

### **USI Mental Health**

This strategy aims to provide a framework for good practice for the support of students, the promotion of mental well-being and prevention of mental health difficulties, to be implemented by both the Union of Students in Ireland and local Students' Unions.

The USI Vice President for Welfare must follow the USI Mental Health Strategy and assist local officers in following through with its recommendations by disseminating the strategy at the beginning of each year.

'It is internationally recognised that mental illness is a public health problem in need of urgent attention. Mental health disorders account for a significant burden of disease in all societies. Effective interventions are available but are not accessible to the majority of the people who need them.' — World Health Organisation World Health Report 2001 Mental Health New Understandings New Hope.

## **Collaborations and Partnerships**

*USI acknowledges the importance of collaborations and partnerships when it comes to mental health organisations. USI recognises the need to work with others in the mental health sector to further our aims and ambitions.*

### **Objectives:**

- To build support for the work that USI does in the area of mental health.
- To develop new initiatives through collaborations with students' unions and external organisations.
- To build upon a coalition for effective lobbying for mental health supports and legislative change.
- To build a network of partners and stakeholders across 3rd level institutions in Ireland.

### **Actions:**

- Seek support from external organisations to strengthen campaigns on the issue.
- Collaborate and consult with students' unions, student groups and external organisations to support and develop new campaigns, resources, research and training.
- Sustain coalitions, such as the Mental Health Working Group for 3rd Level.
- Sustain membership to organisations such as Mental Health Reform
- Develop an accreditation scheme in consultation with external organisations for 3rd level institutions and develop an Annual Forum for Mental Health.
- Establish and maintain links with HSE resource officers to provide support and resources to Students' Union Officers.
- Establish and maintain links with Mental Health Ireland development officers to provide support and resources to Students' Union Officers.
- The VP Welfare should run a mental health campaign in the first semester, at the very least in an online form, but should aim to have the main mental health week in semester 1 of the academic year.

### **Suggested Action for Students' Unions:**

- To aim, where possible, to establish links with local organisations and resources and promote local supports to students in campus community.
- To support the development of local coalitions and committees that aim to promote mental health supports and resources.

## **Training and Support - Students' Unions**

*We believe, through knowledge gained by working with young people as student leaders, and through our lived experience as students, that Students' Union Officers are uniquely positioned to work for the better mental health of our student populations.*

*We believe our colleges and universities are communities and families, and to ensure the relationships within these institutions are strong and healthy, all members must be safeguarded, cherished and protected. We recognise that the lack of resources in Students' Unions contributes to stress and pressure upon officers, and their ability to support others in difficulty. It is important Students' Union are trained and supported throughout their terms.*

### **Objectives:**

- To support officers throughout their term in dealing with casework in relation to mental health.
- To equip officers with the skills and tools necessary to promote understanding of and a positive approach to mental health and help seeking on campus.
- To support officers to develop new initiatives to improve the mental health of their student population
- For Students' Unions to be encouraged to seek consultation with mental health professionals, where possible.
- For Students' Unions to be equipped with the skills and information necessary to partake in lobbying efforts.
- For Students' Unions to be equipped with the skills and information necessary to develop and review campus policy and to seek representation on student services management committees.
- For Students' Union officers to be aware of Self Care best practice and promote the importance of Self Care to officers in their line of work

### **Action:**

- Provide training for relevant officers during the summer term in mental health promotion.
- Provide training for relevant officers during the summer term in dealing with casework and referral.
- Provide mental health first aid to Officers through St. John of Gods
- Provide an online mental health resources and contacts for Students' Unions through the USI Mental Health Hub on USI.ie
- Support officers in establishing links with local, community-based support services to establish referral pathways and to support their work in promoting positive mental health, coping skills and therapies.
- Promote the St Pats Helpline to SU Officers
- Lobbying training Policy training Campaign Training - Briefing Session on issues
- The VP Welfare shall support MOs in organising lobbying for local representatives with the support of regional officers.

**Suggested Action for Students' Unions:**

- Where possible, attend training events promoted or organised by USI.
- Utilise appropriate resources and supports provided through USI or locally by relevant organisations and support services.
- Aim to establish local links with community-based services and identify a referral path for students in need.
- Utilise personal support either from the VP Welfare or from Walk in My Shoes Helpline to debrief and discuss casework.
- To follow best practice for Self Care during officer terms.
- To seek, where possible, representation on campus decision making boards/committees in relation to mental health.
- Aim to develop and review new or existing campus mental health policies.

