



# COLLEGE STUDENTS SPEAK

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## A SURVEY REPORT ON MENTAL HEALTH



*College Students Speak: A Survey Report on Mental Health*

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NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness. NAMI advocates for access to services, treatment, supports and research and is steadfast in its commitment to raising awareness and building a community of hope for all of those in need.

To access this publication online, visit [www.nami.org/namioncampus](http://www.nami.org/namioncampus).

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## Introduction

“I think colleges should pay attention to the fact that many more students need mental health services than who actually access them. Some of the students most affected or most at risk for mental health conditions are the hardest to reach because they are secluded in their rooms.”

- Survey Respondent

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) conducted a national survey of college students living with mental health conditions to learn about their experiences in school. NAMI designed the survey to hear directly from students about whether schools are meeting their needs and what improvements are needed to support their academic experience.

These issues are vitally important because colleges across the country are reporting large increases in the prevalence and severity of mental health conditions experienced by students attending their schools. This is good news for those living with these conditions since higher education is the foundation for securing stable employment and achieving financial independence. At the same time, it places pressure on schools to provide the services and supports that are necessary for these students to stay in school and to achieve academic success.

This survey report provides schools with a focused look at the services and supports that students identified as necessary to support their academic studies. Without adequate support, many students leave school. Whereas, with the right services and supports, most students can stay in school. In fact, many survey respondents rated their school’s services and supports in key areas as excellent, more than likely contributing to their academic achievement. Stigma remains the number one barrier to students seeking help and survey respondents shared valuable ways in which schools can work more effectively to combat stigma.

Each section of the report includes both student responses and a “tips” section, which provides colleges with items that should be addressed to support the needs of students. NAMI developed these tips based on survey responses for each section of the survey. For some schools that have invested in effectively addressing the mental health needs of students, these tips serve as confirmation that they are meeting student needs. For others, they will serve as action steps that should be taken to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of students attending their colleges with mental health conditions.

NAMI recognizes that many colleges, especially publically funded schools, continue to face shrinking and tight budgets. This report provides colleges with a targeted list of the services and supports that are most important to students living with mental health conditions. It can help schools prioritize how to invest limited resources. NAMI stands ready to partner with colleges in developing effective resources, programs and activities that promise to improve the academic experience of all students, especially those living with mental health conditions. This survey report is the first step in a larger initiative designed to support colleges and students. NAMI looks forward to working with leaders in higher education and students in addressing these critically important issues. All students deserve the opportunity to have fulfilling and positive college experiences.

## Methodology

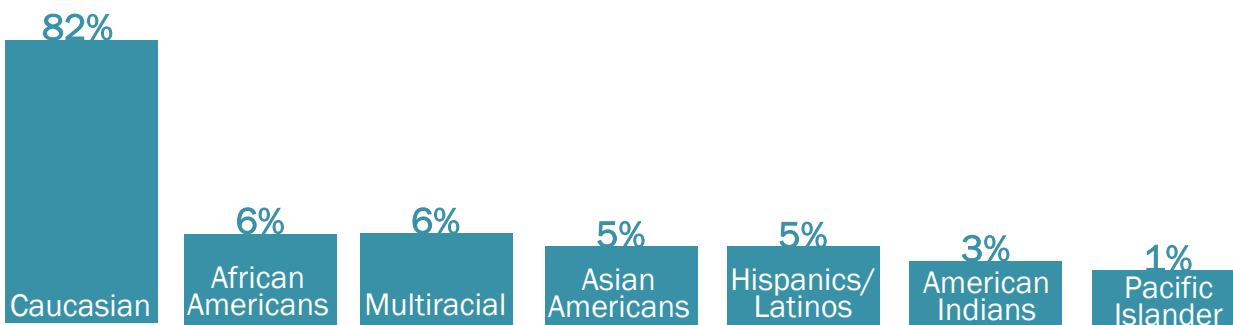
The data included in this report is based on information received by NAMI in response to a web-based survey. NAMI worked with a number of college students in developing the focus areas and questions for the survey.

The survey responses came from individuals diagnosed with a mental health condition who are currently or were enrolled in college within the past five years. The survey asked them a variety of questions related to their experiences living with a mental health condition while attending college and what services and supports they value most as students. Responses were collected from August 2011 to November 2011. NAMI received 765 survey responses.

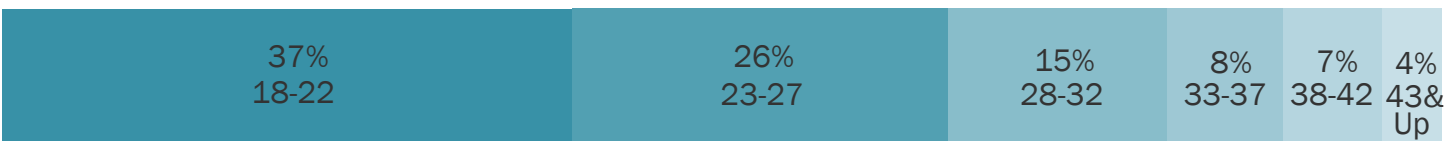
## Demographics of Survey Respondents

The individuals who completed the survey represent a diverse geographical area, with 48 states and the District of Columbia represented in the survey (responses were not received from Idaho and Vermont). They also represent a racially diverse population. Straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual and other sexual orientations are represented in the survey. Survey respondents also represent a broad cross-section of ages.

