

MD Live

By EVERNORTH

Demystifying mental health:

Improving mental wellness for higher education faculty.





Students today are facing more pressure than ever before, and it’s taking a toll on their mental health. In fact, 15% of children aged 12-17 had their school, work, or home life impaired by a major depressive episode in 2024.¹

Higher education isn’t faring any better, with 80% of students saying they regularly deal with emotional challenges.² On top of this, nearly 90% of higher ed students say their mental health impacts their ability to study and focus.³

But students aren’t the only ones struggling.

Educators play a critical role in how young minds are nurtured and guided toward a brighter future. Yet oftentimes, they themselves are overworked, underpaid, and burning out. And the mental and behavioral crisis facing students is making the jobs of educators even more difficult.

38% of college faculty report being emotionally exhausted most of the time.⁴

The poor well-being of instructors is a dire issue, as it not only impacts them but also has a runoff effect on students, who are already having a difficult time. 90% of faculty agree that student mental health has worsened since they began their careers. Another 47% say their mental health is suffering as a result of having to offer ongoing mental health support to students.⁵



Mental health in education by numbers.

61%

of college professors are struggling with mental health challenges.⁶

41%

of college students are battling depression, nearly double what it was in 2014.^{7,8}

81%

of faculty say their school should invest more in mental health support for employees.⁹

75%

of the U.S. feels mental health is treated worse than physical health to some degree.¹⁰

Mental health has become a significant focus in recent years, both inside and outside the education sphere. While the country faces numerous hurdles between education and mental wellness, education has several unique challenges that complicate matters.

The mental health challenges facing education:

- + **Resources:** Funding for public universities in 32 states is lower than it was in 2008.¹¹
- + **Poor access to licensed professionals:** Public schools cite this as one of the top reasons they can't deliver better mental health support.¹²
- + **Stigma around mental health:** 58% of people don't seek help for fear of being judged by others.¹³
- + **Care access:** 65% of rural areas don't have a psychiatrist.¹⁴
- + **High burnout rates:** 53% of college professors and staff have considered quitting due to burnout.¹⁵

Those leading the classroom are clearly struggling. To support students, we need faculty to be at their best. So, what can you do?

How can we tackle these ongoing mental health challenges?

As leaders in the virtual care space, MD Live by Evernorth works with thousands of licensed mental health professionals nationwide, helping organizations take control of their physical and mental health. There's no single cure for what ails mental health in education. But, with a collaborative, multi-pronged effort, we believe change is possible by taking the necessary steps:

- 1. Advocate for change on campus:** An atmosphere of mental wellness for students and faculty alike is foundational to ongoing success.
- 2. Find the right solutions and resources:** Pair your institution with mental health support that aligns with your budget and goals.
- 3. Work to destigmatize mental health:** Mental health still faces a stigma in the United States, and we need to change that.

How you can foster a campus culture that supports mental wellness.

While professional mental health support is essential, there are also steps you can take to create a healthier campus environment. Here are several ways you can promote mental wellness on your campus.

Push for realistic expectations.

There's a big issue with overworking in higher education. In fact, 65% of instructors and faculty say their workload is too high.¹⁶ Research is often a top priority for instructors. Because they dedicate so much time to it, it's essential to push for realistic expectations from stakeholders to help instructors find that balance.

Instructors can also set more realistic research expectations for themselves. With teaching and administrative tasks also on their plate, there isn't always time for research in a 40-hour week. Encourage instructors to temper expectations to avoid overworking and burning out.

Train staff on mental health first aid and awareness.

Many faculty and educators are trained in first aid. Go a step further and have your staff attend Mental Health First Aid training. Extra training allows them to better identify mental health challenges with students and colleagues and take the appropriate next steps.



Did you know?

Mental Health First Aid training is available virtually and free.

[Find a course near you.](#)

You can also host mental health awareness workshops and offer more casual educational sessions on mental health challenges impacting campuses, current trends, and more. Paired with proper first aid training, awareness workshops can help your faculty become more equipped to recognize mental health challenges facing students and staff.

Encourage open discussion around mental health, starting at the top.

There's a stigma around mental health in general, but the problem is uniquely challenging in higher ed. Many educators and faculty tend to practice presenteeism—showing up to work even when you're sick or unwell. This is especially common for those on the tenure track, as there's additional pressure to perform.¹⁷

Encourage open discussion around mental health, starting with leadership. While people don't have to share more than they're comfortable with, openly talking about going to therapy, struggles one is facing, and so on can all help destigmatize mental health in higher ed.

Promote short breaks during the day.

Finding any kind of breathing room in higher ed can feel next to impossible. But even the busiest day likely has some minutes to spare. Promote a short break of ten minutes or so during the day. Encourage your staff to take ten minutes for themselves at some point without mandating a specific time. No work, just ten minutes of unplugging and unwinding.

Host mental wellness-boosting activities on campus.

Students and staff alike can benefit from wellness-oriented activities. Find a common space you can use without incurring further costs and host activities like yoga, live concerts, painting sessions, or guided workouts.

If cost is a concern, look for any college resources you can leverage. For example, if your college has a music program, consider seeing if any students would be interested in putting on a concert. Similarly, students studying physical fitness are perfect candidates for leading a workout session.

