

## HOW STATES CAN ADDRESS THE GROWING MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

### The Issue:

COVID-19 has created a student mental health crisis for institutions of higher education. A [report](#) from the National Academy of Medicine confirms that college students across the country are experiencing negative mental health impacts from the numerous dislocations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Student [surveys](#) show that mental health issues represent a growing threat to student retention, academic achievement, and degree completion.

While presidents and other college administrators across the country [readily acknowledge](#) the need to strengthen their student mental health services, financial constraints are a challenge and an obstacle in making critically-needed investments in student mental health.

Failure to address this growing crisis will have a negative impact on the career trajectories of the future workforce and threaten the health of state economies across the nation.

### Use of Federal Stimulus Dollars:

States have an opportunity to address the crisis in college student mental health by using some of the Federal stimulus funds that are being provided to them to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The [Governor's Emergency Education Relief \(GEER\)](#) portion on the CRRSA stimulus bill provides funds to address COVID-19 impacts across any segment of the education spectrum. The amount of GEER II funds coming to every state through the CRRSA Act can be found [here](#). States should consider college student mental health a high priority use for their GEER funds.

States are also receiving Federal funds through the American Rescue Plan Act. They should also consider college student mental health as a high-priority use of these funds, with the goal of mitigating the effects of poor student mental health on college enrollment, academic achievement, and timely graduation.

## Case Studies:

States that have chosen to use Federal stimulus funds for college mental health include:

### Georgia

Governor Brian Kemp [allocated](#) \$11.5 million of the state's GEER funds to support mental health and student support services within the University System of Georgia (USG), a system with 340,000 students across 26 campuses that includes flagships, state colleges, and HBCUs. USG has used the GEER funds to launch a [Mental Health Initiative](#) which has expanded USG's clinical resources to ensure every student has access to mental health services through a 24/7 support line, expanded access to in-person and tele-counseling, and psychiatric prescribing services.

### Ohio

Governor Mike DeWine, in partnership with the Ohio General Assembly, [designated](#) \$16 million to be distributed to public and independent not-for-profit campuses in Ohio to support the increased demand for mental health and counseling support services for students, with \$13.5 million of that assistance to be provided in the form of direct aid to institutions. Of that amount, \$5 million came from CARES Act Coronavirus Relief dollars, and \$8.5 million came from Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) dollars.

### Massachusetts

Under Governor Charlie Baker's leadership, the MA Department of Higher Education is moving to strengthen student mental health services at all three levels of the state's higher education system: UMass campuses, state colleges, and community colleges. The DHE has approved three vendors through an RFP process, and the Governor is making \$3 million available from the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) fund to provide up to 50% reimbursement for the first year of any contract for services beginning in the Fall of 2021.

### North Carolina

The University of North Carolina (UNC) System will use a [\\$5 million grant](#) from the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund to expand mental health services to students at all its campuses. In his announcement, UNC System President Peter Hans remarked "The UNC System appreciates the Governor's support to keep our students on track towards on-time graduation through completion grants

## CASE STUDY

## DEVELOPING A PLAN

and to address urgent mental health needs, especially for at-risk students.”

### Developing a Plan:

It’s been noted frequently during the pandemic that a crisis can also be an opportunity. That adage is certainly applicable to the college student health crisis that’s been markedly exacerbated by COVID-19. The large amount of Federal stimulus dollars coming to states in the form of GEER allocations gives states a way to turn the college mental health crisis into an opportunity by investing in mental health programs at their institutions of higher education.

Towards that end, states should seriously consider the following approaches:

- ✓ Create a state initiative aimed at strengthening mental health services for college students.
- ✓ Decide whether to include all institutions of higher education in the state or focus on the state’s systems of higher learning.
- ✓ Consider using a portion of the state’s GEER funds to support the initial year of the program. This will allow schools to assess impact and then make informed decisions about arrangements for ongoing funding.
- ✓ Emphasize increased support for technology in college mental health services.
- ✓ Explore options that don’t require hiring more on-campus counseling staff.

Higher education will be facing unprecedented student demand for mental health services when campuses re-open this fall. States have a meaningful opportunity to help their institutions of higher education address this very serious downside of the COVID-19 pandemic. By actively supporting their colleges and universities in their efforts to deal with mental health issues, their students can achieve academically, graduate in a timely fashion, and become productive and positive citizens.