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Western Interstate Commission  
For Higher Education



# Changing the Conversation about Mental Health to Support Students in the West During a Pandemic

Alison Malmon, Founder and Executive Director of Active Minds

Dennis Mohatt, Vice President for Behavioral Health, WICHE

Patrick Lane, Vice President for Policy Analysis and Research, WICHE

# Thank you for joining us today!

Please remember to:

Ask questions in Q & A / comments in chat box.

Due to the large number of participants, we may not be able to answer all questions live. We will compile a FAQ following today's session and address topics that come up over email.

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# The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

- WICHE: An interstate compact formed 65 years ago



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# Webinar Outline

- Introduction
- **Pre-Pandemic:** Students' everyday needs
- **Impacts** of the pandemic
- **What** students are saying
- **Emerging** creative approaches
- **Coming** back: Postvention
- **Q&A**



# Introduction

[www.activeminds.org](http://www.activeminds.org)

Active Minds is the nation's leading nonprofit supporting mental health awareness and education for young adults. With a presence on over 800 college, university, and high school campuses nationwide, Active Minds is powered by a robust Chapter Network, the nationally acclaimed Send Silence Packing® exhibit, and inspiring Active Minds Speakers.

Active Minds is creating communities of support and saving lives.



# Introduction

- Founded in 2003
- Preeminent organization mobilizing young adults to change the conversation about mental health
- 19,000+ annual student members, reaching 1.5M students
- RAND evaluated



# Pre-Pandemic: Students' Everyday Needs

1. More than **30 percent** of college students report having been diagnosed or treated by a professional for **some form of psychological distress** in the last year\*
2. The **top 4** factors **negatively affecting academic performance** in the past year were all mental health related (anxiety, depression, sleep difficulties, stress)\*
3. Rates of depression and suicidal ideation have increased over the past 10 years, as have rates of service utilization\*\*
4. **67% of college students** who feel suicidal **tell a friend** before telling anyone else.
5. **Young adults** hold some of the **least-stigmatizing attitudes** toward **mental illness** and are more likely to know someone with mental illness, but they are less likely to **feel that they know how to help\*\***, suggesting the importance of programming that educates this group about how to be supportive and how to connect people to the resources that they need.

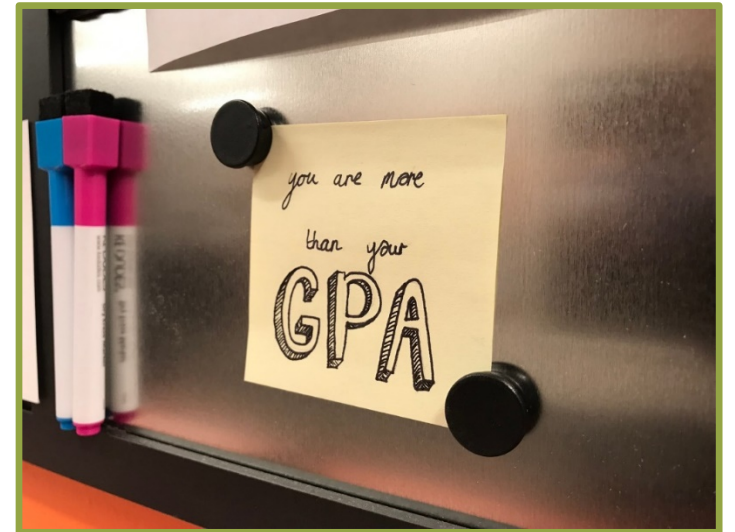


# Impacts of the Pandemic on Students

- **Immediate:** Displacement
- **Short-term:** Grief, fear for self or family, economic uncertainty (housing refund? tuition credits? work-study jobs?), loss of social networks + freedom
  - *“Getting more of what we signed up for”*
- **Long-term:** What will happen with credits (practicum/labs esp)/graduation dates?, loss of senior year identity, loss of graduation, unknown job prospects, uncertain family economic health

# What Students are Saying

- *“I just want to know that everything is going to be okay”*
- Appreciate advanced technology that allows for social interaction: screensharing; playing group games; running polls
- How create a productive and healthy working/living environment while quarantined with family or roommates?
- Navigating mental health conversations with my parents for the first time since starting college.
- Anxiety + difficulty concentrating.
- Desire for tips for good social media content: running self-care challenges on IG, sending inspirational quotes.



