

2025 EDUCAUSE Horizon Action Plan: Mental Health Supports

Nicole Muscanell

EDUCAUSE



2025 EDUCAUSE Horizon Action Plan: Mental Health Supports

Nicole Muscanell, *2025 Horizon Action Plan: Mental Health Supports* (Boulder, CO: EDUCAUSE, 2025)

© 2025 EDUCAUSE

This report is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Learn More

Read additional materials on the research hub for the *2023EDUCAUSE Horizon Report: Holistic Student Experience Edition*, <https://library.educause.edu/resources/2023/10/2023-educause-horizon-report-holistic-student-experience-edition>.

EDUCAUSE

EDUCAUSE is a higher education technology association and the largest community of IT leaders and professionals committed to advancing higher education. Technology, IT roles and responsibilities, and higher education are dynamically changing. Formed in 1998, EDUCAUSE supports those who lead, manage, and use information technology to anticipate and adapt to these changes, advancing strategic IT decision-making at every level within higher education. EDUCAUSE is a global nonprofit organization whose members include U.S. and international higher education institutions, corporations, not-for-profit organizations, and K-12 institutions. With a community of more than 100,000 individuals at member organizations located around the world, EDUCAUSE encourages diversity in perspective, opinion, and representation. For more information, please visit educause.edu.

INTRODUCTION

The rise of mental health challenges in higher education is increasingly impacting students, faculty, and staff, affecting academic success, job satisfaction, and the overall campus climate. Recognizing this, the [2023 EDUCAUSE Horizon Report: Holistic Student Experience Edition](#) highlights student mental health supports as essential, and the [2024 EDUCAUSE Horizon Report: Teaching and Learning Edition](#) emphasized mental health needs for members across the higher education community. Mental health supports are essential for fostering a thriving educational environment in higher education, benefiting students, faculty, and staff alike. As mental health challenges rise across campuses, institutions are increasingly called on to develop comprehensive wellness strategies that address the diverse needs of their communities. As explained in the report “Investing in Student Mental Health” from the American Council on Education, effective mental health supports not only [improve academic and work performance but also enhance overall campus culture, retention, and resilience](#). By focusing on strategic actions to build supportive, responsive, and well-resourced environments, higher education institutions can create a foundation for sustainable mental wellness that enriches the entire academic experience.

To that end, an expert panel was charged with envisioning the preferred future of mental health supports in higher education and creating an action plan targeting that future. Panelists were asked to focus on a 10-year time horizon, which allows us to realistically consider the future impacts of current social, technological, economic, environmental, and political trends. Building on the trends, technologies, practices, and scenarios described in the *2024 EDUCAUSE Horizon Report: Teaching and Learning Edition*, panelists collaboratively generated a description of their preferred future of mental health supports in higher education. Working backwards from this vision, the panel also identified actions that individuals, departments, cross-department collaborators, and cross-institution collaborators can take to make our preferred future a reality.

Activity: Imagine Future You

Imagining the future can be challenging. Our daily lives require us to be present in the moment, considering threats and opportunities that exist around us. Take a minute to jump-start your creativity and foresight by answering the following questions:

- What will your life look like 10 years from today? Envision your home, hobbies, family, and friends.
- What will your work look like 10 years from today? Envision your workspace, daily activities, and colleagues.

Contents

Goals for Our Future State	4
Actions	6
Planning for the Road Ahead	9
Methodology	11
Expert Panel Roster	12

GOALS FOR OUR FUTURE STATE

Asked to describe the mental health supports that they would like to see in higher education 10 years from now, panelists collaboratively constructed the future described below.

Mental health supports are built upon a holistic, integrated approach in which resources are seamlessly woven into the campus community and experiences. In this model, mental health is not only a priority but an essential component of success and well-being for students, faculty, and staff alike. Faculty, staff, and students have direct access to mental health resources within institutional platforms, with dedicated sections offering information on self-care, resilience, and academic accommodations, all readily available alongside their professional and academic tools. This integration ensures that all members of the campus community can access relevant mental health resources without having to navigate separate systems, making support as accessible and natural as accessing academic materials. By incorporating mental health supports into professional development, academic advising, and classroom settings, institutions create a culture that actively supports the wellness of faculty, staff, and students and acknowledges the importance of mental health in achieving academic and personal success.

Leadership accountability and commitment are cornerstones. Institutional leaders play a proactive role, allocating and directing resources toward student mental health initiatives. Recognizing that mental health needs are dynamic and influenced by demographic shifts, leadership continuously evaluates the types of support provided, ensuring they remain responsive to changing faculty, staff, and student demographics. Leaders also prioritize partnerships with telehealth vendors, applying rigorous standards for quality, access, and affordability. By carefully vetting telehealth providers and holding them accountable for meeting best practices, institutions ensure that faculty, staff, and students have access to high-quality mental health care. In this vision, leaders view mental health as an ongoing priority and direct attention to it with the same vigor and focus as other institutional goals.