As a bonus, any of these activities would work well for your students and staff. They also provide an excellent chance for staff to get to know students in a more casual setting.

Wellness-oriented activities for campus:



Yoga



Live concerts



Painting sessions



Guided workouts



Student-led cooking lessons

Fostering positivity in the classroom.

Oftentimes, students only hear from professors when something isn't going well. Flip the script and encourage educators to share praise with their students. This can help motivate students and create a more positive atmosphere in the classroom.

Is a student excelling where they previously struggled? Did they do something kind or thoughtful for someone else? Encourage your educators to let the students know. Not only will this help prompt the student to continue giving it their all, but it also makes for more pleasant interactions for the professor. Nobody wants to be the bearer of bad news all the time, and professors are no exception.

Where many mental wellness solutions fall short.

There are numerous mental wellness solutions out there, from in-person consultation services to online telehealth services to solutions that fall somewhere in between. While most of these solutions are made with the best intentions, many cannot bridge the gap between higher education and mental wellness.



Mental health support is costly.

The average American spends \$1,080 each year on mental health.¹⁸ For those with multiple family members seeking care, that number quickly goes up.



There are long wait periods.

On average, patients have to wait two months before they can be seen in person by a mental health professional.¹⁹ Telehealth options didn't fare much better, with an average wait time of 43 days.¹⁹



They can't scale.

Many solutions struggle to scale, especially if in person. With the ongoing provider shortage, finding one therapist is hard enough. Finding additional support to scale up to your needs is highly unlikely for many.



They require in-person visits.

Brick-and-mortar specialists are often ideal. But there's the aforementioned stigma around mental health, especially in academia, where 42% of faculty and staff agree that most would think less of someone receiving mental treatment.²⁰ On top of this, 122 million people live in a Mental Health Professional Shortage Area, making in-person care difficult.²¹



The scheduling process is impersonal.

Choosing a provider or specialist is laborious and overwhelming, with Americans spending two years looking for a provider on average.²² Many solutions employ an algorithm for matchmaking, which can result in poor adherence to care.

Bridging the gap with virtual care.

Virtual care is the solution for providing stronger, more available mental health resources for several reasons:

- + Virtual care is location-agnostic. Wherever care is needed, virtual care can go.
- + Virtual care can scale to meet the demands of the community.
- + Virtual care combats stigma by enabling folks to get mental health care from the privacy of their home.
- + Virtual care can fill gaps left by brick and mortar. If someone is in the midst of their mental health journey and needs help now, virtual care can meet those needs far quicker than in-person sessions.

But, no two virtual care solutions are the same.
So, where do you start?



Expand mental health support access with MD Live by Evernorth.

With more than 1,300 board-certified mental health providers across all 50 states, including Puerto Rico, and an average of 10+ years of experience, MD Live partners with higher education organizations nationwide to offer comprehensive talk therapy and psychiatric support.

Unlike many mental health solutions, MD Live mirrors the brick-and-mortar experience, delivering true talk therapy. We believe mental health deserves a comprehensive, personal approach, not purely text or in-app-based communication.

Through ongoing sessions, MD Live enables patients to foster genuine, strong patient-provider relationships. And MD Live fits into virtually any schedule.

- + It meets your faculty wherever they're most comfortable. Patients can easily take a voice or video call anywhere they have their phone.
- + It lets patients control the provider selection process by deciding who they want to see rather than an algorithm.
- + It helps patients find the right fit. 63% had repeat visits with the same provider in 2023.
- + It's effective. 81% of MD Live behavioral health patients had improved GAD-7 and PHQ-9 scores.
- + It's available. Many patients can get an appointment within a week, and MD Live sees dependents as young as age 10.

“MD Live is building bridges, not walls — connecting faculty and staff to the care they need for mental health and wellness through seamless access to virtual care.”



DR. ERIC WEIL,
CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER,
MD LIVE FOR EVERNORTH



Reach out to see how MD Live can help you demystify mental health at your institution.

[Request your demo](#)

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⁵<https://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/psychology-teacher-network/introductory-psychology/faculty-burnout-survey>

⁶<https://newsroom.wiley.com/press-releases/press-release-details/2024/College-Instructors-Feeling-the-Strain-of-Mental-Health-Crisis/default.aspx>

⁷<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7681156/#:~:text=There%20is%20a%20significant%20lack,%20need%20areas%205B17%5D.>

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¹⁰<https://news.gallup.com/poll/644144/americans-perceive-gaps-mental-physical-healthcare.aspx>

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¹³<https://www.rethink.org/news-and-stories/media-centre/2023/05/stigma-effect-stops-three-in-five-people-experiencing-mental-illness-from-seeking-help-survey-reveals/#:~:text='Stigma%20effect'%20stops%20three%20in%20five%20people,ten%20have%20been%20worried%20about%20accessing%20treatment.>

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¹⁵<https://www.campusafetyemagazine.com/news/college-faculty-burnout-the-statistics-and-solutions/132000/>

¹⁶<https://campustechnology.com/articles/2024/02/07/burnout-excessive-workloads-plague-teaching-and-learning-workforce-in-higher-ed.aspx>

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¹⁹<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0163834323000877>

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