May 2023

VISIBLE AND ACCESSIBLE CARE

ADVANCING AND SUPPORTING CAMPUS MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING AT MIAMI UNIVERSITY

*Report and Recommendations from the
Institutional Task Force on Student, Faculty, and
Staff Mental Health and Well-being*

Executive Summary

During the 2022-23 academic year, the Institutional Task Force on Student, Faculty, and Staff Mental Health and Well-being (MHTF) was charged to assess Miami's current services and culture around mental health and emotional well-being and to make recommendations for improvement. Based on the work of three workgroups (students, faculty/staff, and community), campus listening sessions, literature on mental health and well-being, local and national survey data, and a review of best practices, we have crafted recommendations in four major areas: systems, communication, education, and culture. This work is an important first step in a comprehensive, multi-campus effort to advance mental health and emotional well-being at Miami.

In our review of the current state of mental health and well-being at Miami, we identified areas of strength upon which we can build. Miami offers a broad range of resources and services, particularly for students, extending well beyond counseling services to meet a wide range of needs related to emotional well-being. Training, education, and programming related to mental health and well-being are abundant. We have a robust system in place to identify students of concern, and a case management approach to follow up with those students. And we have a culture at Miami that is relational, open, and aware, which offers a good base to grow upon.

We also identified areas for improvement:

- Although students, faculty, and staff have access to a wide variety of resources, many people are unaware of them, or have misconceptions or disagreements about what they can or should offer. That misalignment of expectations and our practices can lead to issues of trust.

- Our communication efforts around mental health and well-being should be more intentional, proactive, timely, and accessible.

- Staff are working at capacity and financial resources are limited so we need to use the resources available strategically, ensuring that services are equitable, culturally-appropriate, and accessible to all members of our community.

In addition, we identified challenges in our culture that impact well-being and our campus as a whole. Among those cultural challenges, three were noted most often:

- Not all populations on campus feel an equal sense of safety, belonging, or acceptance on campus or in the community. For some groups, there is still a sense of stigma related to seeking help for mental health.

- Many people noted feelings of intense pressure for achievement in our culture. The reasons for and degree of that pressure vary depending on one's roles and identities.

- Many in our community are feeling low morale and burnout as we adapt to rapidly changing and increasingly complex student needs.

As we turn to the future, we hope to inspire a campus environment where holistic wellness is experienced at all levels, both for the individual and overall community, measured both objectively and subjectively. To help achieve this vision, we offer 56 recommendations in four categories:

**Systems
Communication
Education
Culture**

We were energized by the amount of interest and passion we encountered in exploring this topic. This work was informed by many voices in our Miami community– Oxford and Regionals, all categories of faculty and staff across every division, individuals with varied identities, students representing many different academic majors and subcultures, parents, alumni, and community partners– as well as by national best practices and conversations with experts currently in the field. We recognize the many people at Miami who have prioritized these topics for many years, and we are excited to move to a new phase of work around mental health and emotional well-being that is comprehensive, coordinated, and inclusive.

Introduction

Over the past several years, the COVID-19 pandemic, national and global events, and social unrest have significantly impacted our collective emotional well-being. Across the United States and in our own Miami community, needs around emotional well-being and mental health are continuing to evolve and grow. As a university, we have both an opportunity and a responsibility to better understand the complex mental health needs of our campus communities. Only when we comprehend our culture and existing support frameworks can we determine the critical gaps that must be filled to improve the holistic wellness of our campus community.

To that end, in the summer of 2022, President Crawford formed the Institutional Task Force on Student, Faculty, and Staff Mental Health and Well-being and charged it to:

- Inventory and assess Miami's current approach to supporting our community's well-being and the resources available to our students, faculty, and staff;

- Assess Miami's approach using an equity lens, ensuring that resources are both culturally-inclusive and accessible (physically, financially, etc.);

- Assess Miami's culture, evaluating how our environment supports or inhibits the well-being of our community and subgroups within it; and

- Review best and emerging practices in comparison to our current offerings and make recommendations for improvement.

Well-being is "an optimal and dynamic state that allows people to achieve their full potential."

-NIRSA, NASPA, and ACHA, 2020

Current Assessment

A range of assessment strategies were employed to solicit feedback from the Miami community regarding our strengths and challenges pertaining to mental health and emotional well-being, including listening sessions, surveys, benchmarking, and an inventory of current practices on campus.

