



**SHEEO**

State Higher Education  
Executive Officers Association



The Jed Foundation

# **Lessons from The Wellness Blueprint Convening: Cultivating Foundations for Statewide Student Mental Health Policy**

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The State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) serves the executives of statewide governing, policy, and coordinating boards of postsecondary education and their staffs. Founded in 1954, SHEEO promotes an environment that values higher education and its role in ensuring the equitable education of all Americans, regardless of race/ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic factors. Together with its members, SHEEO aims to achieve this vision by equipping state higher education executive officers and their staffs with the tools to effectively advance the value of higher education, promoting public policies and academic practices that enable all Americans to achieve success in the 21st century, and serving as an advocate for state higher education leadership. For more information, visit [sheeo.org](https://sheeo.org).

The Jed Foundation (JED) is a nonprofit that protects emotional health and prevents suicide for our nation's teens and young adults. We're partnering with high schools and colleges to strengthen their mental health, substance misuse, and suicide prevention programs and systems. We're equipping teens and young adults with the skills and knowledge to help themselves and each other. We're encouraging community awareness, understanding, and action for young adult mental health.

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## INTRODUCTION

Inadequate campus support for student mental health, such as student isolation, long wait times, understaffing, and underfunding, predates 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, contributed to growing students' mental health needs and exacerbating preexisting conditions resulting in a failure to support students adequately. In 2023, more than 60 percent of college students met the criteria for at least one mental health concern – a nearly 50 percent increase<sup>1</sup> since 2013 – according to the [Healthy Minds Study](#).

The impacts of the mental health crisis have been particularly pronounced for historically underrepresented and underserved students, including students of color, students from low-income circumstances, and LGBTQIA+ students, who experience greater disparities in access to mental health care. Systemic inequities, mental health disparities (related to both additive stressors and lower access to care), and higher levels of harassment and violence, exacerbated by the pandemic, have rendered these populations more vulnerable to mental health risks, in comparison to peers from less marginalized groups.

There have been some signs of improvement. In 2022, 36 percent of students<sup>2</sup> indicated they received mental health counseling – a 7 percent increase<sup>3</sup> from 2020. Institution-specific interventions and solutions have also shown some success. Yet widespread equitable access to culturally responsive mental health care continues to be a barrier for most college students.<sup>4</sup> The growing need for systemic, policy-driven approaches at the state and system level is clear.

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1. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0165032722002774>

2. [https://healthymindsnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/HMS\\_National-Report-2022-2023\\_full.pdf](https://healthymindsnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/HMS_National-Report-2022-2023_full.pdf)

3. <https://healthymindsnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/HMS-Fall-2020-National-Data-Report.pdf>

4. <https://news.umich.edu/college-students-anxiety-depression-higher-than-ever-but-so-are-efforts-to-receive-care/>

## EMERGING POLICIES AND PRACTICES

The State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) and The Jed Foundation (JED) recognized the need for state- and system-wide policy solutions to advance student mental health and launched a student mental health and wellness learning community in the fall of 2023. With generous support from the Lumina Foundation, this learning community has focused on the development and implementation of policy recommendations to advance student mental health and wellness.

After a rigorous Request for Proposal (RFP) process, five states (Arizona, Louisiana, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Texas) were selected for a planning grant to facilitate their participation in the inaugural Student Mental Health and Wellness Learning Community from 2023-2024. The learning community states engaged in technical assistance opportunities focused on creating a culture and community of care, supporting the unmet mental health needs of faculty and staff who serve as unprepared first responders, and demonstrating the return on investment (ROI) on mental health.



Source: SHEEO-JED Convening

In late April, learning community states came together for a convening in Minneapolis, “**The Wellness Blueprint: Cultivating Foundations for Statewide Student Mental Health Policy.**” Hosting this event in Minneapolis was a deliberate choice, not only for its geographic centrality to participating states but also for its powerful symbolic significance in centering equity in our discussions. The location enabled a meaningful pre-convening tour of the George Floyd Memorial, where attendees had the opportunity to meet George Floyd’s family and hear from community leaders who have since dedicated themselves to promoting mental health as a vital profession. This emphasis on equity and community learning carried through the sessions, which urged states to address the heightened mental health challenges faced by minoritized students during the pandemic. Throughout the convening, state teams from our learning community identified collaborative strategies and innovative solutions to bolster institutions’ ability to effectively promote and support student mental health, thereby fostering educational success and overall life fulfillment.