## **Stigma Reduction and Awareness Campaigns**

*It is vitally important for USI to aim to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues in the student population and encourage an open attitude towards the discussion and treatment of mental ill-health. The experience of mental ill health and its associated stigma can mean real personal suffering and distress for some students. Stigma is a barrier that deters students from accessing mental health supports. "The number of those in receipt of mental health services is far lower than the level of need" (Rothi and Leavey. 2006).*

### **Objectives:**

- To support and develop new initiatives that will reduce stigma of mental ill health among 3rd level students.
- To equip officers in developing new campaigns and initiatives on campus to reduce stigma associated with mental ill-health.
- To encourage and support campus events to promote positive mental health
- To encourage new student media to promote positive mental health in campus publications
- To promote material from those who have lived life experience as a means to reduce stigma and encourage open discussion of mental health.
- To promote stigma reduction in national campaigns
- To increase support for USI's efforts to reduce stigma

### **Actions:**

- Develop a USI Mental Health Campus Ambassador scheme. Run a recruitment drive at the beginning of each academic year and communicate campaigns and training opportunities to ambassadors throughout the year.
- Develop a secondary Mental Health Hub for students/student ambassadors and provide a resource to log positive mental health events.
- Include guides on media production in Mental Health Hub
- Develop a promotion plan and outreach programme through the ambassador scheme.
- Promote student blogs on Mental Health Hub/Please Talk
- Collaborate with student ambassadors to include stigma reduction material in national campaigns
- Maintain relationships with organisations that promote stigma reduction such as Please Talk etc.
- Encourage on campus initiatives such as Mental Health Officers in 3rd level institutions.

### **Suggested Actions for Students' Unions:**

- Where possible aim to promote campaigns and initiatives that reduces stigma and encourages an open attitude towards the treatment of mental ill-health

### **Suicide Prevention and Postvention - Therapy and Help Seeking Promotion.**

*In the past few years, there has been an evident shift in the way that third level institutions view their role with respect to the health and specifically mental health of students.*

*Initiatives such as UCC Health Matters have been established to improve upon campus community health and well-being.*

*Our college communities need to be safe, suicide aware spaces for all students, with targeted approaches to reduce suicidal behaviour and improve mental health among students.*

*Creating ongoing awareness of services and supports on campus is a challenging task.*

*Students may not seek help for mental health issues due to lack of awareness about available services or misconceptions about those services. According to Reach Out Ireland “a high proportion of students with poor mental health may not be aware of the need for support.”. (ReachOut Ireland 2015)*

#### **Objectives:**

- Increase campus capacity to prevent and respond to suicidal behaviour.
- Enhance communications and awareness of support services among students.
- Build awareness of positive mental health or mental fitness and its important relationship with academic and workplace success.
- Promote personal growth and development among students to prevent mental ill-health.
- Provide suicide intervention training appropriate for students.

#### **Actions:**

- Research and collaborate to review existing training and where necessary develop new training to equip students in suicide intervention skills.
- Support Students' Unions in developing an on-campus Help Seeking Promotion Plan
- Develop an online promotion plan for USI to facilitate help seeking promotion on social media platforms.
- Encourage officers to provide support information to students in financial difficulty.
- Include promotions of various therapies and coping skills in national mental health campaigns.
- Promote the provision of staff roles to facilitate a supportive environment and promote and lobby for improved mental health training and resources for academic and other staff to equip them with the tools and skills necessary to assume a more supportive role for students.
- Promote physical activity and exercise programmes as a protective factor in national campaigns.
- Promote help-seeking and mental fitness as part of academic and career success.
- Create awareness of post-trauma resources, providing support where necessary for students' union to develop a protocol for responding to a traumatic event on campus such as a student death by suicide.

#### **Suggested Actions for Students' Unions:**

- Ensure that sources of help and support are well publicised on campus.

- To attend, where possible, training provided or promoted by USI to equip officers with the skills and tools needed to support fellow students.
- To promote campus-based therapies and programmes that encourage coping skills among students.
- To develop new initiatives on campus in relation to Suicide Prevention and Postvention Therapy and Help Seeking Promotion
- Develop a campus Help-Seeking Promotion Plan at the beginning of academic term.
- Develop a referral path to Mental Health Supports for students in financial difficulty.

