

Universities of Wisconsin Student Behavioral Health Initiative Summary of Activity

Updated: August 2026

Background

The Student Behavioral Health Initiative emerged following a Senior Student Affairs Officer [presentation to the UW System Board of Regents in April 2019](#), which resulted in the establishment of three workgroups to develop recommendations for addressing the growing influence of mental health issues on the personal and academic lives of students. Counseling, health, academic and student affairs professionals representing all thirteen UW universities participated in the workgroups, and recommendations were submitted to then President Ray Cross in March 2020, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The workgroups adopted a comprehensive public health framework composed of the following levels of intervention to guide the work of the initiative:

- **Prevention/Health Promotion:** Creating healthy campus environments, providing for basic needs, promoting connectedness, and teaching skills to improve well-being for all students
- **Early Intervention:** Reaching targeted/vulnerable populations and providing resources to address issues early
- **Treatment & Crisis Response:** Providing critical treatment and crisis response resources to help those in greatest need

Additionally, an executive oversight committee made recommendations related to operations, policy, and data to inform ongoing behavioral health efforts.

Strategies and Projects

The following tables outline the strategies and projects recommended by the original workgroups, as well as others emerging since the project's inception. Funding, implementation dates, and other status information is included where applicable.

Focus Area - Prevention		
Project Title	Description	Status
Mini-Grant Program	The objective of the program is to provide one-time funding to universities for innovative programming or strategies that address student mental health and well-being. Successful programs are shared for potential adoption and scaling at other UW universities. Beginning in 2024-25, behavioral health mini-grant opportunities were subsumed into the Student Success Mini-Grant program. This allowed for broadening the focus of grant	Three \$25,000 grant distributions were completed under the initial mini-grant structure in Fall 2021, 2022, and 2023. Projects received up to \$5,000 for use during the academic year and reports were submitted at the end of the academic year documenting outcomes. Under the new mini-grant program, \$75,000 in grants were distributed in both Fall 2024 and Fall 2025. To date, fifty-six mini grant projects have been funded for initiatives related to student success and behavioral health, with

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	proposals and increasing the maximum award from \$5,000 to \$15,000. <u>Funding:</u> UW Administration	all UW universities receiving funding for more than one project. In 2026, a five-year report was created to summarize the mini-grant projects awarded thus far.
MIEA/Koru Workshops (Mindfulness Institute for Emerging Adults)	MIEA (formerly Koru Mindfulness) is an evidence-based curriculum designed for teaching mindfulness, meditation, and stress management to college students and young adults. Workshops were first offered at UW-Superior through the Pruitt Center for Mindfulness and Well-Being and eventually expanded via virtual offerings to students at other UW universities during the pandemic. In three successive semesters beginning Fall 2021, virtual participation in MIEA workshops grew from 10 to 43 students from across UW universities The success of the program prompted other UW universities to request training so they could better serve their own students. <u>Funding:</u> ARPA funds and UW Administration	Superior hosted a MIEA certification training in Summer 2024 during which 28 UW professional staff (at least 2 from each UW) were equipped with the skills to expand workshops to all UW universities. In the first year post-training, over 300 participants attended MIEA workshops, and a community of practice was established to provide instructors with ongoing support, information sharing, and troubleshooting. In 2025-26, 19 of the original 28 instructors remained active and renewed their MIEA certifications and delivered 49 MIEA workshops attended by 376 participants. For 2026-27, 18 instructors have re-certified, and UW Admin joined the new MIEA Institutional Partners Program (MIPP), which will provide unlimited workshop materials to participants and provide one free instructor training, and additional discounted trainings, to help maintain a healthy pool of instructors across UW universities.
Pruitt Center for Mindfulness & Wellbeing Speaker Series	The Pruitt Center hosts twice-yearly speaker series with national experts, focused on mental health and well-being topics, which are offered to the UW-Superior community and the public. The series was offered virtually during the pandemic to reach a wider audience and has continued in this format. UW Administration began providing annual financial sponsorship during the 2022-23 academic year. <u>Funding:</u> UW-Superior, UW Administration, and Other	Mental health and well-being topics from national experts have included: <i>Gratitude; Exercise and Well-being; Neuroplasticity: The Science of Changing Your Brain; Mindfulness and Healing Conversations; Unwinding Anxiety; Improving Sleep; The How, What and Why of Happiness; Dopamine Nation: Finding Balance in the Age of Indulgence; Awe: Meeting the Crisis of Our Times.</i> Since 2022-23, attendance at these biannual events has included approximately 800 UW faculty and staff from outside of UW-Superior.
Healthy Minds Program App Course Integration	The Center for Healthy Minds at UW-Madison is internationally known for research on the neuroscience of well-being. Their non-profit affiliate, Humin (formerly Healthy Minds Innovations) created a mobile app that teaches well-	In 2024-25, three additional UW universities joined the pilot, assigning weekly learning and practice modules from the Healthy Minds Program App to 1,040 students as part of course curriculum. Post-semester analyses showed reductions in stress,