In this white paper, SHEEO shares insights from the Wellness Blueprint convening where learning community states presented their work and identified opportunities for future work. Following this introduction, the paper provides detailed recommendations and case studies from each learning community state, illustrating practical applications and strategies that can guide state and system policy development. These examples highlight successful interventions and innovative approaches that other states can replicate or adapt to enhance student mental health and wellness on a broader scale. SHEEO will build on the insights highlighted in this paper in the final deliverable, which will be published at the culmination of the inaugural learning community in late 2024.

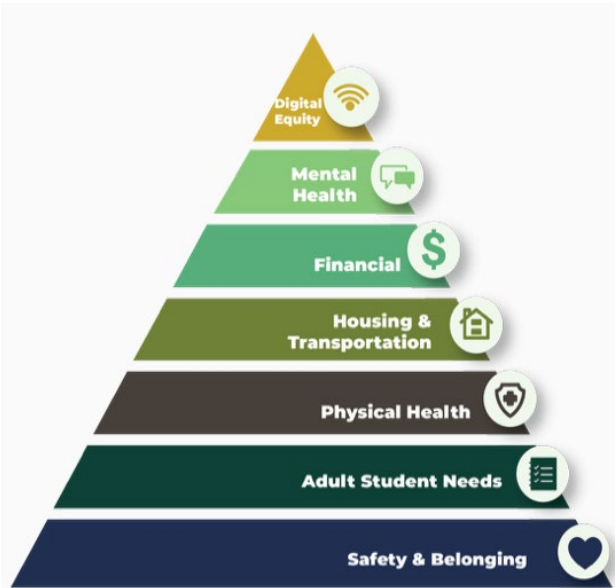
### INSIGHT 1: EMPHASIZING BASIC NEEDS AS FOUNDATIONAL TO ADVANCING MENTAL HEALTH

Current research<sup>5</sup> reinforces what students have consistently requested of academic institutions: **meeting students’ basic needs is foundational to ensuring student mental health and consequently student success.** When students have access to essential resources such as food, housing, and financial stability,

5. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-019-00189-5>

they are better equipped to manage stress and focus on their academic and personal growth. Addressing these basic needs creates a stable and supportive environment that directly influences students' mental well-being. Without the burden of unmet basic needs, students can fully engage in their educational pursuits within campus cultures that include psychological safety, leading to improved overall health and academic success. Learning from our member states, higher education agencies and institutions should prioritize these fundamental basic needs to foster a healthy, productive, and resilient student population.

The **Arizona Board of Regents** (ABOR) is actively expanding its current Students Food and Housing Insecurity Taskforce to comprehensively address basic needs alongside mental health and wellness. Recognizing that student success is intricately linked to having these essential needs met, the task force aims to provide a holistic support system for students. Arizona is integrating initiatives that address food insecurity and housing stability with mental health services to create a more supportive and nurturing environment for students. This expanded focus ensures that students have the necessary resources to thrive academically and personally, highlighting the state's commitment to fostering a well-rounded approach to student well-being.



Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education

**PA MASLOW**, launched by the **Pennsylvania Department of Education** (PDE), recognizes the critical importance of addressing basic needs to foster student success. Based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, this initiative focuses on meeting students' foundational needs—such as food, housing, mental health, and financial stability—are essential for their academic achievement and overall well-being.

By focusing on the 7 Pillars of Work, PA MASLOW aims to share resources and best practices among higher education practitioners throughout the Commonwealth. The initiative employs comprehensive strategies to identify and address basic needs on campus through the PA MASLOW Checklist and Fifty States MASLOW Checklist to aid in asset mapping and through the You Good? Anti-stigma campaign.

By prioritizing basic needs, PA MASLOW helps to remove barriers to education, allowing students to engage in their studies and achieve their academic goals. Pennsylvania's holistic approach underscores that student success is not merely about providing academic support but also about ensuring the well-being of every student.



Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education



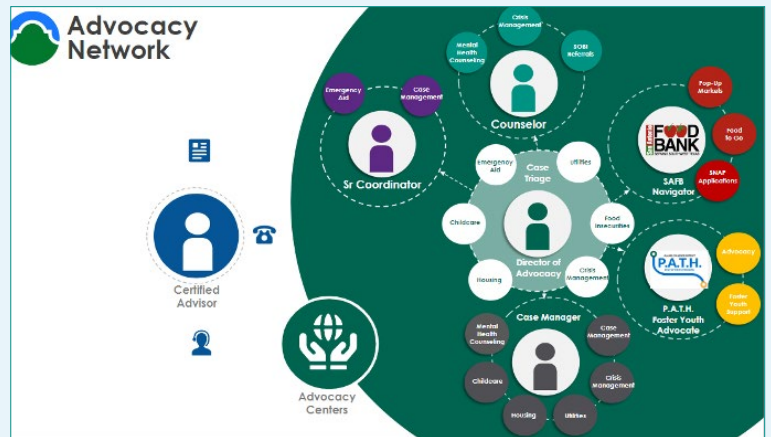
## INSIGHT 2: BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

Most state higher education agencies recognize that a successful state-driven effort to advance student mental health and wellness will require a coalition of stakeholders and organizations with a shared vision. Each team tasked to advance student mental health must engage a broad array of cross-sector stakeholders across a shared system or state to effectively address the student mental health crisis. SHEEO-JED state learning community teams built diverse partnerships with representatives from higher education agencies, higher education institutions or systems, health departments, non-profit organizations, and philanthropies.



Source: SHEEO-JED Convening

The **Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB)** leads the learning community with partnerships from the **Texas State University System (TSUS)**, **Alamo Colleges District**, **Dallas College**, **Trellis Foundation**, **Meadows Mental Health Policy Institution**, and the **The Hope Center** to create a comprehensive support network for mental health initiatives. Representation from philanthropies such as the Trellis Foundation as well as technical experts such as the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute and the Hope Center significantly enhance the Texas learning community team's efforts in addressing student mental health and wellness. By integrating philanthropic support with technical expertise, the Texas team can access additional funding, innovative strategies, and specialized knowledge grounded in the Texas context that can amplify their impact. This synergy allows for a more comprehensive approach to mental health initiatives, ensuring internal state resources and expertise are used effectively and reach a broad audience across the vast state.



Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

**Arizona** also exemplifies the power of cross-sector partnerships in driving student mental health initiatives. The **Arizona Board of Regents (ABOR)** collaborates with the **Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System**, the **Arizona Department of Health Services**, and various nonprofit organizations to support the planning and implementation of mental health programs. This collaboration allows for a coordinated approach to mental health that integrates services across different sectors, ensuring that students receive comprehensive support. By engaging with external stakeholders, Arizona can expand its coalition and build momentum for statewide mental health initiatives.

### INSIGHT 3: CENTERING MARGINALIZED VOICES TO DEVELOP CULTURALLY COMPETENT SERVICES FOR EQUITABLE ACCESS

State higher education agencies committed to advancing student mental health and wellness should center the needs of marginalized voices in their policy development, as these communities often face the greatest barriers to accessing mental health resources. Marginalized and underserved students, including those from racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic minority groups, as well as LGBTQ+ individuals, experience higher rates of mental health challenges due to systemic inequities and additional stressors. By actively centering the lived experiences of minoritized voices in policy discussions and policy development, higher education agencies can work to ensure the support of all students in fidelity leading to more inclusive, equitable, and effective mental health support systems.



Source: SHEEO-JED Convening

State higher education agencies should also commit to the development of culturally responsive services to meet the unique needs of diverse student populations. These services recognize the distinct cultural, social, and economic backgrounds that influence students' mental health experiences and access to care. By integrating culturally competent counseling and tailored awareness programs, states can create inclusive environments that respect and value the diverse identities of all students.

Ensuring equitable access to mental health resources means that all students, regardless of their backgrounds, can receive appropriate and effective support. This approach not only promotes better mental health outcomes but also fosters a more inclusive and supportive campus community, where every student can thrive academically and personally.

The **Oregon** learning community, led by the **Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission** (HECC), has proactively centered marginalized voices in the development of its advisory board. The board was established to address the mental health needs of historically underserved student populations, including students of color and low-income students. It comprises higher education professionals from culturally specific and marginalized groups to ensure the voices of those most impacted by health disparities, particularly mental health disparities, are focused on policy development.



Source: SHEEO-JED Convening

The board's first meeting in February marked the beginning of a series of discussions and listening sessions aimed at identifying what has and has not worked in providing mental health support to marginalized students on their campuses. By incorporating diverse perspectives, Oregon aims to create more inclusive and effective mental health strategies.