## **Funding and Services**

*Ireland has one of the highest levels of participation in third-level education within the EU (Careersportal, 2013 - Eurostat Figures). The importance of promoting positive mental health among the large third-level student population cannot be underestimated, with recent research showing a high percentage of students experiencing mental health difficulties including depression, anxiety, loneliness, substance misuse and suicidal behaviour (Vision for Change, 2006).*

*The number of mature students, international students, students with disabilities and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds has also grown steadily. Yet the provision of counselling services to meet the growing numbers and diverse needs of students has not kept pace.*

*One in four people will experience mental health problems in the course of their lives. A small percentage of persons affected will require access to mental health services to address their mental health needs. Currently waiting lists can be up to six weeks which raises serious concern if a student is in distress. Given the increasing numbers of students reporting mental health issues this causes serious concerns if a student is in distress. Currently, as a result of hiring restrictions most institutions may not be able to afford to hire extra counselling staff to meet the demand. Access to 24/7 crisis intervention services remain extremely poor. Some patients who present to A&E with a mental health crisis face lengthy waits of 8 hours or more before receiving support.*

### **Objectives:**

- To protect and improve funding for mental health services within our college communities.
- To build support through the production of reports and research to lobby.

### **Actions:**

- Lobby for the creation of a promotion plan for positive mental health or mental fitness, building coalitions to support its development and progress included within the development and implementation of a Health Promoting College Network with Healthy Ireland.
- Lobby for budget allocations for counselling services to be ring fenced.
- Lobby for the introduction of community based 24/7 crisis intervention services.
- Retain membership of MHR and actively partake in the coalition of organisations campaigning to transform mental health and well-being supports in Ireland.
- Lobby for budgets to services to be protected during cuts through the provision of reports and research.
- Work with the CSSI, PCHEI and ISHA to research access to and integration of support services on campus and in catchment area.
- Following through commitments on the Youth Mental Health Taskforce

### **Suggested Actions for Students' Unions:**

- Students' Union Officers should aim to partake, where possible, in lobbying opportunities with support from regional officers locally and the VP Welfare on a national basis.
- Establish a referral pathway for students in need of mental health supports.

### **Research, Monitoring and Evaluation**

*It is vital for USI to review progress under the Mental Health Strategy on an annual basis. By providing basic annual progress reports on the action points outlined in the strategy, progress and effect can be tracked and with the provision of annual reviews, updates or changes can be suggested if deemed necessary.*

#### **Objectives:**

- To monitor the impact of USI campaigns to promote mental health awareness.
- To evaluate and review each campaign yearly and to update the strategy accordingly.
- To continue to collaborate and partner with organisations to collect research and data to guide USI's work in mental health promotion.

#### **Actions:**

- Map progress of the strategy and produce a yearly progress update document.
- To review all campaigns and evaluate impact with support from external expert groups and consultation with VP Campaigns.
- Implement the strategy with regular monitoring and review of its effectiveness by USI National Council, Welfare Working Group, Campaign Working Group and Regional Working Groups.

#### **Suggested Action for Students' Unions:**

- Where possible, review local campaigns on campus level to ensure messaging is effective, appropriate and relevant to students.

### **Relationship with Other Strategies:**

#### **Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015-2020**

Higher Education Authority – Commitments List Role Action Work with the HSE to develop national guidance for higher education institutions in relation to suicide risk and critical-incident response, thereby helping to address any gaps which may exist in the prevention of suicide in higher education.

*Lead 3.3.3 Support the coordination and streamlining of research completed by third-level institutions.*

*Lead 7.4.2 Encourage the coordination of suicide-prevention initiatives and research across the higher education sector.*

Support, in relation to suicide prevention, the Substance Misuse Strategy, to address the high rate of alcohol and drug misuse.

*3.3 Enhance the supports for young people with mental health problems or vulnerable to suicide.*

The USI Mental Health Strategy also relates to action points prescribed in the Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy, the USI Physical Health Strategy and the USI Sexual Health Strategy.

#### **Previous Mandates:**

- The VP Welfare to create a set of guidelines for officers as a support and referral guide on how best to deal with Student bereavement in supporting bereaved students and themselves.
- The VP Welfare to coordinate a training event on bereavement for all officers annually before the academic year commences
- The VP for Welfare to co-ordinate a campaign with literature that provides support, advice and support services to students who are suffering from bereavement.
- The USI VP for Welfare to provide training to Welfare Officers to support students in this position as well as providing links to organisations who work in the area of bereavement.
- The Vice-President for Welfare to include information on the use of medication in relation to mental health issues as part of their on-going mental health campaigns.
- The Vice President for Welfare to lobby the relevant bodies including the Minister for Disability, Equality, Mental Health and Older People to lift the embargo on the hiring of counselling staff in Higher Education Institutes and for increased funding to be given specifically for the provision of adequate Counselling services to all Third Level Students either through the direct employment of more Counsellors or in purchasing external counselling session hours.
- The VP for Welfare to find out the best practice of MOs regarding their individual bereavement policies and come up with a uniformed policy for MOs to use in the case of a bereavement. This mandate should be fulfilled by September 2014.
- The VP for welfare to ensure that Safetalk training are offered to all Welfare Officers and any other officer who wish to avail of such training by September before students return to college.
- The Vice President for Welfare to lobby the Minister for Disability, Equality, Mental Health & Older People to challenge the Minister for Education on the effects that the rising student contribution charge and 3% cut to the maintenance grant has on the mental health of students in Ireland.

