Navi Dhaliwal, MSc

Director of Economic Research and Data Strategy, Research Institute, Dallas College

Leticia Duncan-Brosnan, PhD

Director, District-Wide Student Advocacy Network, Alamo Colleges District

Carla Fletcher, MS

Research Consultant, Trellis Strategies

Tegan Henke, MS

Senior Fellow, Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute

Kaitlin Hill, MS, LPC-S

Associate Dean of Counseling and Psychological Services, Dallas College

Sayeeda Jamilah, PhD

Operations Manager, Outcomes Lab, Research Institute, Dallas College

Leilani Lamb, MPH, MPAff

Director of Higher Education and Workforce Strategy, Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute

Thaddeus Mantaro, PhD

Dean, Student Health and Wellness, Dallas College

Jenna Parro, MHA

Director for Cross System Strategy and Practice, Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute

Ashley Spicer-Runnels, EdD

Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic & Health Affairs, Texas State University System

Contributors

We would also like to thank reviewers, editors, and thought partners who offered insightful feedback throughout the development of this playbook, including Erica Bumpurs, Sakshee Chawla, Jillian Denman, Jen Esterline, David Mahan, Christy McDaniel, Zainab Okolo, Brittany Pearce, and Eitandria Tello. In preparing this playbook, the Coalition also benefited from webinars and meetings with a variety of mental health, policy, and research organizations. The views expressed in this report reflect the perspectives of the Coalition and may not represent those of individual contributors or their affiliated organizations.

References

- Abelson, S., Lipson, S. K., & Eisenberg, D. (2022). Mental health in college populations: A multidisciplinary review of what works, evidence gaps, and paths forward. In: Perna, L. W. (Eds.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research*, vol 37. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-66959-1_6-1
- Allen, K. A., Kern, M. L., Rozek, C. S., McInerney, D., & Slavich, G. M. (2021). Belonging: A review of conceptual issues, an integrative framework, and directions for future research. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 73(1), 87–102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049530.2021.1883409>
- Bertram, R. M., Blase, K. A., & Fixsen, D. L. (2014). Improving programs and outcomes: Implementation frameworks and organization change. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 25(4), 477–487. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731514537687>
- Broton, K. M., Mohebbali, M., & Lingo, M. D. (2022). Basic needs insecurity and mental health: Community college students' dual challenges and use of social support. *Community College Review*, 50(4), 456–482. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00915521221111460>
- Campion, J. (2018). Public mental health: Key challenges and opportunities. *British Journal of Psychiatry International*, 15(3), 51–54. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bji.2017.11>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). *Mental health: Protecting the nation's mental health*. <https://www.cdc.gov/mental-health/about/what-cdc-is-doing.html>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, August 3). *Well-being concepts*. https://archive.cdc.gov/www_cdc.gov/hrqol/wellbeing.htm
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025, January 31). *Mental health stigma*. <https://www.cdc.gov/mental-health/stigma/index.html>
- Chen, K., Huang, J. J., & Torous, J. (2024). Hybrid care in mental health: A framework for understanding care, research, and future opportunities. *Digital Psychiatry and Neuroscience*, 2(16). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44277-024-00016-7>
- Coakley, K. E., Cargas, S., Walsh-Dilley, M., & Mechler, H. (2022). Basic needs insecurities are associated with anxiety, depression, and poor health among university students in the state of New Mexico. *Journal of Community Health*, 47(3), 454–463. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10900-022-01073-9>
- Cruz Ojeda, N., Kufour, E., Chiu, G., & Benitez, R. (2023). *More than self care: Students speaking out for mental health*. Young Invincibles. <https://younginvincibles.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/New-Agenda-More-Than-Self-Care-v2.pdf>
- The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs. (2024). *Accelerating student success at Texas colleges through supporting student basic needs: A report on The Hope Center's efforts in Texas in 2022-2023*. https://hope.temple.edu/sites/hope/files/media/document/Texas_Final%20%28Web%29_0.pdf
- The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs. (2025). *The Hope Center 2023-2024 Student Basic Needs Survey Report*. <https://hope.temple.edu/sites/hope/files/media/document/Hope%20Student%20Basic%20Needs%20Survey%20Report%20202324.pdf>
-

