



Spring 2021 Newsletter

## **Your Voice is Your Power: Advocating for BIPOC Mental Health on Your Campus**

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Mental health issues have been consistently increasing in prevalence and severity among college students and young adults. An estimated 20% of all adult mental health diagnoses occur in those between 18 and 24 years old (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010; National Institute of Mental Health, 2017). National data sources document a rising prevalence of depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and suicidality on campus across the past decade, with approximately one in three students showing a clinically significant mental health concern (American College Health Association, 2020; Healthy Minds Network, 2020). As a result, students' academic performance, and subsequent retention and persistence, are negatively affected.

COVID-19 has worsened this problem. One in five college students reported that their mental health has significantly worsened during COVID-19 (Active Minds, 2020), and sixty percent of students indicated it has been more difficult to access mental health services (Healthy Minds Network & American College Health Association, 2020). For BIPOC students in particular, mental health concerns are on the rise. The Healthy Minds Study has seen increases in anxiety and depression among students of color (Healthy Minds Network, 2020). Relative to their white peers, Black and multiracial university students are less likely to receive mental health treatment. This is exacerbated by high levels of stigma for seeking mental health diagnoses and treatment (Pedersen & Paves, 2014; Vogel et al., 2017; Vogel, Wade, & Haake, 2006) among BIPOC students (Lipson et al., 2018).

[Active Minds](#), the nation's leading nonprofit organization for mental health awareness and education for young adults, has called on students across the country to advocate for change and establish a campus culture that supports the mental and emotional well-being of BIPOC students. In fall 2020 Active Minds implemented the [Your Voice is Your Power](#) campaign to provide young adults and institutions of higher education with strategies to improve mental health for BIPOC students in the counseling center, in the classroom, in conversation, and in the institution's strategic plan.

- **In the Counseling Center.** The COVID-19 pandemic has forced students to experiment with technology to support their mental health. Institutions of higher education have begun to meet students where they are by investing in telehealth, drop-in counseling, and virtual support groups as students have advocated for these changes. Counseling centers need to link these new platforms with culturally responsive care for BIPOC students who may be less inclined to use them.

- **In the classroom.** Faculty members are often key mental health first responders, especially within hybrid or remote learning models, and key facilitators to BIPOC students' sense of belonging on campus. Students can advocate to have faculty demonstrate their commitment to students' wellbeing by sharing mental health resources on course syllabi, in discussion, in their signature lines, and/or on their course web platforms.
- **In conversation.** It is important for faculty and staff to build everyday relationships and trust with students with diverse racial and ethnic identities. In order to support students and reduce the risk for misunderstandings, microaggressions, and bias, schools can offer cultural competency training for faculty and staff.
- **In the strategic plan.** Including equity and mental health in an institution's strategic plan demonstrates its commitment to the campus community's mental health and provides accountability for prioritizing the wellbeing of BIPOC students. Building a healthy campus community requires a comprehensive, strategic approach that ties mental health and equity and inclusion with the mission and values of the institution. Students can advocate to include mental health and equity and inclusion language in their institutions' strategic plans.

Our goal is to make Your Voice is Your Power a seed of transformation in confronting the long-term harm of systemic racism for the mental health of BIPOC young adults. It provides students with the tools to advocate for policy changes that prioritize the mental health needs of BIPOC students, in addition to creating an equitable and inclusive campus community. Active Minds is committed to the continued work of becoming a more anti-racist and inclusive organization, and Your Voice is Your Power is one part of this journey.

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