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	being skills through meditation practice. In 2022-23 UW-Superior piloted integrating a tailored, 15-week student version of the app into a required health and wellness course. In 2024-25, ARPA funds paid for Humin to streamline their processes for delivering student data to instructors, paving the way for more widespread curriculum integration at other UW universities. In 2025-26, the initiative was approved as one of three priorities recommended by the President's Advisory Committee on Mental Health & Wellbeing. This will provide funding to 1) keep the app free for students, 2) develop Canvas integration to ease faculty burden of monitoring student participation data, and 3) recruit additional UW instructors/courses to expand access and uptake. <u>Funding:</u> UW Administration mini-grant; American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds; UW Administration	improvements in coping, and positive change in the four Healthy Minds program pillars: awareness, connection, insight, and purpose. In 2025-26, the initiative expanded to a total of six UW universities that provided this evidence-based well-being skills training to an additional 1,500+ students. In addition to the 15-week version of the app, an 8-week version was also created and piloted by instructors teaching shorter courses. Pre/post data on both the 8-week and 15-week courses showed statistically significant and meaningful reductions in student stress and hopelessness, and improvements in coping, self-efficacy, and the four Healthy Minds program pillars: awareness, connection, insight, and purpose. Anecdotal reports from instructors are uniformly positive, noting that even students who are initially dubious about the purpose of the app generally begin to perceive benefit after three or four weeks of engagement. Initiative partners are interested in collecting additional evaluation and research data in future semesters.
President's Advisory Committee on Mental Health and Well-Being	The purpose of the President's Advisory Committee on Mental Health and Well-being is to engage in critical discourse about student mental health and well-being, to provide feedback on ongoing initiatives, and to review and recommend innovative and promising practices that could benefit students across the Universities of Wisconsin. The committee met three times in 2024-25 and recommended three priority areas of which were approved by the President: 1) Course integration of the Healthy Minds Program App 2) Strategic identification of mental health service needs and gaps for students	Sub-committees were organized in 2025-26 to develop action plans and create budget requests to support the three priorities beginning in 2026-27: • Course integration of the Healthy Minds Program App ◦ free access to the app ◦ integration with Canvas to ease grading burden ◦ marketing to recruit additional UW participants • Strategic identification of mental health service needs and gaps for students ◦ Administration of the Healthy Minds Student Survey every 4 years, beginning Spring 2027

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	3) Development of a repository of student mental health resources for use by faculty and staff <u>Funding:</u> UW Administration	- Development of a repository of student mental health resources for use by faculty and staff - funding will support continued access to, maintenance of, and marketing assistance for UW-Madison's Recognize, Respond, Refer suicide prevention training across all UW universities.
UW Mental Health Shared Projects Coordinator	A staff member was hired at UW-Madison for 2024-25 to provide additional support for mental health and well-being projects across the Universities of Wisconsin, particularly implementation of the <i>Recognize, Respond, Refer</i> suicide prevention training created by UW-Madison (see next section). This position was extended for a second year in 2025-26 and again in 2026-27. <u>Funding:</u> ARPA funds, UW Administration, and WI Act 15 funding for virtual mental health services	Anna Kopitzke was hired by University Health Services at UW-Madison in 2024 and has provided leadership and support for the following initiatives: <i>Recognize, Respond, Refer</i> suicide prevention training - President's Advisory Committee for Mental Health and Well-Being - BIT/CARE/TAT training - Mental health student org advisor community of practice - Marketing support for virtual mental health services (Mantra Health & Togetherall)