STRENGTHS

The taskforce first set out to identify what we were already doing well to establish a foundation that could be built upon. The following strengths were identified:

Services, training, education, and response. A variety of programs and services are offered to help members of our community recognize potential mental health concerns and to provide support, intervention, and referrals, as needed. Additionally, a multi-faceted system exists to identify students of concern and connect them with appropriate resources.

Cultural strengths. Miami's culture is relational in nature. There is an overall awareness of the importance of mental health and well-being, and community members are generally open to talking about these issues.

CHALLENGES

The next step in our assessment was identifying challenges within our system that warrant improvement or investment. Our intention is to be transparent in sharing the feedback we received, not to single out or critique any particular department or process on campus.

Communication. Information on mental health resources at Miami is not always well-coordinated or easy to find, and outdated reports and myths about care and resources can persist long-term.

Staffing and resources. Financial resources to add or expand services are limited and services are not always consistent or accessible across all campuses or for all populations.

Cultural challenges. Various subpopulations at Miami have very different experiences from one another. These experiences may affect emotional well-being, particularly for those who carry marginalized identities. All populations report feeling some sense of internalized pressure for achievement in our culture.

Misalignment of individual expectations and Miami's practices and services. Some students expressed mistrust regarding Miami's "care" when their expectations for support were not or could not be met.

A Vision for the Future

As we reflect on the things that Miami is doing well and where we have room for growth, it is helpful to envision the future we aspire to at Miami. If our recommendations were all successfully implemented, what would Miami look and feel like?

The quote at the beginning of this report, "well-being [is] an optimal and dynamic state that allows people to achieve their full potential" (NIRSA, NASPA, & ACHA, 2020), is the beginning line of a more comprehensive definition of well-being that has been adopted by 15 professional associations in higher education. While our work is focused specifically on emotional well-being, the elements in that full definition mirror our hopes for a future Miami.

That definition recognizes the intersection of the individual and the community and guides us to our vision of the Miami of the future.

INDIVIDUAL-SUBJECTIVE

Individuals feel generally satisfied or content with their current state of mental health and emotional-well-being. When they experience challenges, they feel they are receiving support and care as a person and in their role by their peers and by the systems at Miami. Students, faculty, and staff will feel they can step up or step back depending on the current state of their own well-being or the needs of others without judgment and with the support and encouragement of systems at Miami.

INDIVIDUAL-OBJECTIVE

Individuals know about the mental health and emotional well-being resources available on campus and can access them as needed, through multiple modalities. For needs that go beyond what services can effectively be offered on campus, they can easily find information about off-campus resources and receive help to access those in an equitable manner.

INDIVIDUAL-CIVIC

Individuals express genuine care and concern for the people around them, treating them fairly, compassionately, and respectfully. They feel a sense of responsibility for contributing to a positive campus culture that sees the humanity of and values the well-being of all members of the Miami community.

COMMUNITY-SUBJECTIVE

Our Miami community is a place where its members feel a sense of community and belonging, and feel that Miami is a good place to work, live, learn, and play. Members feel connected, heard, safe, and empowered to share our experiences and well-being needs, positive and negative. They are received with compassion and non-judgment. We believe that Miami is an interdependent community where each person's well-being matters and is valued by the whole.

COMMUNITY-OBJECTIVE

Miami's infrastructure, systems, practices, and policies create the conditions under which students, faculty, and staff can thrive. We seek feedback and use data to improve our practices related to well-being. Our structure ensures that the well-being of our community members is prioritized and consistently tended to over time. Services are accessible to all members of our community equitably, and are culturally-appropriate. Our systems are also set up to recognize that life conditions change and allow flexibility for people to temporarily step up or step back.

Recommendations

SYSTEMS

Starting with the creation of a standing committee on mental health and well-being, we recommend foundational systems, organizations, and policies that will keep the mental health and well-being of our community a visible priority over time. This category also includes specific actions by offices at Miami to support an individual's mental health and well-being.

COMMUNICATION

These recommendations are focused on enhancing Miami's communication efforts pertaining to mental health and emotional well-being to ensure accurate information is readily and easily available.

EDUCATION

We offer recommendations related to both programming and training for students, faculty, and staff. This includes programming to benefit faculty and staff themselves, as well as training that would benefit the students they work with.