# Emerging Creative Approaches

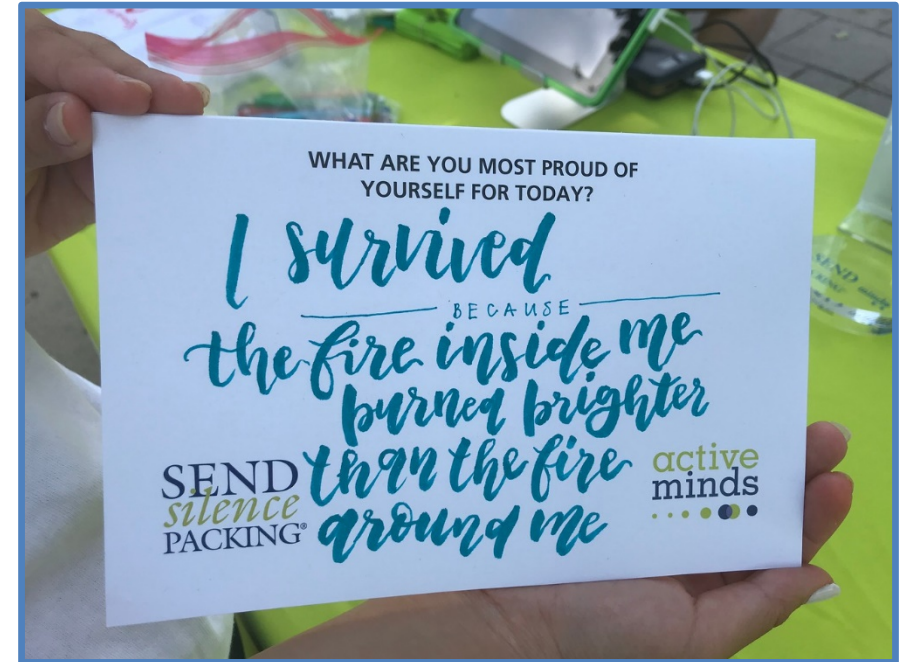
- **Building** social connection during social distancing
  - Keep distance, but stay social: weekly student chat, student Slack channel, pushing supportive texts
- **Design** creative programming
- **Extra** support for international/home/food insecure students
  - Pass/fail grading
- **Practicing** positive mental health/share remote resources
  - Spread the word about counseling services available during online learning period/Telehealth (HIPAA)
  - Share tips for dealing with stress and school closures:  
[activeminds.org/blog](https://www.activeminds.org/blog)



# Coming Bank: Trauma Response and Postvention

## *What students say: “Don’t Avoid”*

- Acknowledge the trauma
- Treat the year as a “postvention year”
  - Communication, Stabilization, Coping, and Advocacy/Policy Change



# Coming Bank: Trauma Response and Postvention

- Communicate, communicate, communicate
- Stabilization and Coping: programming and partnerships with students & faculty
  - Promote resources
- Advocacy/Policy Changes



*Make mental health part of everyday conversation*

# Questions?



# Additional Resources

## COVID19 Resource Pages at WICHE:

- <https://www.wiche.edu/covid-19-resources>
- <https://wcet.wiche.edu/covid-19-resources/policy-briefs-fed-state-regs>
- <https://mhttcnetwork.org/centers/mountain-plains-mhttc/coronavirus-covid-19-mental-health-resources>

## Active Minds Resources:

- [activeminds.org/covid](https://activeminds.org/covid)
- [activeminds.org/join](https://activeminds.org/join)

# Thank You!

Alison Malmon

Active Minds

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