

Campus programs increase California college students receiving mental health services

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The proportion of California public university and college students receiving treatment for mental health issues increased more than 10 percent in the final year of a statewide prevention and early intervention program, according to a new RAND Corporation study.

With the increase in [students](#) seeking [mental health treatment](#), RAND researchers predict an additional 329 students will receive a college degree for each year the investment is made. Graduating from college has a direct result on lifetime earnings for an individual and a greater benefit to society.

"We know students with untreated mental health disorders do worse educationally, from lower grades to delayed graduation to dropping out," said Dr. Bradley Stein, a study author and a senior scientist at RAND, a nonprofit research organization. "Our findings suggest that by teaching faculty, staff and students to better identify and support those students struggling with [mental health issues](#), and by changing the conversation about mental health on campuses, we can get more students into the mental health treatment they need."

Assuming the increase in treatment is entirely due to prevention efforts, researchers estimate the net societal benefit for California is more than \$6 for each dollar invested in prevention and early intervention programs. For community college students the net benefit is more than \$11 for each dollar invested.

The California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA), an organization of county governments working to improve mental health outcomes for individuals, families and communities, has provided funds to support prevention and early intervention efforts across each of the California public university and college systems. With the support, all three higher educational systems have made substantial efforts to enhance awareness and knowledge of student mental health issues, as well as related services.

Previous research has shown [mental health disorders](#) frequently are first diagnosed in young adults and many of these individuals don't receive mental [health services](#).

The RAND analysis focused on cost of the prevention and early intervention programs compared to the projected benefit to society. CalMHSA's average investment in student mental health programs for each year was \$8.7 million. The societal benefit of the increase in treatment costs and the corresponding increase in graduation rates is estimated to be as high as \$56 million for each year of CalMHSA's investment in prevention and [early intervention](#) programs, which is a result of expected increase in lifetime earnings for additional graduates.

To examine change over time in student use of mental health services, researchers examined student responses from the campuses that participated in two separate surveys. Since the same students did not participate in both surveys, the surveys represent a cross-section of students taken at two different times.

The surveys assessed students' use of mental health services while at their current campus through two questions. Students were asked if they had ever used on-campus mental health services while at college. The students who responded no to the first question were asked if they had ever used off-campus mental health services. Students who responded

"yes" to either question were categorized as having used mental health services during college.

All 10 University of California and 23 California State University campuses, along with 60 California community college campuses, were invited to participate in the first survey; however, not all of the campuses chose to participate.

The first survey was conducted in 2013 with 29,134 students responding from eight UC campuses, nine CSU campuses and 14 [community college](#) campuses. Fewer campuses participated in the second survey, which was conducted in fall 2014 and spring 2015, with 14,071 students responding from seven UC campuses, five CSU campuses, and nine community [college](#) campuses.

"As we try to understand how to meet the growing need of [college students](#) for [mental health services](#), it is important that we understand that investing in student [mental health](#) not only can get more students into care, but that society benefits financially through increased wages and tax revenues," said Scott Ashwood, the study's lead author and an associate policy researcher at RAND.

More information: The study, "Payoffs for California College Students and Taxpayers from Investing in Student Mental Health," can be found at www.rand.org

Provided by RAND Corporation

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