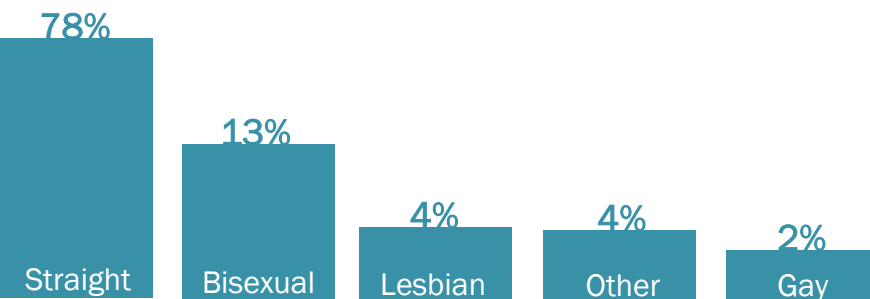
### Race/Ethnicity



### Age



### Sexual orientation



### Sex

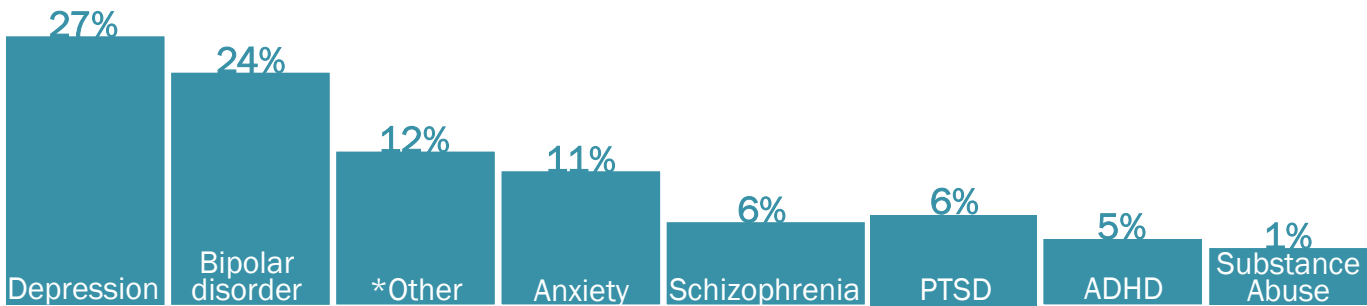


\*Women are 2 times more likely than men to experience depression during their lifetime. Depression is the highest represented mental health condition among survey respondents, which might help to explain the high percentage of women who responded to the survey when compared with men. It is also likely that women are more comfortable sharing information about their mental health needs. In either case, the responses and issues raised are quite consistent among survey respondents regardless of whether they are female or male.

## Information About Survey Respondents

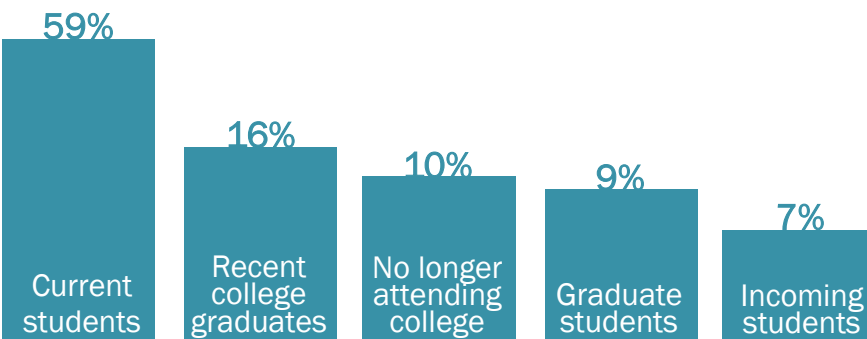
Survey respondents shared information about their primary diagnoses, their status as students, the type of college they attend, their living arrangements while attending college and their years in college.

### Type of illness

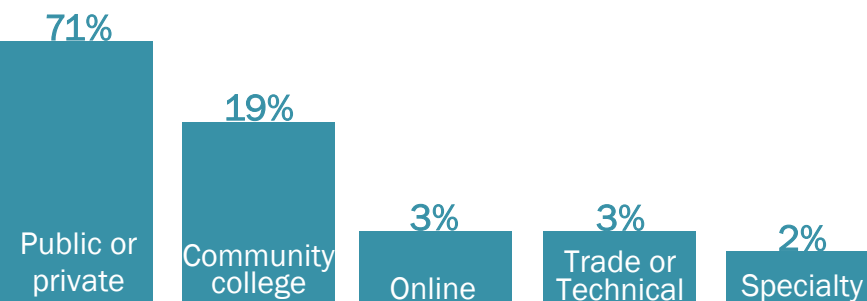


\*Other diagnoses include borderline personality disorder, dysthymia, eating disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, schizoaffective disorder and autism spectrum disorder.