CULTURE

Although culture can be the most difficult and slowest area to impact, it is essential to strive for cultural change to positively impact the mental health and emotional well-being of our campus. Culture change requires buy-in and commitment from the individuals who make up our Miami community. It is also the area with the fewest measurable, actionable recommendations, but instead primarily poses topics for discussion and exploration over time.
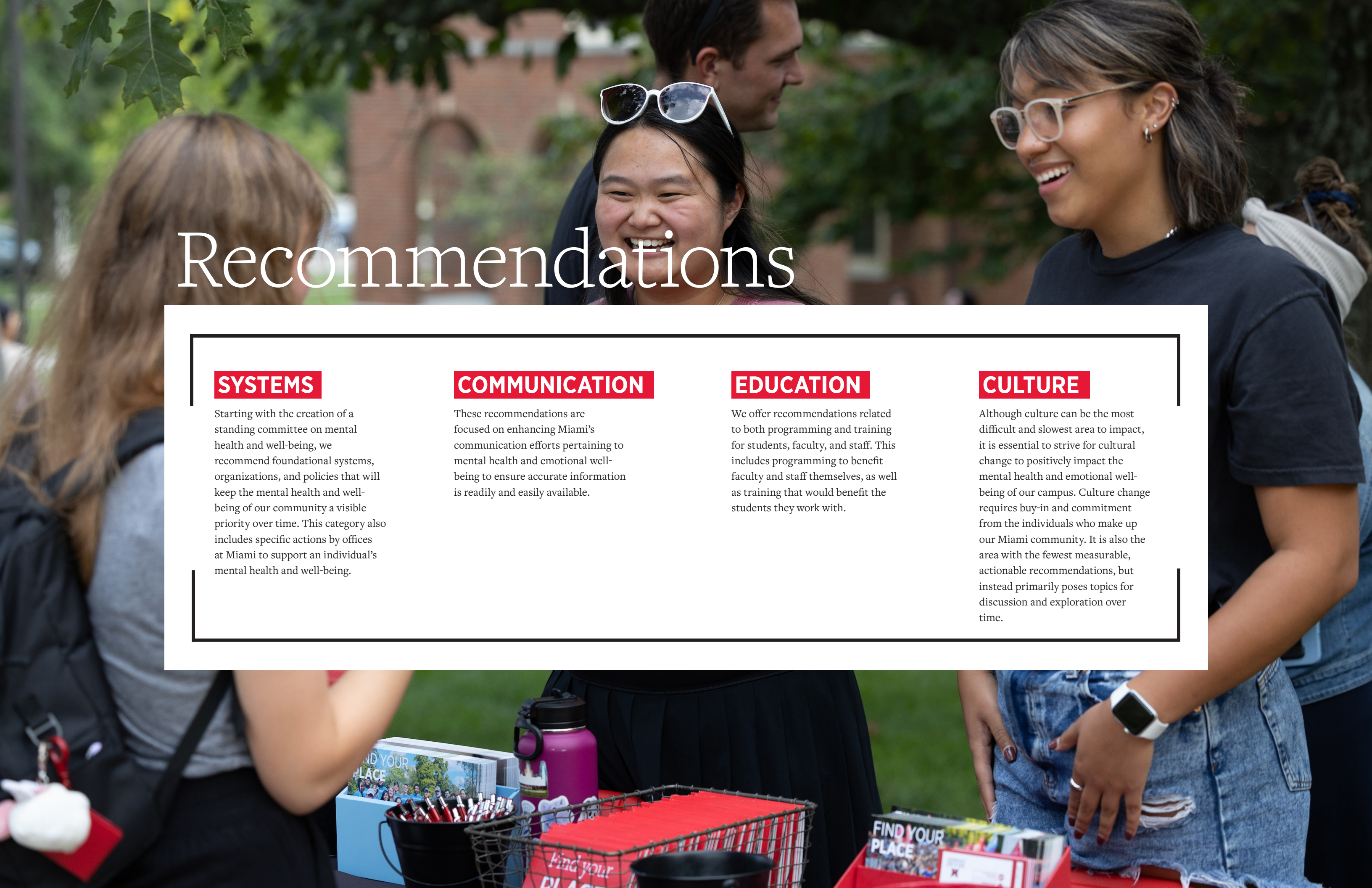
ABOUT SYSTEMS
The starting point for our recommendations is looking at the current systems that we have in place at Miami and identifying where we can improve. The subcategory, **infrastructure**, refers to the foundational systems, organizations, and policies that need to exist at the university level in order to keep the mental health and well-being of our community a visible priority over time. The subcategory **services** refer to practices offered by Miami offices that support an individual's mental health and emotional well-being.

