



General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Joint State Government Commission
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Report Summary in Response to 2016 Senate Resolution No. 7
SUICIDE AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS IN PENNSYLVANIA

Colleges and universities strive to maintain the health and well-being of all their students. Most of Pennsylvania's college and universities have policies and programs in place to address the needs of students experiencing mental health distress, including suicidal ideation and attempts, though they range in breadth and capacity. This report seeks to identify those practices that can best prevent suicide among college students and suggest ways they can be incorporated into the services provided by Pennsylvania's institutions of higher education, in an effort to reduce self-inflicted loss of life among students.

The principal recommendation of the Advisory Committee on College Student Suicide is that each college and university should have a suicide prevention plan in place. The plan should address the components described below in some form, based upon the needs and resources of each institution. Campuses should review their existing policies and programs to ensure that efforts are not duplicated and that adequate resources are available on campus or that referral systems are in place to ensure that students can access effective mental health care in the community.

Identify students at risk – provide faculty, staff and students with means of assisting students in distress; provide referral procedures for faculty, staff and students; and make mental health assessments easily available across campus

Increase help-seeking behavior - Support outreach campaigns and educational campaigns to reduce stigma and promote protective factors; support peer education and counseling; provide placarding and brochures in high traffic student areas with hotline and crisis text line numbers for the National Suicide Prevention Hotline, as well as other appropriate organizations

Provide access to effective mental health services - Ensure that treatment capacity exists to meet the counseling needs of students; maintain staffing levels and community ensure that staffing is supported with multi-disciplinary licensed professionals; avoid combining psychological counseling services with other counseling services; ensure clinicians are adequately trained to diagnose students, make appropriate referrals and assess and manage suicide risk; encourage students and family to communicate pre-existing or newly developed mental health issues with campus counseling to facilitate treatment transitions from home to school

Respond effectively to individuals in crisis - Institute brief, same day appointments to triage students; maintain a defined crisis response plan; require colleges and universities to provide access to 24/7 trained/experience counselors on campus or via telephone or other means; if campus police are responsible for crisis intervention, ensure that all such personnel have adequate training in dealing with a suicidal person. Any potential first responders should also be offered training

Provide for immediate and long-term postvention- Establish postvention protocols to deal with the immediate aftermath of a suicide; provide counseling and support to those in need following a campus-related suicide; develop guidelines for media reporting of suicides on campus via traditional media and social media; establish and publicize leave of absence and re-entry procedures for students who have attempted suicide or have other mental health issues requiring a break from school to receive treatment

Reduce access to means of suicide - Consider placing physical barriers on rooftops and other high places; limit ability to access weapons on campus; limit access to dangerous chemicals in laboratories and chemical storage areas; establish procedures for ready availability and access to Naloxone (a drug that reverses the effects of an opioid overdose) by emergency responders

Enhance critical life skills and resilience -The Department of Education should continue to assist middle and high school schools to institute programs that help promote and develop life skills and effective relational tool; educational institutions should develop programs to effectively deal with different types of loss across the life cycle span; colleges and universities should provide life skills “refreshers” as part of new student orientation, promote good executive functioning skills, such as time management and study skills, offer financial education, and promote healthy lifestyles

Promote social connectedness and support- Establish housing centered around common interests of students and wellness housing; promote spiritual connections; encourage and support student clubs and organizations that provide support and “safe zones” for students in higher-risk groups, such as LGBTQIA+, veterans, immigrants, and students of color.

**The full report is available on our website,
<http://jsg.legis.state.pa.us/>**