

SWOT: Mental health services on college campuses

<p><b>Strengths</b>          More affordable for students than public or private mental health services.          Provides equal opportunity for health while avoiding the complexities of the healthcare system.          Easier and earlier access to care because campus health centers are closer to dorms and classes.          Off-campus providers require more out-of-pocket expenses and increase scheduling barriers for students.</p>	<p><b>Opportunities</b>          There is a rising demand among students and parents for mental health services on campuses.          Uptick in student anxiety and depression due to the pandemic, <a href="#">73% of students have experienced a mental health crisis.</a>          Increase collaboration and partnerships with health professionals.</p>
<p><b>Weaknesses</b>          Not advertised as much as other campus services.  <a href="#">Only 15% of students utilized college-offered counselling.</a>          Some students may already have external access to care (are already seeing another therapist).</p>	<p><b>Threats</b>          Stigma of therapy and intervention creates a negative atmosphere surrounding campus counselling.          National shortage of psychiatrists - <a href="#">60% of the 3,000 U.S. counties do not have psychiatrists.</a>          Services are getting cut due to budgeting issues.</p>

**Communication challenges & how to address them:**

One communication challenge is that college students prefer concise, valuable information. College students like to save time, they have shorter attention spans due to the pandemic, which emphasizes the need for inclusive messaging that immediately raises feelings of resonance. Another challenge is that we are dealing with latent, aware, and apathetic publics. Meeting students where they are requires conveying a variety of messages depending on how much they already know or have experience with. These concise messages should be in places we know students are already looking, like on buses, bathroom stalls, or social media platforms like Tik-Tok.

To improve use of mental health services, we must assume everyone is in their own capacity of seeking help. Starting out we would need to meet students exactly where they are: on campus. Taking insight from the "Let's Talk" campaign at Cornell University, their strategy “sends mental health counselors to popular student venues around campus to offer students informal opportunities to speak with clinicians. By meeting students where they are, the campaign decreases barriers to services and encourages help-seeking behaviors.” (Active minds, inc.)

Another way to improve use would be to offer services for free, at least for students that utilize financial aid or grants for university costs. Young adults aged 18-22 scored the highest loneliness score of 48.3 in a recent study of 20,000 adults, making them the generation feeling most lonely (US). The more we are able to prove that this is a nationwide crisis, and that students are not alone, the more successful the services will be.

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