-
- Institute for Evidence Based Change. (2020). *Caring campus guide*. https://iebcnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/IEBC-CC_Guide1-v2.pdf
- Kosiewicz, H., Kane, H., Miller, T., Sontag-Padilla, L., & Williams, D. (2024). *Understanding how Texas community college campuses are supporting student mental health*. Rand Corporation. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RRA2500/RRA2552-2/RAND_RRA2552-2.pdf
- Lipson, S. K., Kern, A., Eisenberg, D., & Breland-Noble, A. M. (2018). Mental health disparities among college students of color. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 63*(3), 348–356. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2018.04.014>
- Lipson, S. K., Abelson, S., Ceglarek, P., Phillips, M., & Eisenberg, D. (2019). *Investing in student mental health: Opportunities and benefits for college leadership*. American Council on Education. <https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Investing-in-Student-Mental-Health.pdf>
- Lipson, S. K., Zhou, S., Abelson, S., Heinze, J., Jirsa, M., Morigney, J., Patterson, A., Singh, M., & Eisenberg, D. (2022). Trends in college student mental health and help-seeking by race/ethnicity: Findings from the national healthy minds study, 2013-2021. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 306*, 138–147. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2022.03.038>
- McIntosh, K., & Goodman, S. (2016). *Integrated Multi-Tiered Systems of Support: Blending RTI and PBIS*. Guilford Press.
- Mongelli, F., Georgakopoulos, P., & Pato, M. T. (2020). Challenges and opportunities to meet the mental health needs of underserved and disenfranchised populations in the United States. *Focus, 18*(1), 16–24. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.focus.20190028>
- Mowreader, A. (2024, January 9). College students provide mental health education to peers. *Inside Higher Ed*. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/student-success/health-wellness/2024/01/09/six-models-peer-support-college-campuses>
- Simpson, S. (2024, July 17). A look at the Texas mental health workforce shortage. *The Texas Tribune*. <https://www.texastribune.org/2024/07/17/texas-mental-health-workforce-explainer/>
- Simpson, S. (2023, February 21). Texas' shortage of mental health care professionals is getting worse. *The Texas Tribune*. <https://www.texastribune.org/2023/02/21/texas-mental-health-workforce-shortage/>
- Sontag-Padilla, L., Dunbar, M.S., Ye, F., Kase, C., Fein, R., Abelson, S., Seelam, R., & Stein, B. D. (2018). Strengthening college students' mental health knowledge, awareness, and helping behaviors: The impact of Active Minds, a peer mental health organization. *The Journal of American Academic Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 57*(7), 500–507. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29960695>
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2022). *Mental health: Key facts*. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>

Appendix A

Implementation Assessment Excerpt

The Minding College Minds Implementation Assessment is a practical tool designed to help postsecondary institutions evaluate and strengthen their mental health systems using the Meadows Institute’s Minding College Minds Framework for Postsecondary Mental Health. This assessment translates the framework’s comprehensive approach into actionable practices, providing institutions with a roadmap for building robust campus-wide mental health support systems.

The implementation assessment outlines key practices associated with each component of the Minding College Minds Framework—Universal Supports, Therapeutic Supports, Crisis Supports, and Institutional Commitment—then provides guidelines for assessing where your institution lies on the spectrum of pre-implementation (practice not yet adopted) to full implementation (practice is fully integrated into the institution’s operations). This structured approach enables colleges to identify their current strengths, pinpoint areas for improvement, and develop strategic priorities that align with their unique context, resources, and student populations.