Recommendations for

SYSTEMS

SYSTEMS | Infrastructure

For all campuses

Create a **standing committee**, perhaps a Senate subcommittee, focused on mental health and emotional well-being inclusive of faculty, staff, and students across all campuses, chaired by the AVP for Health and Wellness in Student Life. This committee should be small but should have representation from faculty, staff, and students, across divisions, Oxford and Regionals.

- Prioritize, map, and shepherd the recommendations in this report. Create and maintain a website with the plan, providing updates for transparency.

- Develop and communicate a shared definition of wellness to be used across all campuses. We recommend using the Inter-Association definition mentioned in this report.

- Adapt and adopt a framework to guide our efforts for students, faculty and staff, ideally the framework created by the U.S. Surgeon General's office in November 2022. The framework is composed of five essential components, each grounded in two human needs. While created for work settings, it can be adapted for use with our entire campus community.

- In collaboration with the Office of Student Wellness, the Office of Employee Benefits and Wellness, and University Communications and Marketing (UCM), develop and coordinate a communication strategy as outlined later in this report.

- Identify and work with wellness champions across all university divisions and interested departments.

- Examine all resources currently allocated for mental health and emotional wellness across all campuses and strive for equity and consistency related to staffing and budgets.

- Establish a self-assessment/audit process for each division to complete at least once every three years to assess their culture around mental health and emotional well-being.

- Research and strategically pursue **resources** from the state, agencies, foundations, and other grant opportunities to support this work.

For faculty and staff

Expand and enhance a dynamic employee wellness program by working with existing university partners (e.g., Miami's health plan administrator, TriHealth, and other community resources) to meet the needs of faculty and staff across all campuses, and resource the program appropriately.

- Focus the efforts of this program on creating and elevating a robust website and other communications tools to help faculty and staff learn about and navigate resources and care.

- Create an incentive system for healthy habits, similar to Healthy Miami, for mental health. Trackable elements might include participation in trainings or screenings.

- Align staff programming and benefits with the eight dimensions of wellness.

- Examine exemplar practices from other campuses and assess to implement (e.g., University of Pittsburgh, Indiana University, and Ohio University).

- Conduct a voluntary annual survey of all faculty and staff (e.g., the American College Health Association survey), to measure the mental health and emotional well-being of employees and identify areas for improvement.

For students

Explore alternatives to a leave of absence for students in distress, and ease the re-entry process for those who take a leave.

SYSTEMS | Services

For faculty and staff

- Develop a faculty/staff of concern system (similar to CARE team).

- Establish "life change communities" similar to affinity groups: New parents, new campus role, new to our community, empty nester, eldercare, etc.

- Explore mentoring opportunities for colleague to colleague support.

For students

- Assess student counseling on the three main campuses to potentially streamline service (e.g. record keeping, administrative oversight, etc.) and consider how the three offices can support each other.

- Explore external partnerships (e.g., TriHealth) to expand local mental health resources near our campuses, particularly resources related to psychiatry, specialized care, and intensive outpatient services.

- Explore the creation of clinical placements for psychiatric nurse practitioners (post-licensure).

- Explore more opportunities for trainees in social work and psychology to bolster services for students.

- Explore options for telehealth for care outside regular business hours, particularly for Regionals students, and assess financial viability.

- Provide dedicated private space for students to engage in telebehavioral health appointments.

- Explore other resources to support students with financial and practical needs (e.g., transportation) to access services beyond Miami's scope of services.

- Identify key groups that are less likely to seek care and create a plan to ensure allyship and outreach is conducted by an appropriate source.

- Increase strategies to make it easier for students to access care in more informal ways than individual therapy, using technology to increase access beyond standard business hours.

- Support mental health/wellness chairs in student organizations (e.g., fraternities and sororities).

- Explore more opportunities for peer to peer support for mental health.

Miami offers many resources related to mental health and well-being, however most people do not know about all of the resources, misunderstand them, or don't know how to find them at the time that they are needed. We need to promote what we're doing well and dispel myths about our services.

