

Suicide Prevention and Student Mental Health Task Force

Report to the Board of Regents
September 15, 2016

Charge of Task Force

Assess student mental health services and suicide prevention efforts throughout the Montana University System and develop best practices and make recommendations for improvement.

Task Force Background

- 24 member task force – all MUS campuses represented
- Practitioners, faculty, staff, students and administrators
- Monthly conference calls
- Five work groups within the task force and included broader representation
 - Early Intervention Efforts, Primary Care, Screenings and Assessment Tools
 - Common Training, Awareness, Education and Collaboration
 - Suicide Prevention Summit Planning
 - Reduced Access to Lethal Means
 - Data

Task Force Objectives

- Develop and host a statewide summit on suicide prevention
- Conduct assessments of current practices and policies and recommend changes and improvements
- Develop best practices and common training approaches that can be shared and followed by campuses

Findings

- The Task Force administered two surveys to campuses.
 - The first survey was used to develop an inventory of suicide prevention training programs provided to faculty, staff and students
 - The second survey detailed the mental health services provided by campuses.
- Campuses provide significant services to students for mental health needs, but there is not one model used by all campuses to provide student mental health services.
- Campuses have seen a significant increase (16% over the last five years) in utilization of mental health services.
- Campuses do not have adequate staffing or resources to address the need for services.
- Campuses are not meeting national standards for staffing of 1 counselor per 1000-1500 students, the MUS is at 1 counselor per 1800 students.
- Montana has the highest suicide rate in the nation.

Panelists

- Betsy Asserson, PH.D., Licensed Psychologist/Interim Director, Counseling and Psychological Services, Montana State University
- Mike Frost, LCPC, LAC – Director, Counseling Services, University of Montana
- Matt Caires Ed.D. – Dean of Students, Montana State University
- Brian Kassar, Psy.D. – Licensed Psychologist and Outreach Coordinator, Psychological and Counseling Services, Montana State University

Task Force Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Each MUS campus should have a licensed mental health clinician on staff or have readily available through contract services (counselor, social worker, psychologist, mental health nurse practitioner, mental health physician assistant, or psychiatrist) with new funding provided for campuses that do not currently have licensed clinicians on staff to assist with accurate diagnosis, effective treatment, and appropriate follow-up.

Recommendation 2: The MUS and campuses should establish guidelines to ensure appropriate individuals and groups are receiving evidence-based suicide prevention training.

Task Force Recommendations

Recommendation 3: The MUS and campuses should develop a formal process by which staff across campuses can consult with each other about programming and services.

Recommendation 4: MUS campuses that provide medical care on campus should adhere to the recommendations outlined in the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) report on depression screening.

Recommendation 5: MUS campuses should complete the depression screening survey to establish baseline practices, obstacles to implementation, needed resources, and later complete a follow up survey to measure outcomes.

Task Force Recommendations

Recommendation 6: The MUS should provide necessary resources, including compulsory ongoing training for mental health professionals and the formation of a depression screening consortium to encourage implementation and overcome obstacles.

Recommendation 7: Conduct assessments of campus environments to assess the access to lethal means to attempt suicide; create services/policies to help reduce access to lethal means; review policies and practices related to prescription drugs, access to heights and firearms.

Recommendation 8: Review potential programs and policies that could enhance student safety and implement a system-wide protocol and tracking system for suicide attempts and completions.

Task Force Recommendations

Recommendation 9: Increase partnerships with other mental health and suicide prevention stakeholders, increasing communication between all involved, developing efficiencies and best practices and sharing resources to combat student mental health issues and suicide from a holistic approach.

Recommendation 10: The MUS should explore funding/resource availability and determine funding sources to increase mental health services to students.

Recommendation 11: The MUS should host a biennial summit on student mental health and suicide prevention.

Conclusion

- Significant efforts are conducted on campuses throughout the Montana University System to address student mental health needs, including suicide prevention.
- Campus stakeholders are interested in providing additional services and developing best practices and collaborative approaches but are limited due to resources and need additional funding in order to increase services.
- The Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education should lead the system-wide efforts and provide guidance, structure and leadership in development of additional programming and services.