**Best Practices Sub-Committee Report**

The Best Practices Sub-Committee was tasked with examining best practices for counseling services in the community and technical college system and how the colleges meet the mental health needs of students. We organized our work into three areas: a review of the literature on this topic; lessons learned from the California community college system experience; and collection of emerging, promising, and excellent practices through a survey of Washington state community and technical colleges conducted in September, 2020.

**Recommendations**

To be added...

**Literature Review**

The purpose of this literature summary is to highlight current research on effective practices in mental health counseling in the community college setting as well as key considerations when supporting mental health professionals and students. They key themes found were the importance of creating transparency and structure in mental health services, an understanding that counselors are in need of additional support, and the effectiveness of leveraging student voices and engagement to promote an inclusive mental health culture on campus (ACCA, 2013; NASPA, 2020; Nutt, 2018).

In 2013 the American College Counseling Association shared the most recent data from the community college taskforce survey which captured data from nearly 200 two-year institutions throughout the United States. Researchers found that the majority of counselors felt overwhelmed with their job duties and don’t have the necessary resources to wear multiple hats. Counselors reported that they had limited time to provide personal and mental health counseling services.

Researchers found that by establishing a transparent and inclusive counseling structure, within the community college setting, can lead to an increase student awareness and access to counseling services (Jed Foundation, 2016; NASPA, 2020). The guiding principles to create an effective counseling department include:

1. Clearly defining the scope of practice by providing clear and transparent communication on what types of counseling services are available to students.
2. Providing no wrong door to access of care. Making sure all departments are being properly trained to refer and identify students to counseling services no matter where the student goes on campus.
3. Leveraging student voices by integrating student voice into departmental planning. Promoting student led mental health clubs and activities to help normalize mental health at the college (NASPA, 2020).

Lastly, several researchers have found that involving students in the promotion and engagement of mental health on the college campus increases student awareness and help seeking behavior (Active
Researchers found that student peer organizations can also play an important role in shifting the campus culture towards mental health (Nutt, 2018). “Starting a conversation about mental health on a student-to-student level could change our approach to mental health, change the landscape and climate,” (Malmon, 2018 para. 8).


Lessons from California

In 1994, California community colleges decided that there were less expensive ways to achieve student success than utilizing faculty counselors. They instituted paraprofessionals and faculty advisors and decreased the number of faculty counselors. In 2012, California returned to the utilization of faculty counselors because of students’ need for career, academic, and personal counseling. They retained paraprofessionals and faculty advisors but maintained clear boundaries between the three and utilized counselors for training.

Survey Results