Mental Health Screening:
Strategies and Best Practices for Community Colleges
Mental Health Improvement through Community Colleges

Despite the high prevalence of mental health challenges among community college students, many students in need of mental health support don't receive or access treatment, which can lead to an array of negative health, social, and academic outcomes. Given this, mental health screening - the systematic process of identifying students who are experiencing negative mental, physical, or emotional symptoms that may be associated with a mental health condition - is imperative for recognizing students who may be struggling and connecting them with the appropriate resources.

Screening students is a key component of a comprehensive approach to supporting student mental health, oftentimes offering benefits beyond the individual level by driving system, policy, and practice changes, supporting a public health framework for promoting student mental health.

Screening Best Practices

☑ **Engage Relevant Stakeholders**
Consider mental health professionals, college faculty, and administrative staff who may have relevant knowledge, interest, or experience

☑ **Establish clear goals for the screening process.**
Screening goals should be aligned with data on student mental health and your college's broader priorities and directions.

☑ **Select empirically validated screening tools.**
Screening tools used should always be reliable, valid, and evidence based.

☑ **Determine relevant consent requirements and processes.**
Assess if and when consent is needed for students on your campus to complete a mental health screen.

☑ **Develop processes for data collection.**
Prioritize privacy, confidentiality, and accuracy of information when administering screens.

☑ **Ensure access to adequate treatment.**
Have a concrete and well-communicated process in place for referring students to services addressing various needs that may arise from the screening process.

☑ **Identify and train all staff.**
Ensure thorough training is given to any staff who will be administering mental health screens to students, if applicable.

Screening Strategies

Universal Screening
Universal screening is given to an entire population, rather than a smaller subset of the population.

Examples include: screening all enrolled students, all incoming students, or all students in a given course.

Opportunistic Screening
Opportunistic screening occurs on an individual level during a chance encounter with a student.

Examples include: screening in campus health centers, at campus events, or in campus common spaces.

Targeted (Selective) Screening
Targeted screening is aimed at screening only students who are at elevated risk for mental health challenges.

Examples include: screening in advising offices, basic needs resources, or other student support spaces.

Additional Resources

Mental Health Screening: Strategies and Best Practices for Community Colleges (Full Toolkit)
This comprehensive toolkit offers further details and considerations for developing a mental health screening strategy, including a curated selection of evidence based screening tools.

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