**Pennsylvania's PA MASLOW** initiative is another example of centering marginalized voices in policy development. The initiative includes targeted outreach to diverse student populations, ensuring that the mental health needs of underrepresented groups are addressed. By incorporating feedback from students of color, LGBTQ+ students, and students from low-income backgrounds. Pennsylvania is conducting an equity audit, using focus groups and surveys, to ensure mental health needs of underrepresented groups are addressed through inclusive and effective policies. Results from the survey will help identify barriers to access and help tailor mental health services to meet student specific needs.

**Louisiana** supports marginalized students through targeted marketing campaigns and outreach efforts designed to ensure that all students are aware of and can access mental health resources. These initiatives specifically reach out to and build relationships with on-campus centers that support diverse student groups such as the multi-cultural center or the LGBTQ+ center, thereby emphasizing the availability and inclusiveness of mental health services. Louisiana is intentional in ensuring that its services are culturally responsive so counseling and support respects and acknowledges the unique cultural backgrounds and experiences of students. This culturally sensitive approach helps create a supportive environment where all students, particularly those from marginalized communities, feel seen, understood, and adequately supported in their mental health and wellness journeys.

#### INSIGHT 4: IDENTIFYING STUDENT CHALLENGES AND NEEDS TO DEVELOP POLICY

Higher education agencies should conduct a needs assessment to understand the specific mental health challenges faced by students in their state. This assessment identifies the prevalence of conditions such as anxiety or depression as well as barriers that prevent access to mental health services. It also sets a baseline for where an institution or system stands as it relates to meeting student needs. By pointing out these challenges, a needs assessment provides valuable data and insights that inform the development of targeted, evidence-based policies. Such policies can then be tailored to address the unique needs of different student populations, ensuring that resources are allocated effectively and impactfully. A well-conducted needs assessment lays the groundwork for creating a supportive and responsive mental health infrastructure that promotes the well-being and academic success of all students.

**Pennsylvania** conducted a policy and program scan on student mental health support at all its state higher education institutions. The scan revealed that anxiety and depression are the top concerns among students. The survey and subsequent report provide crucial insights into the mental health challenges faced by the student population and will inform policy development and implementation.

As an example, some institutions have implemented the proactive measure of keeping ambulances on retainer, ensuring immediate transportation for students in need of urgent care, to address acute mental health emergencies. Approaches such as this underscore the importance of having rapid response capabilities to address acute mental health crises effectively. By identifying these prevalent issues and implementing strategic measures, **Pennsylvania's Department of Education** and its institutions aim to create a safer and more supportive environment for all students by identifying gaps and implementing solutions.

## INSIGHT 5: USING DATA TO UNCOVER BARRIERS AND DRIVE POLICY

Data, both quantitative and qualitative, is crucial to understanding student mental health needs and informing effective policy development. Quantitative data, including survey results and statistical analyses, provide measurable insights into the prevalence and patterns of mental health concerns among students. Qualitative data, such as interviews and focus groups, offer deeper insights into how lived experiences and contextual factors influence student well-being. Together, these forms of data enable a holistic understanding of the challenges faced by students, thereby allowing policymakers to craft targeted, evidence-based interventions that address both the widespread and nuanced aspects of mental health.

The **Texas** learning community utilizes surveys from organizations like **The Hope Center** and the **Healthy Minds Study** to gather comprehensive data on student mental health needs and access to services. These surveys, which involve numerous higher education institutions across the state, reveal critical insights into the mental health challenges faced by students. For instance, a survey conducted by The Hope Center in Spring 2023 found that 43% of students experience clinically significant symptoms of depression or anxiety, with 25% of these students not accessing any form of mental health services.

Through these surveys, Texas identified three significant barriers to accessing mental health services: availability, financial constraints, and lack of awareness. Students reported availability and financial challenges such as difficulty in finding appointments, conflicting obligations, prohibitive cost of services, and lack of insurance coverage. Students also reported a lack of awareness about where and how to seek help. Identifying these key barriers better equips Texas to develop targeted strategies to improve access to mental health services for its student population.

**Oregon**, too, uses data from its **Youth Suicide Intervention and Prevention Plan (YSIPP)** and **Adult Suicide Intervention and Prevention Plan (ASIPP)** to uncover barriers and drive policy. These plans include comprehensive data collection efforts that track mental health trends, service utilization, and outcomes. The data helps identify gaps in service delivery and areas where additional support is needed. By continuously analyzing this information, Oregon can adapt its policies and programs to better support student mental health across the state.