Focus Area - Early Intervention		
Project Title	Description	Status
Recognize, Respond, Refer : Suicide Prevention Training for Faculty and Staff	<i>Recognize, Respond, Refer</i> is an online suicide prevention/gatekeeper training created by staff at UW-Madison's University Health Services to teach non-mental health professionals the knowledge and skills needed to recognize signs of distress and make referrals to appropriate resources. This is a core component of comprehensive suicide prevention and mental health promotion strategies. <u>Funding:</u> UW-Madison, ARPA funds, and UW Administration	Fall 2022: UW universities were provided access to an adapted version of the faculty/staff training in Canvas. Fall 2024: Revised faculty/staff, undergraduate, and graduate student versions of the training were made available with implementation support from the UW Mental Health Shared Projects Coordinator. 2025-26: Campuses received customized versions of RRR including uniform branding, local photos, and internal reference to local resources. A structure was developed for ongoing data collection to track training completion and learning outcomes. 2026-27: The faculty/staff version of RRR will move into Workday, allowing new features for course assignment and tracking.

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Mental Health Screening for Student Athletes and Other Student Groups	NCAA mental health best practices guidelines recommend pre-participation mental health screening for all student athletes. Several UWs have implemented this strategy in cooperation with their counseling centers. Athletes are also made aware of resources to improve their mental health and well-being. Some UWs have expanded screening to other student groups, including resident assistants, student employees, and international students. <u>Funding:</u> Campus-supported with existing resources	First discussed broadly in 2019, participation has grown from a few UW universities offering screening to most UW universities now offering systematic athlete screening. The most common screening instrument used is the CCAPS Screen, created for and normed on university students across the US to screen for the most common psychological problems experienced by college students. An informal survey of counseling directors revealed the following impacts from these screening efforts: • Increased counseling referrals of varsity athletes, doubling in some cases • More requests from coaches for mental health/well-being trainings/workshops • Higher number of coach reports to Behavior Intervention/CARE teams • Increased promotion and uptake of telehealth resources, due to after-hours availability
Training for Behavior Intervention /CARE and Threat Assessment Teams	Behavior Intervention, Campus Assessment Response & Education, and Threat Assessment Teams (BIT/CARE/TAT teams) exist at every UW university and serve a critical role in early identification, support, and deterrence of escalation for students exhibiting signs of distress, disruption, or potential danger to self or others. Training is held on a biannual basis and is organized and planned by a committee of UW university professionals. <u>Funding:</u> UW Administration	The first systemwide training for campus teams was held in August 2021. Topics included <i>Threat Assessment & Management</i>; <i>Legal Issues</i>; <i>Case Management</i>; and <i>Non-Clinical Assessment of Suicide</i>. The second training occurred in spring 2024. A 4-part series of customized topics was coordinated with the National Association for Behavioral Intervention and Threat Assessment (NABITA). The third and most recent training occurred in Spring 2026 and included 4 virtual training sessions and an in-person training. Virtual training topics included: <i>Legal Issues</i>; <i>Threat Management in Wisconsin Higher Education</i>; <i>Triage Risk Assessment (D-PREP Pathways Tool)</i>; and <i>Advanced Violence Risk Assessment (D-PREP Dark Fox Tool)</i>.
Membership: National Association for Behavioral Intervention and Threat Assessment (NABITA)	Membership gives access to resources including the latest news, research, best practices, case law, professional development opportunities, and other developments impacting Behavior	Each UW university has a primary contact for membership who can add additional campus representatives who serve as members of university BIT/CARE/TAT teams.