- The Vice President for Welfare, in consultation with other members of Officer Board, to organise intensive casework training for Students' Union officers each year. This training must include; referral, role plays, data protection and managing casework records. This training must be completed before September each year.
- The Vice President for Welfare to organise Suicide Intervention Skills Training each year for Students' Union Officers. This must be completed by September each year.
- The USI President and VP for Welfare to call on the Government in the strongest possible terms to ensure that commitments to fund mental health services are met in future Budgets, and for the speedy roll-out of service developments for which these monies were earmarked.
- To provide supports to individual Students' Unions by way of centralised sourcing materials and information, targeting the stigma surrounding mental health issues.
- To further engage with relevant groups and NGOs to publicise the various means of dealing with mental illness to the wider student population. To run a campaign on the issues raised above.
- The Welfare Officer to organise, design and run a National Suicide Prevention Campaign that would be rolled out right across the Country on a Specific Day.
- To both follow the USI Mental Health Strategy and assist local officers in following through with its recommendations by disseminating the strategy at the start of the year as well as providing support and training throughout the year.
- The Vice President for Welfare to create a new USI Mental Health Strategy with specific reference to reducing stigma, to be completed by January 2014.
- The Vice President for Welfare to implement the USI Mental Health Strategy and assist local officers in following through with its recommendations by disseminating the strategy at the start of the year as well as providing support and training throughout the year.
- The Vice President for Welfare to conduct a study on the effects of budget cuts on counselling services and in turn the danger which could leave young people at further risk. The results from the study carried out can be used to lobby Minister for Disability, Equality, Mental Health & Older People prior to Budget 2014.

### **Reporting and Progress**

To ensure transparency, accountability and ongoing priority is placed on the mental health and wellness of students in Ireland clear and consistent communication on the progress of the implementation of the USI Mental Health Strategy and its initiatives are vital. The strategy's progress will be documented in USI's annual report, along with highlighting individual campus initiatives as they are launched throughout the year. An accreditation scheme will be developed to award individual campuses for excellence in mental health promotion and support.

The strategic objectives for Mental Health in 3rd level between now and July 2020 are set out in this strategy and reflect the ambition and intent of the Union of Students in Ireland to deliver on its mandate for its members.

Titles	Mandate / Info	Comment / Update on mandate
<b>Investment in Mental Health Care in Rural and West of Ireland</b>	The USI Welfare Officer to lobby for ongoing Mental Health services in the west and rural Ireland inclusive of non-emergency services as well as bringing awareness to the current situation in order to highlight the need, and aid the lobbying for this investment.	Met with Victim support and part of student manifesto
<b>Men's Mental Health</b>	The Vice President for Welfare & Vice President for Equality and Citizenship to coordinate an action to mark International Men's Day specific to Men's Health.	Action on International men's day highlighting male suicide rates
<b>Counselling and Mental Health Support for Students' Union Officers.</b>	The Vice President for Welfare to explore the possibility of providing free counselling services and mental health support to all USI and SU officers throughout their term with an additional number of de-brief sessions to follow on from the end of an officer's term.	Crisis text line provided
<b>Timetabled Wellness Hours</b>	The USI Welfare Officer to develop a proposal document based on the USI Mental Health survey outlining the benefits of timetabled Wellness Hours on students from a holistic lifestyle approach with a focus on student retention, mental health and wellbeing. This document would be intended to be used by MO's in a hope to establish scheduled wellness hours in their Institute.	Submission to department of sports including this
<b>Crisis Counselling Access</b>	The Vice President for Welfare to lobby the HSE to provide a list of mental health organisations that mental health professionals and case workers can refer people to when wait times are too long. Congress Further Mandates: The Vice President for Welfare to lobby the HSE to negotiate with short term counselling services to accept patients currently under the care of the HSE for counselling.	Meeting with PCHEI and Minister Mary Mitchell O'Connor - not follow up