## INSIGHT 6: DRIVING STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVES THROUGH CHAMPIONS

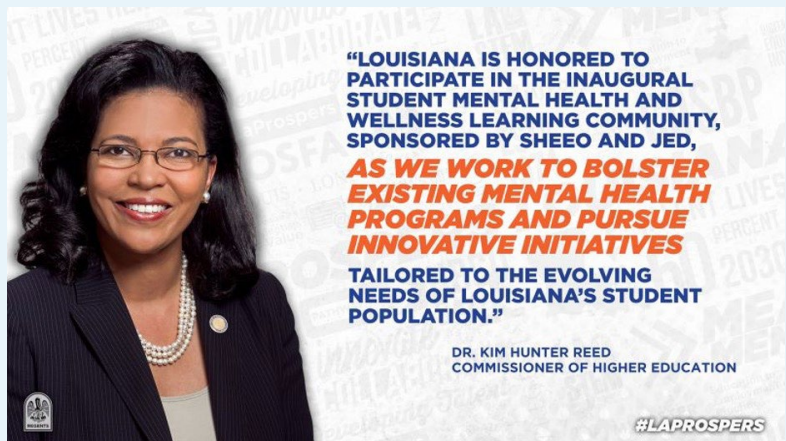
States in the learning community demonstrate how important it is to have a leader committed to and invested in student mental health initiatives. The mental health and well-being of students directly impact their ability to succeed in higher education with implications for postsecondary success and economic development. When a policy leader emphasizes the importance of investments in mental health, it highlights how interrelated mental health is to academic achievement, retention, and graduation rates which are fundamental to students' long-term success.<sup>6</sup>

By promoting student mental health, state policy leaders can steer supportive educational environments toward fostering resilience and productivity, leading to a more skilled and capable workforce. Additionally, leadership focus on mental health can make policies more politically feasible as part of a pressing public health issue and an investment in the future economic stability of the community. This political backing is essential for securing the necessary funding and legislative support to implement and sustain comprehensive mental health programs.

**Arizona** has demonstrated strong leadership support for investment in student mental health. Governor Hobbs released the "Arizona for Everyone" priorities, which include a focus on improving education, safe and healthy schools, housing, human services, and accessible healthcare—all critical components that relate to student mental health and wellness. The **Arizona Board of Regents** (ABOR) has been actively involved in roadmap sessions to discuss collective impact approaches and make student mental health a priority in policy initiatives. These sessions provide an opportunity for ABOR to present evidence that underscores the statewide need for targeted mental health interventions and support, particularly for underrepresented student populations.

In **Louisiana**, the commitment of leadership at both the state and institutional levels is driving considerable progress in student mental health initiatives. The **Louisiana Board of Regents**, in collaboration with the **Louisiana Department of Health**, advocates for increased funding and support for mental health services

across the state's public postsecondary systems. Leaders, including the Commissioner Dr. Kim Hunter Reed, have been vocal in legislative sessions, emphasizing the importance of mental health funding and the need for sustainable support systems. The advocacy of state higher education agencies has been pivotal in aligning state resources with institutional needs.






Source: Louisiana Board of Regents

6. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.201800332>

## INSIGHT 7: CREATING SUSTAINABLE, SCALABLE, AND WELL-FUNDED SUPPORTS

While short-term funding prospects can help address immediate needs related to student mental health support services, sustaining and scaling programs that have a lasting impact requires longer-term investments from states, institutions, and other funding partners. Sustainable funding ensures that mental health initiatives are not only implemented but maintained and improved over time by adapting to changing student needs. Sustainability, however, alone will not address the vastness of the student mental health crisis. It is also important that programs are scalable so that they can be expanded and replicated across various institutions thereby maximizing their reach and effectiveness. By securing continuous political and financial support, stakeholders can build comprehensive mental health infrastructures that provide consistent, high-quality care, fostering a healthier, more resilient student population for years to come.

**Arizona** demonstrates its commitment to ensuring its mental health services are scalable and sustainable by seeking to establish the Student Well-Being Task Force. An expansion of the Student Food and Housing Insecurity Taskforce, the Student Well-Being Task Force, focuses on integrating comprehensive mental health services across all educational institutions. Arizona collaborates with various stakeholders, including the [Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System](#) and the [Arizona Department of Health Services](#), to secure ongoing funding and support. This multifaceted approach allows for continuous evaluation and expansion of mental health services, ensuring that Arizona can scale support to meet the growing needs of the student population.

