

**CORNELL UNIVERSITY
COUNCIL ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELFARE**

COMMISSION AND CHARGE

I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Cornell, like its peer institutions, is experiencing a dramatic increase in demand for mental health services. Though the University has responded by expanding Gannett's professional mental health staff and providing an employee assistance program, demand for student mental health services continues to exceed the capacity for professional response. At the same time, we are facing increasingly challenging situations in the classroom, residential environment, and workplace. The community is impacted by student mental health problems ranging from developmental difficulties to severe psychiatric conditions, including eating disorders, depression, self-mutilation, suicidal behavior, and schizophrenia. These problems have serious implications for the health and welfare of individuals, for productivity in the workplace, and for the climate and academic mission of the University.

II. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Mental health is a critical determinant of an individual's overall health and welfare.
- A significant portion of Cornell students experience mental health problems that interfere with their academic performance or social functioning.
- During the developmental periods of undergraduate and graduate students' lives, minimal interventions can result in major lifelong benefits.
- Mental health problems are intertwined with issues of diversity and inclusion.
- Mental health problems negatively impact both the individual in distress and those community members who have contact with that individual.
- Suicides represent a tragic loss of potential, are devastating to families and to the Cornell community, and increase the risk of further suicides.
- Cornell's reputation, admissions experience, and student satisfaction are affected by the commonly held belief that the school is a high stress environment with a high suicide rate.
- Collectively, mental health problems undermine the academic mission of the university.
- Institutional policies and practices can contribute to, or protect against, mental health problems to the extent that they foster or mitigate student and employee distress.
- Student mental health concerns are best addressed by support, medical and mental health systems that are integrated with each other and with the environment in which they are manifested.
- The cultivation of an environment that supports optimal mental health is a shared responsibility of faculty, staff, students, alumni, parents, and the larger community.
- It will be essential to broadly engage the campus community in identifying and maximizing opportunities for mitigation and intervention within this large, diverse and decentralized institution.

III. COMMISSION

In response to the need for broad-based and sustained attention to the mental health of our students and employees, the Cornell University Council on Mental Health and Welfare is hereby established. The Executive Committee on Campus Health shall appoint the members of the Council, including faculty, staff, and students, and provide it administrative oversight. The Executive Committee will forward recommendations and updates from the Council to the Vice President for Student and Academic Services, the Provost, and the President.

IV. CHARGE FROM THE PROVOST AND VICE PRESIDENT FOR STUDENT AND ACADEMIC SERVICES

The Council on Mental Health and Welfare will be responsible for studying the campus environment in order to advise the Provost and Vice President on opportunities for reducing risks and increasing support for members of the Cornell community facing mental health challenges. The Council shall provide an annual progress report to the Offices of the President, Provost and Vice President for Student and Academic Services.