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	Intervention, CARE, and Threat Assessment teams (BIT/CARE/TAT). <u>Funding:</u> UW Administration	
Togetherall	Togetherall is a virtual peer-to-peer support platform that is moderated by mental health professionals and available to all students as an alternative or adjunct to seeking clinical care. Peer support programs are a well-established component of holistic mental health and wellbeing resource offerings. The typical student using Togetherall does so after hours, is not seeking other forms of mental health support on campus or in the community, and is more likely a member of an underserved population (e.g., BIPOC, trans or non-binary gender), highlighting its unique niche among mental health resource offerings. <u>Funding:</u> American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA); WI Act 15 funding for virtual mental health services	UW-Madison had a pre-existing contract with Togetherall when the remaining UWs entered into a one-year contract from July 2024 to June 2025. During this first year, over 1,500 students engaged with the platform, completing an average of 20 activities (community posts, self-assessments, and/or self-help courses). In 2025-26, Madison discontinued its contract, while the remaining 12 UWs extended through 2027, as part of the Mantra contract renewal. Approximately 450 students engaged with the platform in 2025-26, again completing an average of 20 activities each.
YOU at College	YOU at College is an online personalized student success and well-being platform that directs students toward campus-based and online resources to promote academic and career success, purpose and connection, and physical and mental well-being. YOU serves as a digital “front-door” connecting students to the right resources at the right time. <u>Funding:</u> American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA); WI Act 15 funding for virtual mental health services	YOU was selected as part of the comprehensive RFP for tele-mental health and well-being services in Summer 2022. Twelve UW universities implemented the platform beginning November 2022 through August 2025. Over 9,000 students engaged with the platform over three years, seeking help with the following top concerns: sleep, academics & grades, stress and anxiety, fitness & nutrition, relationships, mindfulness, purpose, and meaning. Three UW universities renewed contracts with the YOU platform for 2025-27. The others chose not to after Mantra Health (see below) added self-help modules into their platform.

Focus Area – Treatment & Crisis Response		
Project Title	Description	Status
Culturally Responsive Approaches to Student Success	UW students consistently express a desire to have staff in direct service positions who mirror the wide-ranging backgrounds of the student population and who understand the unique experiences of a variety of different students. Consistent training is intended to help staff and faculty gain awareness and skill to better serve the needs of all students, regardless of background. <u>Funding:</u> UW Administration	Four systemwide trainings for health, counseling, student affairs professionals, and faculty have been held to date: • January 2021: Working with BIPOC Students (100 attendees) • August 2021: Serving the LGBTQ+ Community (238 attendees) • April 2023: Supporting Autistic College Students (650 attendees) • November 2024: Culturally Responsive Approaches to Mental Health (330 attendees) • November 2025: Student Basic Needs (190 attendees)
Suicide Hotline Information	Governor Evers signed the Student ID Bill on 03/02/20 mandating that suicide hotline contact numbers be listed on student ID cards as quick resource for students. <u>Funding:</u> Campus-supported with existing resources	All UW universities implemented this recommendation during the 2020-21 academic year. Beginning Fall 2023, student ID cards began including the new 988 suicide hotline number, which Congress designated to replace the 1-800 number.
Mantra Health	Mantra Health offers a suite of tele-mental health and well-being resources to supplement on-campus services. These include tele-counseling, tele-psychiatry, emotional wellness and productivity self-help modules with optional coaching, and a 24/7 support and crisis service (via video, phone, or text). These additional resources are intended to improve timely access to care and support and to better reach underserved students. <u>Funding:</u> American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA); WI Act 15 funding for virtual mental health services	After a competitive RFP process seeking tele-mental health and well-being services for twelve UW universities (excluding UW-Madison), a contract with Mantra Health was signed for services from 10/2022 to 8/2025. Thanks to dedicated telehealth funding approved in the 2025-27 biennial budget, the contract was renewed through 8/2027 with a possible extension through 8/2029, pending funding continuation in the next biennium. Utilization of various services since Fall 2022 is summarized below: • Teletherapy: 4,347 students • Telepsychiatry: 1,323 Students • 24/7 mental health support (video, phone, text): 1,100 Students • Coaching: 158 students (began in Fall 2024) • Self-help modules: 1,686 Both satisfaction with services and clinical improvements for teletherapy are comparable to on-campus counseling services.

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UW Mental Health Support 24/7 (Didi Hirsch Crisis Services)	Phone and text service with trained crisis counselors, available 24/7, 365. This service can be consulted for general support as well as crisis situations. Funding: American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)	Implemented simultaneously with Mantra's telepsychiatry and tele-counseling services in 2023. Mantra ended this subcontract and began offering their own 24/7 service in Fall 2024.
SilverCloud	SilverCloud is an evidence-based, online, self-guided resource designed to teach resilience skills and address common concerns including stress, anxiety, and depression. Funding: UW Administration	Active from Fall 2020 - June 2022 under emergency procurement authority. Replaced by the <i>YOU at College</i> platform as part of the 2022 tele-mental health and well-being RFP.
Biennial budget requests for additional on-campus mental health providers	2025-27: President Rothman proposed \$6.5M to improve counselor/student ratio to 1/1000 across UW universities and provide salary adjustments to compete with market forces. 2021-23: President Thompson proposed \$10M to improve counselor/ student ratio to 1/1000, increase access to psychiatric providers, and add case manager staff. Funding: \$0	These requests did not make it into the final Universities of Wisconsin budgets approved by the legislature.

