



MEMORANDUM

March 23, 2017

TO: Members of the Board of Trustees

FROM: Nancy L. Zimpher, Chancellor

SUBJECT: Innovations in Providing Mental Health Services to Students

Action Requested

The proposed resolution directs the Chancellor, or designee, to explore innovative and cost-effective ways to improve the provision of mental health counseling services to students on SUNY campuses.

Resolution

I recommend that the Board of Trustees adopt the following resolution:

Whereas in 2016, the State University of New York Mental Health Task Force ("Task Force") collected information on campus resources and needs and found that campus health and counseling centers reported an increase in both regular and crisis mental health appointments, and an increase in hospital admissions; and

Whereas a significant number of students arrive at college with diagnosed mental health problems and a need to continue treatment; and

Whereas the Task Force found that specific student populations, such as veterans, LGBTQ, first generation students, athletes, and international students in need of mental health services often do not seek to procure such services; and

Whereas the significant percentage of students who currently seek mental health services on campus may not therefore accurately reflect the true level of need; and

Whereas students on college campuses may be unable to obtain adequate mental health services due to the limited availability of mental health professionals on campus or in the campus's geographic region, or because the cost of services precludes students from obtaining private counseling services; and

Whereas there is a need to investigate and invest in non-traditional modes of service delivery, including the use of telephonic counseling and online counseling; and

Whereas SUNY has issued a Request for Information ("RFI") regarding available modes of delivering mental health services on college campuses; now, therefore, be it

Resolved that the Chancellor, or designee, shall explore innovative, novel and cost-effective modes of enhancing and delivering mental health services to students on SUNY campuses, including, but not limited to telephonic and online evaluation and counseling, and any other delivery modes identified in the responses to the RFI, in order to maximize the availability of mental health services for SUNY students; and, be it further

Resolved that the Chancellor, or designee, shall develop pilot programs including, but not limited to, telephonic and online counseling, in order to make mental health services available in areas where additional resources could better serve students; and, be it further

Resolved that the Chancellor, or designee, shall provide the Board of Trustees with a report and recommendations concerning pilot programs for expanding access to mental health services on or before October 30, 2017.

Background

The SUNY Mental Health Task Force studied how student mental health issues impact campuses, identified experts within the University, highlighted successful programs, discussed University-wide steps to assist campuses, and provided recommendations for future action. The Task Force was comprised of 33 campus professionals from State-operated campuses and community colleges, and student representatives.

Within SUNY and across the country, it is increasingly evident that a significant number of students arrive at college with diagnosed mental health problems and a need for continued treatment. The data provided in response to a Student Information Survey completed by over 19,000 SUNY students is startling; 49% of those responding self-identified as having an anxiety disorder, and 36% as having depression. In general, 26 % indicated that they have a significant mental health disorder.

Typically, a campus counseling center serves 10 - 12 percent of the overall student population, but this figure does not capture all students in need, as many do not seek care, often due to the unavailability of ready resources or lack of access to care. Consequently, the critical need to find innovative, novel and cost-effective ways to provide critical mental health services to the student population.