	<h3>QPR/Suicide Prevention Training</h3>	<p>Implemented at Arizona State University (ASU), Northern Arizona University (NAU), and University of Arizona (UArizona)</p> <p>Innovative, evidence-based training to reduce suicidal behaviors and save lives</p> <p>Enhances capacity to identify and refer individuals in distress</p>
	<h3>Student Well-being Task Force</h3>	<p>Planned task force to institutionalize focus on student mental health</p> <p>Proposed expanded scope to include mental health and basic needs</p> <p>Multi-stakeholder approach involving students, faculty, staff, and community partners</p>
	<h3>System-Level Convening</h3>	<p>Upcoming convening of key leaders from universities, organizations, and agencies</p> <p>Share successful strategies, discuss best practices, and develop recommendations</p> <p>Foster collaboration and partnerships to support implementation</p>

Source: Arizona Board of Regents

**Louisiana** leverages partnerships with state agencies to secure funding through diverse sources. The Louisiana Higher Education Coalition (LaHEC) plays a pivotal role in coordinating efforts across institutions and facilitating the sharing of resources and best practices. By advocating for consistent state funding and exploring grants and private partnerships, Louisiana aims to create a robust framework that can adapt and expand over time to meet the evolving mental health needs of its students.

Mental Health in Louisiana

**1 in 5 U.S. adults** experience mental illness each year.

**715,000 adults** in Louisiana have a mental health condition.  
That's more than **3X** the population of Baton Rouge.

**More than half of Americans** report that **COVID-19** has had a **negative impact** on their mental health.

In February 2021, **47.5% of adults in Louisiana** reported symptoms of **anxiety or depression**.  
**18.6% were unable to get needed counseling or therapy.**

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**1 in 20 U.S. adults** experience serious mental illness each year.

In Louisiana, **179,000 adults** have a **serious mental illness**.

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**1 in 6 U.S. youth** aged 6–17 experience a **mental health disorder** each year.

**44,000 Louisianans** age 12–17 have depression.

**Louisianans struggle to get the help they need.**

**More than half of people** with a mental health condition in the U.S. **did not receive any treatment** in the last year.

Of the **194,000 adults in Louisiana who did not receive needed mental health care**, **41.8%** did not because of cost.

**8.9% of people in the state are uninsured.**

**Louisianans** are over **4x more likely to be forced out-of-network** for mental health care than for primary health care — making it more difficult to find care and less affordable due to higher out-of-pocket costs.

**3,398,990 people** in Louisiana live in a community that **does not have enough mental health professionals**.

It is more important than ever to build a stronger mental health system that provides the care, support and services needed to help people build better lives.

Source: Louisiana Board of Regents

**Oregon** has developed comprehensive, long-term plans such as the Youth Suicide Intervention and Prevention Plan (YSIPP) and Adult Suicide Intervention and Prevention Plan (ASIPP) to ensure the sustainability and scalability of its mental health initiatives. These plans are supported by stable funding from state appropriations and grants. Additionally, Oregon's inclusion of mental health strategies in institutional policies through advisory boards and task forces helps institutionalize these efforts, ensuring that they are continuously supported and expanded as needed.



## THE WORK AHEAD

The insights from the Wellness Blueprint convening highlight the promising efforts of the SHEEO-JED Student Mental Health and Wellness learning community states. Together the states highlighted some of the most effective ways to create a culture of care, support the mental health needs of faculty and staff, and demonstrate the return on investment of mental health initiatives. States are prioritizing basic needs, building cross-sector partnerships, centering marginalized voices, and using data to uncover barriers and drive policy. By focusing on sustainable, scalable, and well-funded supports, these states are working towards creating comprehensive mental health infrastructures.

States and systems are also engaging in the crucial task of understanding and demonstrating the return on investment (ROI) in student mental health. Learning Community states are applying lessons from Dr. Daniel Eisenberg's work at the Healthy Minds Initiative on calculating ROI estimates at the campus level to inform state and system policy decisions. This approach will help the states make informed decisions about state mental health investments and effectively communicate the need for additional funding. This is especially important as federal emergency funds from the pandemic are discontinued. By demonstrating the financial and social benefits of investing in student mental health, states can secure the necessary support to sustain and expand these essential services.

Participating states will continue to engage in technical assistance opportunities offered by SHEEO and JED through the summer and fall of 2024. The learning community will ultimately contribute to a best practice report to be published in late 2024.