Faculty and staff are empowered as frontline supporters of student wellness. Institutions implement regular mental health trainings and guidance, integrating these as part of professional development for faculty and staff. Comprehensive training equips faculty and staff to recognize signs of mental distress and confidently refer students to appropriate resources. Mental health literacy among faculty helps them provide empathetic support and guidance while also modeling positive wellness behaviors—such as mindfulness and balance—in their teaching practices. Faculty and staff are given the tools to navigate the challenges of guiding students through mental health concerns, alleviating their concerns about mishandling sensitive situations and providing clear guidance on their roles and responsibilities. Through training, campuses foster a supportive, well-informed community that normalizes conversations about mental health, creating a culture where seeking help is both encouraged and expected.

Resilience, self-regulation, and emotional intelligence become core competencies that every member of the campus develops. Co-curricular modules focusing on these skills are integrated into institutional systems and LMSs, available as interactive experiences that all can engage with during high-stakes projects, transitional periods, or challenging times. Rather than a compliance-driven requirement, these modules encourage individuals to build lifelong skills in a supportive, peer-driven environment where discussions on mental wellness are openly encouraged. By embedding resilience training within institutional platforms and offering specific resources tailored to both academic and professional contexts, institutions promote skill-building that benefits students in their studies, faculty in their teaching and research, and staff in their roles, equipping them with strategies to navigate stress and thrive amid challenges.

Technology-driven mental health solutions play a pivotal role in expanding access to services and supports across campuses. Advanced tools such as virtual reality therapy, telehealth, AI-powered technologies, and technology yet to be invented become key components of mental health offerings as institutions strive to do more with limited resources. These tools allow institutions to reach a larger number of students without overburdening staff. By leveraging technology in this way, institutions can meet diverse needs cost-effectively and with flexibility, providing tailored mental

health services that fit into busy schedules. Additionally, these technological solutions are coupled with ongoing evaluation to ensure they meet students' needs effectively and that there is a return on investment based on cost versus demand for these services, making mental health supports a sustainable and integrated part of campus life. This preferred future reflects an institutional commitment to wellness, where mental health is not peripheral but foundational to the higher education experience.

Panelists generated a list of actions that individuals, units and departments, and multi-unit or multi-institutional teams can take to arrive at this preferred future in 10 years.

Individuals

Individual-level actions in higher education refer to efforts taken by individual faculty, staff, or students to contribute to shared institutional or collaborative goals.

Encourage individual responsibility in self-care.

Empower faculty, staff, and students to develop personal self-care plans and incorporate self-care practices into their daily routines. Allocate time for staff self-care activities and offer flexible work schedules to support individual wellness. Provide evidence-based resources, such as workshops, guides, and self-assessment tools, to help individuals design and sustain effective self-care plans. Integrate these practices into Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and broader wellness programs that embed well-being into the culture of our campuses and create accessible support frameworks.

Promote emotional intelligence and positive leadership.

Train staff and leaders in emotional intelligence and how to lead with positivity, respect, and an understanding of the influence of attitude on others. Invest in training sessions and on-demand access to emotional intelligence resources and expertise.

Establish institution-level funding for mental health.

Allocate dedicated funding from the institutional level to mental health and wellness, allowing individuals and units/departments to customize spending based on their unique needs. Implement a clear, institutional consensus-driven approach to determine spending priorities.

Embed mental health support and self-care into all positions. Encourage every faculty and staff member to integrate support for mental health within their roles, with guidance on providing referrals and support to students. Provide training resources for identifying ways to support mental health, clear guidance on referral processes, and understanding of HIPAA and FERPA requirements and limitations.

Units and Departments

Unit- and department-level actions refer to the collective efforts of functional units or departments (e.g., academic, administrative, and support) to contribute to shared institutional or collaborative goals.

Implement best practices and standards-based guidance.

Units and departments should align their operations and wellness initiatives with best practices and standards, guided by national and international organizations. Provide training on current best practices, effective communication tools, and input from evidence-based mental health frameworks to support implementation.

Develop unit/department wellness policies. Encourage each unit/department to create wellness policies that include committees and designated practices for supporting staff wellness. Allocate time, space, and funding to develop and maintain these policies and committees.

Establish “brave spaces” and support networks. Create spaces within units/departments for open discussions and support networks, including council or sharing circles for meetings and retreats. Allocate time and secure support from campus wellness facilitators, counselors, or speakers; provide training in effective facilitation of these spaces.

Enable unit/department autonomy in allocating institutional funding for wellness. Allocate institutional funding specifically for mental health and wellness and give units/departments autonomy to determine their unique priorities and strategies for spending. Provide training and onboarding for units/department directors to understand their options and align strategies with their needs.