Focus Area – Operations, Policy, and Data		
Project Title	Description	Status
Behavioral Health staff position at Universities of Wisconsin Administration	A recommendation from the 2019-20 behavioral health workgroups was to hire a full-time position to coordinate mental health and well-being initiatives across the Universities of Wisconsin, serve as a resource to campuses, and advise leadership on mental health policy and best practice. Funding: UW Administration	Hired John Achter as Student Behavioral Health Coordinator in August 2020. Additional responsibilities led a title change to Sr. Director of Student Success and Wellbeing in July 2023. A new Director for Wellbeing, Accessibility, and Student Success will be hired to coordinate mental health and well-being initiatives upon John's retirement in Fall 2026.
Dedicated Student Behavioral Health Website	A dedicated website was developed to provide information on the behavioral health initiative, links to campus-	Content has been updated as the initiative has evolved, now including landing pages for the following:

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	based and telehealth services, training resources, a resource library, and reports from the Counseling Impact Assessment Project and the National College Health Assessment. <u>Funding:</u> UW Administration	• BIT/CARE/TAT Training • Culturally Responsive Approaches to Student Success • Mental Health Services • President’s Advisory Committee for Mental Health and Well-Being • Recognize, Respond, Refer Suicide Prevention Training • Wisconsin Area College Counseling Conference (WACCC)
Medical Withdrawal Policy (SYS 807)	This policy was created by a task force of student affairs representatives to ensure consistent, transparent, and compassionate withdrawal guidelines for students who experience a serious or unexpected physical or mental health condition, may need to provide care to an immediate family member, or experience the death of an immediate family member. <u>Funding:</u> Campus and UW Administration supported with existing resources	The policy was approved in January 2021. UW universities developed or revised their own policies to be consistent with the system policy by Fall 2021. The policy was revised in June 2024 based on UW university feedback.
National College Health Assessment (NCHA)	Systemwide administration of a population health survey assessing student attitudes and behaviors related to physical and mental health, alcohol and drug use, and experiences with harassment and violence. Since 2015, this survey has been administered every 3 years across the Universities of Wisconsin during the Spring semester to track trends and plan and evaluate programs and services. <u>Funding:</u> UW Administration	<u>Dates Administered:</u> Spring semester 2015, 2018, 2021, 2024 The American College Health Association (ACHA) provides university- and system-level aggregate reports. Catalyst at UW-Stout produces an additional disaggregated report to show trends among specific student groups. Reports allow university, system, and national-level comparisons to inform individual campus and systemwide initiatives. Next administration planned for Spring 2029, and thereafter shifting to a 4-year cycle, given the addition of the Healthy Minds Student Survey in Spring 2027.
Healthy Minds Student Survey	Systemwide administration of a mental health survey assessing the prevalence of mental health and substance use issues, bystander behavior, help-seeking behavior,	First administration planned for Spring 2027, continuing every 4 years.

Focus Area – Operations, Policy, and Data		
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	stigma, and other potential barriers to mental health resource utilization	
Counseling Impact Assessment Project	The Universities of Wisconsin Counseling Impact Assessment Project was established in 2010 to track mental health concerns, counseling utilization and outcomes and staffing levels across UW counseling centers. This provides UW and national benchmarking data for each university and allows for system-level analyses of counseling utilization and impact. <u>Funding:</u> UW Administration	An annual report is produced which summarizes the results from data aggregated across UW counseling centers each academic year. Counseling center directors have also periodically presented a summary of results to the Board of Regents to raise awareness and advocate for mental health resources.
Wisconsin Area College Counseling Conference (WACCC)	WACCC (formerly WAPCHE) is coordinated by counseling center professionals to bring together their peers from UW universities and other Wisconsin colleges and universities on an annual basis for networking and professional development. <u>Funding:</u> UW Administration and individual attendees	UW Administration funding is provided to support keynote speaker costs—focused on a topic of current relevance to mental health professionals in higher education—and other conference related expenses.