<p><b>Dealing with students in distress</b></p>	<p>The USI Vice President for Welfare to organise comprehensive and practical training at SUT to ensure Sabbatical Officers are capable of dealing with students in distress from the early stages of the officer's term.</p>	<p>Full day casework/boundaries training in August</p>
<p><b>Training for Officers dealing with students with mental illness or disability</b></p>	<p>The Vice President for Welfare to organise training for MOs in the basic skills for dealing with a student with a mental illness, a Disability or a Medical Condition if a difficult situation arose and which are the proper services to which to refer students.</p>	<p>Mental Health first aid training provides this but not done this year due to training overload with officers</p>
<p><b>Student Bereavement Support</b></p>	<p>The VP for Welfare to find out the best practice of MOs regarding their individual bereavement policies and come up with a uniformed policy for MOs to use in the case of a bereavement.</p>	<p>Student suicide toolkit</p>
<p><b>Mental Health Awareness</b></p>	<p>The Vice-President for Welfare to include information on medication in relation to mental health issues as part of their on-going mental health campaigns.</p>	<p>Inclusion of medication in campaigns - not incorporated into Re:Charge as not part of HSE little things campaign</p>
<p><b>Applied suicide intervention skills training for Students' Union officers</b></p>	<p>The Vice President for Welfare to organise Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) each year for Students' Union Officers. This must be completed by September each year.</p>	<p>2 day training provided through regional officers</p>
<p><b>Suicide Prevention campaign</b></p>	<p>The Welfare Officer to organise, design and run a National Suicide Prevention Campaign that would be rolled out right across the Country on a Specific Day.</p>	<p>Marked suicide prevention day with toolkit and graphic around language</p>
<p><b>Casework training</b></p>	<p>The Vice President for Welfare, in consultation with other members of Officer Board, to organise intensive casework training for Students' Union officers each year. This training must include; referral, role plays, data protection and managing casework records. This training must be completed before September each year.</p>	<p>Full day casework/boundaries training in August</p>

<p><b>Availability of counsellors in third level education</b></p>	<p>The Vice President for Welfare to lobby the relevant bodies including the Minister for Disability, Equality, Mental Health and Older People to lift the embargo on the hiring of counselling staff in Higher Education Institutes and for increased funding to be given specifically for the provision of adequate Counselling services to all Third Level Students either through the direct employment of more Counsellors or in purchasing external counselling session hours.</p>	<p>€2 million secured through lobbying Minister Mary Michhelle O'Connor</p>
<p><b>Student suicide</b></p>	<p>The VP for welfare to ensure that Safetalk training are offered to all Welfare Officers and any other officer who wish to avail of such training by September before students return to college.</p>	<p>ASIST offered instead. Marked suicide prevention day with toolkit and graphic around language</p>
<p><b>Exam stress packs</b></p>	<p>To develop and source a stress pack and booklet to be distributed to MO's before the winter and summer exams</p>	<p>Done - Re:Charge study planners and highlighters sent out to colleges</p>



### **USI Mental Health Work (in addition to work outlined in strategy/mandates)**

#### **Re:Charge Campaign**

Re:Charge is a national campaign led by USI, it was created in 2018. The campaign focuses on practical skills that students can do to improve their mental health and well-being while studying in college. Every year, 3 new themes are chosen to be the main focus of the campaign. The themes are chosen from the Health Executive services (HSE) little things campaign which are evidence based. More information on the campaign can be found [here](#).

#### **Mental Health Programme Manager Role**

This is a full-time staff role, funded by the National Office for Suicide Prevention.

The role provides support to the Welfare Officer around any mental health work, as well as conducting research/maintaining connections with relevant people in the student mental health area.

#### **+Connections Mental Health App**

The app provides information on sources of help specific to each college campus. The app can be obtained at the links below; however it is under review for redevelopment currently.

Apple users can find the app [here](#).

Android users can find the app [here](#).

#### **Student Mental Health Blog**

The blog is comprised of posts written by students on their mental health experiences in college. Submissions to the blog are always welcome and should be sent to [mentalhealth@usi.ie](mailto:mentalhealth@usi.ie). Guidelines for blog posts can be found [here](#).

#### **Student Mental Health Report**

The report is a study into the mental health experiences of 3340 third level students in Ireland. It was carried out in 2019. The full report is available [here](#).

#### **Student Mental Health Web Page**

The web page is part of the overall USI website and is maintained by the mental health programme manager in conjunction with both the PR officer and the welfare officer. It can be found at <http://mentalhealth.usi.ie/>

#### **Student Mental Health Twitter**

The twitter feed keeps people up to date with all the mental health work of the USI. It can be found at <https://twitter.com/home> (the handle is @MentalHealthUSI)