

## **Mental Health and Higher Education**

**Pass legislation to increase mental health literacy on college and university campuses and ensure parity with respect to policies and procedures for students experiencing mental health issues.**

**Summary:** Seven out of 10 college students have experienced mental health issues in 2023. The crisis is not limited to students, as rates of burnout among college faculty are also increasing. We urge New York State to pass legislation to increase mental health literacy and require colleges to review and update policies around mental health issues, including medical leaves of absence, to be consistent with physical health.

### **Highlights**

- ✓ Mental health is the number one stressor for college students.
- ✓ The data continues to identify a college mental health crisis dating back to 2007. The college mental health crisis worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although a 2024-2025 Health Minds Study showed some positive trends, more than half of college students (52%) reported high levels of loneliness, and only one-third reported wellness.
- ✓ The impact is not just limited to students. More than half of college faculty report signs of professional burnout, with 40% considering leaving their current jobs as a result of COVID changes.

### **Legislative Request**

- ✓ Support passage of S1008 (Sen. Brouk) this session to increase mental health literacy and require colleges to review their mental health policies and procedures for consistency with physical health policies regarding events such as medical leaves of absence and return to campus.

### **Talking Points**

- ✓ There's evidence of a college mental health crisis dating back to at least 2007 that continues and is exacerbating.
- ✓ At least two federal lawsuits found that colleges' policies for student mental health, especially crisis and leaves of absence, are not always fair or consistent with how colleges treat a physical illness or injury.
- ✓ New York must act to require colleges to at least review their mental health policies and, if necessary, update them to reflect parity between physical health and mental health.

## Background

For most college students, the period of time engaged in higher education represents a critical stage of development in their lives and has serious implications for success later in life. Students are becoming independent adults, navigating the challenges of academic life and living on their own for the first time apart from direct parental guidance. Yet, at the same time, they are entrusted to the care and supervision of colleges, which bear significant responsibility for student safety and well-being. The data demonstrates a crisis that emerged before the COVID-19 pandemic and was exacerbated and continues today. Data from an April 2022 Active Minds study showed a 135% increase in depression and 110% increase in anxiety among college students between 2013 and 2021, and in 2021, fully 60% of college students met the criteria for one or more mental health conditions.<sup>1</sup>

There is general consensus among clinicians that college students' demand for services has dramatically outstripped the capacity and rate of growth of available mental health care systems. Post pandemic, concerns remain as a Healthy Minds survey during the 2023-2024 academic year found 38 percent of undergraduates had symptoms of moderate or severe depression.<sup>2</sup> Although the 2024-2025 Health Minds Study showed some positive trends, only one-third reported overall wellness, noting "Mental health concerns remain elevated post-pandemic."<sup>3</sup>

This crisis is not limited to college students, but pervades the mental health and wellness of the whole college, including faculty, staff, and students. In a November 2020 survey conducted by [Course Hero](#), more than half of college faculty report signs of professional burnout, with 40% considering leaving their current jobs as a result of COVID changes. While stress was high at the onset of the pandemic, research has found that faculty anxiety appears to be increasing, with more faculty reporting peak stress now than at the beginning of the pandemic.

Two major federal lawsuits and subsequent settlements (at Stanford and Yale) have further highlighted the inconsistent policies and procedures colleges and universities have had with respect to leaves of absence for mental health as compared to physical health. This emphasizes the need for New York State to pass comprehensive legislation to enhance mental health literacy and require colleges and universities to review their policies and practices for responding to student mental health challenges and ensure parity. These policies include, but are not limited to, leave of absence and return to campus, as well as policies for suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.bu.edu/articles/2022/mental-health-of-college-students-is-getting-worse/>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.insidehighered.com/news/students/physical-mental-health/2024/09/11/college-students-are-less-depressed-more-mentally#:~:text=Student%20mental%20health%E2%80%94trend%20rather%20than%20an%20anomaly>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.insidehighered.com/news/student-success/health-wellness/2025/09/11/college-student-mental-health-remains-poor-minority#:~:text=Only%20One%2DThird%20of%20College,significant%20share%20of%20college%20students.&text=Nearly%2040%20percent%20of%20college,according%20to%20a%20recent%20survey.&text=College%20students%20continue%20to%20report,30%20percent%20in%202018%E2%80%93319>