Change is iterative, and institutions can find themselves moving forward or backward on the implementation scale over time as circumstances, resources, and priorities shift. For this reason, institutions are encouraged to retake this assessment annually to maintain a current understanding of their postsecondary mental health systems and to identify emerging challenges and opportunities.

The Minding College Minds Framework helps colleges move beyond fragmented approaches toward comprehensive, evidence-based mental health systems that truly support student success. By providing concrete, measurable practices across the full continuum of mental health care, from prevention and early intervention to crisis response, the Minding College Minds Implementation Assessment helps institutions determine their progress toward this goal and offers practical indicators by which they can measure their success. For more information about the Minding College Minds Implementation Assessment at the [Meadows Institute website](#).



Excerpt from The Minding College Minds Implementation Assessment

Find the full Implementation Assessment at the [Meadows Institute website](#).

Detailed Practice	Data Sources	Pre-Implementation	Early Implementation	Full Implementation
Minding College Minds Component Institutional Commitment		Postsecondary mental health systems uphold student well-being and contribute to their persistence and graduation but—like academic programs—their success hinges on ongoing institutional investment of time, strategic commitment, and funding. In addition to financial resources that promote sustainability, commitment from an institution’s people, that is reinforced through its policies, processes, and practices, form the bedrock of a successful comprehensive postsecondary mental health strategy.		
Institutional leaders (e.g., president/ chancellor) have publicly stated the college’s commitment to and prioritization of campus mental health and well-being systems as part of the college’s student success strategy.	Strategic plan, mission vision statements, campus-wide communications, press release	Mental health and well-being are not identified as an institutional priority	Mental health and well-being are recognized, but not formally identified as an institutional priority	Mental health and well-being formally identified as an institutional priority
Institution’s budget includes dedicated financial resources to fund and sustain mental health and well-being personnel and systems.	Institution budget, grant budgets	No funding allocated for mental health and well-being personnel and systems	Grant funding (time-bound funding) allocated for mental health and well-being personnel and systems	Sustained funding allocated for mental health and well-being personnel and systems
The college has a multi-disciplinary committee (including student services staff, counselors, faculty, and students) with a systematic schedule and established feedback cycle to guide the college’s mental health and well-being strategy.	Strategic plan team/ project charter team member roles & responsibilities	The college does not have a committee to lead and guide the mental health and well-being strategy.	The college has an informal committee or group to guide mental health and well-being, but may not have a formal schedule or feedback cycle.	The college has a committee with a systematic schedule and established feedback cycle to guide the mental health and well-being strategy.

Appendix B

In Practice Strategies Summary

In the following pages, we have included all the In Practice strategies associated with the recommendations outlined in the playbook. Once you have read the playbook in full, we encourage you to use the table below along with the questions that follow to meaningfully reflect on and engage with the recommendations and strategies shared in the playbook. It is our hope that institutional leaders can use this appendix to kickstart brainstorming and building a mental health infrastructure on their campus.



Adopt a Public Health Approach to Overall Well-Being	Develop a Data-Driven Mental Health Ecosystem	Close the Gaps in Student Access and Outcomes	Cultivate Caring Campuses and Communities	Maximize the Mental Health Workforce
Select one or more evidence-based frameworks to help guide your institution's activities and decision-making.	Collect and disaggregate population-level survey data on student needs as well as access to and preferences for supports.	Develop a mental health access plan that provides clear pathways and on-ramps, especially for those less likely to access services.	Create a Caring Campus approach with faculty and professional staff.	Leverage non-clinical staff.
Convene a cross-sector team of stakeholders at your institution to lead efforts to support postsecondary mental health.	Harness data iteratively to inform action, shape implementation, drive evaluation, and strengthen efforts over time.	Reduce stigma through campus-wide initiatives.	Meet the basic needs of students through holistic student supports.	Expand peer support programs.
Assess your postsecondary mental health system to identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities to address.	Inventory campus programs, services, and supports to help identify strengths to build on and gaps to address.	Introduce tools that promote prevention and early intervention.	Amplify student communications to enhance awareness of supports.	Invest in credentials, certificates, and new academic programs.
	Collect and monitor data on students utilizing campus supports and services.	Expand telehealth and flexible service models.		Build relationships with interns to incentivize return to campus once they become a clinician.
	Evaluate impact by linking student health data to academic and workforce outcomes.	Fund targeted programs to address differences.		