Embed systematic evaluation and continuous improvement for best practices. Establish a system for regular review and updates based on evidence-based frameworks and expert feedback. Utilize communication tools, professional input, and leadership support to foster system-wide adherence to best practices while allowing room for innovation.

Multi-Unit Collaboration

Multi-unit collaboration refers to coordinated efforts between different departments, divisions, or units within an institution to achieve shared goals, solve complex challenges, or enhance services. This collaboration can include partnerships between academic departments, administrative offices, student support services, research centers, and other units, enabling the pooling of resources, expertise, and perspectives.

Embed a wellness model as a strategic priority. Integrate mental health and wellness as a core strategic objective across the institution, encouraging departments and units to work together to create a unified approach. Establish metrics aligned to global health goals and resources dedicated to ensuring comprehensive support. Allocate funding, executive support, strategic communications; prioritize mental health alongside other institutional goals.

Establish a shared leadership approach to mental health and wellness. The office of the president/chancellor, with input from campus mental health and health promotion experts, should set mental health and wellness goals and then delegate authority for implementation to a wellness leader, ensuring that mental health and wellness becomes a collective priority, with each leadership level playing an active role in support. Allocate funding and institutional support for this new leadership role, with regular communication from the president/chancellor's office to the campus community.

Create a chief wellness officer role focused on accountability and change. The chief wellness officer would lead and coordinate wellness initiatives across campus, with responsibilities that include setting and tracking goals, promoting evidence-based practices, and building collaborations with mental health stakeholders. Fund the role adequately, recruit qualified candidates who align with campus culture, and provide communications and focus groups to clarify role expectations.

Embed wellness accountability in annual performance reviews. Add wellness components to staff performance evaluations, establishing clear competencies and behaviors that creates a campus culture that promotes health and well-being. Work with HR to integrate these elements and ensure alignment with institutional goals.

Foster cross-unit/department collaboration for holistic wellness. Encourage collaboration between HR, counseling, employee assistance program, recreation, and other units/departments to develop a holistic approach to wellness that breaks down silos. Promote regular interdepartmental meetings, cross-functional projects, and shared resources to ensure alignment on wellness initiatives.

Organize reflective sharing sessions for multi-unit/departmental engagement. Establish reflective, cross-unit/departmental sessions that focus on sharing experiences, storytelling, and deep listening, with an emphasis on mutual learning rather than formal training. Engage outside facilitators and allocate funding for dedicated sessions focused on wellness and collaboration, with structured follow-up activities.

Multi-Institution Collaboration

Multi-institution collaboration in higher education refers to partnerships and coordinated efforts between colleges, universities, or educational organizations to achieve shared goals, enhance resources, and address common challenges. These collaborations can occur at various levels including regional, international, system-wide, and cross-consortia collaborations.

Adopt a comprehensive wellness framework in collaboration with peer institutions. Work together across units/departments and campuses to create unified mental health and wellness initiatives. Secure commitment from executive leaders, facilitate broad engagement with campus stakeholders, and provide integrated communications and funding to support initiatives. Organize regular cross-institutional meetings to align strategies and share progress, ensuring that mental health remains a prioritized and collaborative effort at every level.

Develop cross-institutional policies to foster a culture of caring. Establish a shared framework that participating institutions can customize, allowing individual campuses to adapt these foundational guidelines to their unique community needs. Facilitate consensus-building sessions across campuses to encourage broad buy-in, cooperation, and alignment in implementing these caring policies.

Establish shared mental health goals, with accountability to a governing body. Define and track common mental health and wellness objectives across participating institutions, with regular reporting to a governing body (e.g., board of trustees or regents). Facilitate stakeholder engagement through collaborative workshops and goal-setting sessions, and implement tracking systems to ensure accountability and alignment across institutions.

Promote regional collaborations and communities of practice for wellness initiatives. Encourage cross-institutional collaboration by establishing regional communities of practice focused on wellness, inviting participation from campuses within the system and outside. Recruit campus leaders willing to participate and allocate time for staff to engage in these communities.

Delegate leadership to campus-based wellness leaders with centralized coordination. Establish a mental health charge and delegate implementation authority on campuses, with cross-campus coordination to share resources and best practices. Allocate funding for wellness leaders, meetings for cross-campus networking, and ongoing support from system-level leaders.

PLANNING FOR THE ROAD AHEAD

Envisioning the future we want to see is important and exciting work, but real progress can only be made when individuals like you create change. Use the following activities to solidify your vision of the future and make plans to take action.

Activity: Understand Your Institution's Needs

The best plan of action always starts with understanding the starting line. Use this activity to explore the current needs and interests of stakeholders at your institution.