Recommendations for

COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATION

For all campuses

- Develop and prioritize a broad communication strategy pertaining to mental health and emotional well-being efforts across all campuses, to be overseen by the Standing Committee on Well-being.

- Utilize Miami Matters, social media, and other outlets to regularly push out wellness related messages and education and to promote what Miami is doing well related to mental health. Make our culture of care more visible.

- Coordinate a calendar of wellness messaging that follows the flow of the academic calendar and associated stressors.

- Periodically solicit community input to bolster community partnerships on wellness initiatives.

- Ensure that key community partners (e.g., faith communities, non-profits, local businesses, etc.) who frequently interact with students are aware of campus resources.

For faculty and staff

- Better advertise the range of services available through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) program, and make that more prominent and easy to find on the website.

- Highlight exemplar efforts that departments and divisions have implemented related to mental health and well-being.

For students

- Improve communication regarding access to student counseling services to build trust and confidence with students, perhaps utilizing social media and FAQs. Topics that need attention include:

    - Wait times, to create accurate expectations.

    - Alternative or additional options for fee bearing services.

    - Strategies employed to ensure a diverse Student Counseling Service staff.

    - Information about intern/trainee staff and their clinical experience.

    - Utilization data, including demographic information.

    - Miami's scope of service, to better align expectations with our resources and capabilities.

- Increase the promotion of standing programs and services.

- Review and communicate the Students of Concern process: Do people understand it and what happens next? How are students assessed? Who is appropriate to refer and who is not? Consider creating a video explaining the work of the Care Team.

- Explore opportunities to explain the role and function of MUPD during times of crisis to build trust and reduce anxiety.

Recommendations for

EDUCATION

EDUCATION

For all campuses

- Launch a workgroup to examine the feasibility and impact of creating (an) annual wellness fair(s) inclusive of students, faculty, and staff across all campuses.

- Identify high-impact virtual platforms pertaining to mental health and emotional wellness (e.g., CALM, Spark America, Headspace, etc.) and provide free or reduced-cost memberships of these vetted platforms to all university members. Assess use after implementation.

- Create toolkits for faculty to use in classes (e.g., a Canvas module about mental health that they could easily add to their site) or for student orgs (e.g., standard messages they could send to express care and share resources).

- Offer trainings on how to promote resilience for students and for supervisors.

- Establish standard onboarding procedures for new employees, across all divisions and units, that explicitly include information about available wellness resources for students and for faculty/staff.

- Develop parent webinars about how to help a student/child in distress, one set for parents of our students, and one for employees who are parents, with content for supporting younger children.

For faculty and staff

- Train employees in supervisory roles to be aware and comfortable with referring employees to support services as necessary (e.g., EAP, disability offices, etc.) and require a refresh every three years.

- Create and offer ongoing training opportunities to provide employees with updates on current and new wellness initiatives and resources since their original onboarding period.

- Provide resources and training about how to help faculty/staff colleagues in distress.

- Offer programming and education about all 8 dimensions of wellness and how they contribute to one's mental health.

For students

- Develop or enhance programming opportunities including, but not limited to:
  - Normalization of mental health challenges and setbacks- normalize that the college experience isn't always easy or smooth.
  - Distress tolerance tips and normalization of distress.
  - Offer programming across all 8 dimensions of wellness.

- Prior to departure, require a program on mental health and well-being during study abroad for all students attending a program.

- Offer and potentially require a mental health training for all students similar to AlcoholEdu (e.g., gatekeeper training) focused on how to recognize distress, how to support a friend, and how to refer or access resources.

- Leverage student organizations to support student well-being through the training of student leaders. Build wellness education into the Red Brick Rewards process.

- Continue to build out and promote the Wellness Navigator tool and include resources on the Regional campuses.

- Explore opportunities to embed wellness skill-building into credit-bearing courses.

- Require faculty/staff training on what resources are available to students, perhaps as a video to be shown during a department meeting.

- Discuss student-athlete mental health culture with coaches and provide them with training on how to discuss this topic with their teams.

- Include more information about transition and mental health in international student orientation.

- Provide trauma responsive training for faculty and staff.