IN PRACTICE

STRATEGIES WORKSHEET

IDENTIFY THREE STRATEGIES FROM THE TABLE ABOVE THAT YOUR INSTITUTION IS WELL-POSITIONED TO IMPLEMENT.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

REFLECT ON WHY YOUR INSTITUTION IS WELL-POSITIONED TO IMPLEMENT THE STRATEGIES YOU LISTED ABOVE.

IN PRACTICE

STRATEGIES WORKSHEET

WHO MIGHT BE HELPFUL IN BRAINSTORMING WHAT THESE STRATEGIES CAN LOOK LIKE AT YOUR INSTITUTION?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

BRAINSTORM AS A TEAM:

1. How should these strategies be prioritized based on current student needs and institutional capacity?
2. How would these components intersect with each other and other areas of program and service development?
3. Who has the knowledge and/or capacity necessary to successfully implement these strategies?
4. What existing resources (e.g., software, technology, physical space, funding, offices/departments etc.) can be leveraged to utilize these strategies?
5. What support would be needed to implement these strategies?

Appendix C

Glossary

Basic Needs Security

Safe, secure, reliable, and adequate access to nutritious and sufficient food; housing; physical, mental, and reproductive health and health care; internet and technology; transportation; personal hygiene products; childcare; and other essential resources. (The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs, 2025)

Belonging

A sense of belonging—the subjective feeling of deep connection with social groups, physical places, and individual and collective experiences—is a fundamental human need that predicts numerous mental, physical, social, economic, and behavioral outcomes. (Allen et al., 2021)

Guiding Framework

A set of principles or guidelines that creates a shared language, goals, and processes and serves as a roadmap for change efforts.

Mental Health

Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. (WHO, 2022)

Public Health Approach

Public mental health involves a population approach to mental health and includes treatment of mental disorder, prevention of associated impacts, prevention of mental disorder, and promotion of mental well-being, including for those people recovering from mental disorder. (Campion, 2018)

Return on Investment (ROI)

Economic and societal gains from investing in student mental health services, including improved student outcomes and economic productivity. (Lipson et al., 2019)

Stigma

Stigma refers to negative attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes people may hold towards those who experience mental health conditions. (CDC, 2025)

Well-Being

While there is no single definition of well-being, there is a general agreement that well-being includes having positive emotions (e.g., contentment, happiness), not having negative emotions (e.g., depression, anxiety), satisfaction with life, fulfillment, and positive functioning. (CDC, 2022)

Appendix D

Mental Health Telehealth Providers

BELOW, WE HAVE SHARED A LIMITED LIST OF TELEHEALTH PROVIDERS THAT SERVE POSTSECONDARY STUDENTS.

- **[BetterMynd](#)**
Provides flexible, virtual mental health services to help extend campus counseling services, not replace them, through individual counseling and a 24/7 support line
- **[CampusCare](#)**
Offers 24/7 text, talk, and video physical and mental appointments
- **[Mantra Health](#)**
Offers virtual mental health and well-being services to higher education institutions
- **[Timely Care](#)**
Provides a constellation of virtual supports spanning from basic needs, to medical care, to mental health support for over four hundred institutions nationwide
- **[Uwill](#)**
Provides immediate teletherapy appointments, crisis conversations, and well-being programming

Strengthening College Student Mental Health:

A Practical Playbook for the State of Texas

UPDATED: MARCH 6, 2026

The Texas Postsecondary Student Mental Health Coalition



RESEARCH INSTITUTE
DALLAS COLLEGE