- Make a list of key stakeholders at your institution who will be interested in shaping the future of mental health supports. Consider a wide range of perspectives from a variety of operational units: academic units, information technology, information security, privacy, student services, legal, etc.
- Select a sample of individuals from your list and talk to them about the present and future states of mental health supports at your institution. Some guiding questions are:
 - What is our current state of mental health supports?
 - How do we currently support or suppress mental health supports?
 - What are our biggest challenges related to mental health supports?
 - What are our greatest assets related to mental health supports?
- Take notes on key takeaways from your conversations. Include references for resources and documents such as websites and institutional policies.
- Reflect on your findings and consider how they align with the findings in this action plan. Is your institutional vision aligned with panelists' ideas? Are any individuals at your institution ready to take some of the actions described in this action plan?
- Make a plan for next steps. Usually, this starts with identifying key members of your professional network who can partner with you. Consider stakeholders who are ready to hit the ground running, colleagues who already have considerable influence and can break down barriers, and colleagues or units that might be resistant to change and need help seeing your vision.

Activity: Build an Action Roadmap

Now that you have a clear picture of where you are, where you want to go, and who is going to help, you're ready to develop an Action Roadmap (adapted from the [Institute for the Future](#)). This activity is best accomplished collaboratively, so consider working with some of the individuals you identified in the activity "Understand Your Institution's Needs." Start with the right side of this tool, describing the goals and elements of your preferred future, using the future described in this report as inspiration. Then review the findings you generated with "Understand Your Institution's Needs" and describe the short-, mid-, and long-term actions that will carry you from today's reality to the future you want to see.

BUILD AN ACTION ROADMAP

Short-term _____

Milestones

Mid-term _____

Milestones

Long-term _____

Milestones

Describe your preferred future

Easier Activities	Easier Activities	Easier Activities	
Harder Activities	Harder Activities	Harder Activities	

© 2023 Institute for the Future. All rights reserved. SR-2300B | CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

More Resources for Taking Action

As you work toward supporting mental health at your institution, be sure to explore these resources:

- [The American College Health Association \(ACHA\): Mental Health Best Practices and Healthy Campus Framework](#)
- [Inter-association Definition of Well-being](#)
- [The Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting Universities and Colleges](#)
- [Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors \(AUCCCD\)](#)
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#)
- [National Institute of Mental Health \(NIMH\)](#)
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#)
- [The Higher Education Mental Health Alliance \(HEMHA\)](#)
- [Active Minds](#)
- [The Jed Foundation](#)
- [The Steve Fund](#)

This *2025 Horizon Action Plan: Mental Health Supports* is grounded in the perspectives and knowledge of an expert panel of practitioners and thought leaders who represent the higher education teaching and learning community. The members of this group were sought out for their unique viewpoints as well as their contributions and leadership within their domains.

Dependent as the Horizon Report efforts are on the voices of its panel, every effort was made to ensure those voices were diverse and that each could uniquely enrich the group's work. For this action plan, we adopted and adapted different components of the Institute for the Future (ITF) foresight methodology. First, we asked panelists to review the trends, technologies and practices, and scenarios from the *2024 EDUCAUSE Horizon Report: Teaching and Learning Edition* and to describe their own vision of the preferred future of mental health supports in higher education. Second, panelists were directed to list the threats and opportunities that might imperil or bring momentum to their preferred future and to brainstorm

possible actions in response to those threats and opportunities. The data produced as a result of these efforts have been used to create the action plan featured in this report. EDUCAUSE staff provided group facilitation and technical support but minimal influence on the content of the panel's inputs and discussions. This was done to reduce the potential introduction of bias into the results and to allow for this organized group of experts themselves to discuss and converge on a set of actions for the future based on their own expertise and knowledge.

The panel discussions were held remotely on September 24, 2024, by Zoom.

EXPERT PANEL ROSTER

We would like to acknowledge and express our deepest gratitude to the panel of experts listed below who were responsible for generating all of the big ideas summarized throughout this resource. Their brilliant thinking and rich discussions were the foundation of this work, and this resource simply would not exist had it not been for their dedication to this project and their passion for serving higher education.

Kim DeBacco

Lead Instructional Designer for Learning Spaces Pedagogy
University of California, Los Angeles

Jennifer Henkle

Director, Sexual Violence Prevention and Response
National Association of Student Personnel Administrators
(NASPA)

Marcus Hotaling

Director, Eppler-Wolff Counseling Center
Union College

Thad Mantaro

Dean, Student Health and Wellness
Dallas College

Nate McKee

Director, Bruin Learn Center of Excellence
University of California, Los Angeles

Shari Robinson

Assistant Vice President of Student Life
Executive Director, Health & Wellness
University of New Hampshire

Kathe Pelletier

Senior Director, Community Programs
EDUCAUSE

Nicole Muscanell

Researcher
EDUCAUSE

Keturah Young

Communities Program Manager
EDUCAUSE