ABOUT CULTURE

Culture is the most difficult and slowest area to change, but it is essential to strive for change in this area to positively impact the mental health and emotional well-being of our campus. This is an area that cannot be imposed by "Miami" but requires the buy-in and commitment from the individuals who make up our Miami community. It is also the section with the fewest measurable, actionable recommendations, but instead primarily poses topics for discussion and exploration over time.

Recommendations for

CULTURE

For all campuses

- Continue to tackle and reduce stigma associated with mental health challenges and with seeking care, with an eye to specific populations where this might be more commonly felt.

- Facilitate campus/departmental/organizational conversations about our campus culture:

  - How do we create a true culture of care and a sense of appreciation?

  - How do we balance our messaging about and pressure regarding the glorification of "busy"? In other words, how can we avoid a "culture of busyness" (Waytz, 2023) to allow people to move at their own pace without the fear that they will be judged as less serious or less committed? How can we encourage Miamians to sustain their energy to excel in the long-term rather than pushing to the point of exhaustion or burnout?

  - How do we support populations that carry more pressure or stress, related to their identities, their work roles, their location, or other subcultures within our community?

- Identify Miami systems and processes that create stress for students and employees (e.g., registration) and simplify where possible.

- Encourage communication practices that foster wellness (e.g., no emailing during the night, scheduling the sending of emails, setting and sharing explicit communication expectations, encouraging designated "no meeting days" in departments, etc.).

- Convene a representative group to examine the practicalities and implications of instituting "wellness days" during the academic calendar. This group will provide a recommendation and clear rationale for why wellness days should or should not be implemented at Miami.

- Encourage departments to create opportunities for increased in-person and informal engagement among their teams and between students and faculty and staff to establish camaraderie and bolster morale and well-being.

- Assess how many people are on campus in person each day and how that affects culture amongst departments and the impacts on students. Consider how to balance employee flexibility with the camaraderie that often helps us sustain our wellness.

- We recognize that other forms of wellness, such as physical or occupational wellness, have an impact on our emotional wellness. In time, it would be useful to expand this conversation to include other dimensions of wellness.

CULTURE

Conclusion

During the course of the work of the Mental Health Task Force, we identified many things that Miami is doing well related to the support of mental health and emotional well-being. However, despite the broad range of resources available, some people remain unaware of them and others have varied opinions about the types of services that can or should be offered. There are many ways that we can strengthen and build on the foundation that we have, particularly in the areas of systems, communication, education, and culture, without major financial investments, as noted in the 56 recommendations included here.

Many universities have formed task forces regarding student mental health in the past two years, but we did not identify any that are focusing on the full community of students, faculty, and staff despite the fact that we are an interconnected and interdependent system. That made this work more complex and challenging, but also more exciting. This report is an important first step in a comprehensive effort to focus on mental health and emotional well-being at Miami, but it cannot be the last step. In the action phase of this work, we'll need to build an infrastructure to ensure accountability for this work, and to commit to the work long-term.

As we think about what all members of our community need in regards to their mental health and emotional well-being, we look to the November 2022 report from the U.S. Surgeon General mentioned in the first of our recommendations. The report lists five essential components of well-being, each grounded in two human needs:

• Protection from harm (Needs: safety and security)
• Connection and community (Needs: social support and belonging)
• Work-life [or Learning-life] harmony (Needs: autonomy and flexibility)
• Mattering at work [or school] (Needs: dignity and meaning)
• Opportunity for growth (Needs: learning and appreciation)

Many of these elements and needs are related to culture, which is essential if we are going to truly move toward becoming a campus that more holistically meets the needs of our students, faculty and staff. We must build a culture that:

• Reduces stigma associated with talking about and seeking help for mental health challenges;
• Trusts that each person will be met with understanding and compassion when they need flexibility to deal with life's challenges;
• Promotes equitable access to resources and services on-campus and/or assistance with identifying services off-campus; and
• Is perceived as culture of care that is both seen and felt.

The largest barrier to the success of all these recommendations and efforts is the will of the Miami community itself. As previously noted, people talk about "Miami" as an entity capable of implementing change.

While the university has the power to strengthen its infrastructure and there are recommendations that departments can implement, such as new websites or programming, cultural change is incumbent upon each member of our interconnected Miami community.

We cannot only look to others to care for us, but we also need to support and care for each other, use the resources available to us, attend programs when offered, change our own practices to be more self-sustaining, and create the culture of well-being that we want at Miami. We sincerely hope that we can work together as a community to make that happen.

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