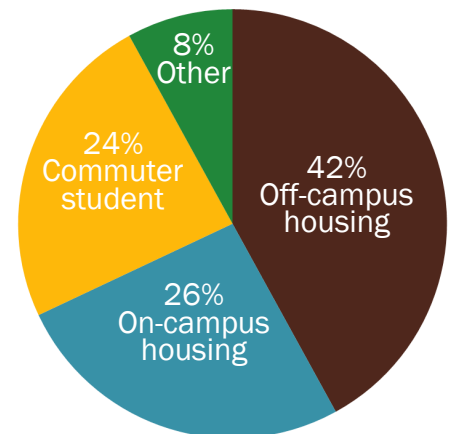
### Student status



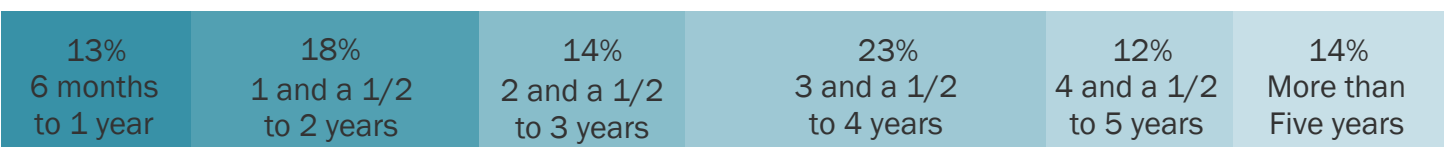
### Type of college



### Living Arrangements



### Years in school



## Student Dropouts

“A depressive episode made it impossible for me to go to classes and I did not get help until it was too late and I was withdrawn and I could never afford the cost to go back because I lost my scholarship for being withdrawn.”

- Survey Respondent

An overwhelming majority of survey respondents who said they are no longer in college (attendance stopped within the past five years) are not attending college because of a mental health related reason.

The primary diagnoses of these survey respondents are **depression, bipolar disorder and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**.

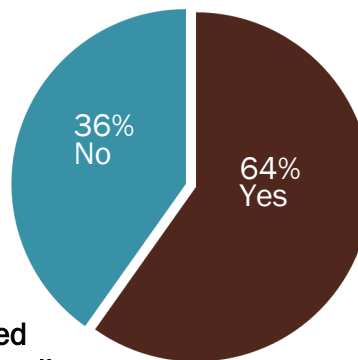
Survey respondents identified what might have helped them stay in school—primarily, campus-based accommodations and mental health services. Yet, these same survey respondents indicated they were not aware of or did not access these supports while they were students.

**More than 45 percent of those who stopped attending college because of mental health related reasons did not receive accommodations. Additionally, 50 percent of them did not access mental health services and supports.**

Since graduation rates are a key factor in ranking colleges according to the closely followed *U.S. News* report on colleges, providing adequate college mental health services is a good investment of resources.

Frequently, survey respondents also shared that they are no longer attending college because they lost their financial aid and/or scholarships as a result of receiving a low GPA or changing to part-time student status.

### Are you no longer attending college because of a mental health related reason?



## Tips for Preventing Student Dropouts

- \* Promote and publicize available accommodations, services and supports to all students.
- \* Encourage students to get help before issues grow.
- \* Share resources and strategies for addressing mental health issues and staying in school.
- \* Find ways to proactively reach out to students struggling in school.
- \* Link students living with mental health conditions to accommodations and services on and off campus. Follow up with them.
- \* Reduce burdensome paperwork needed to get help.
- \* Do not penalize students or revoke financial aid because of mental health issues.
- \* Encourage peer support and clubs.
- \* Ask about and address barriers to getting help.

### What might have helped you stay in school?

Receiving accommodations (e.g., tutoring, books on tape, lower course loads, help with communicating their needs to professors or online classes).

Accessing mental health services and supports on campus to help them address mental health issues impacting their academic performance.

Connecting with mental health providers earlier.

Having peer-run support groups available.

Getting assistance with medical bills and transportation.

Managing side effects of medications.

Getting support from family and friends.



## Disclosure

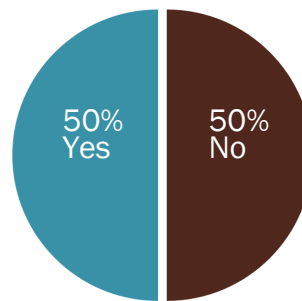
“I was concerned that the information would become part of a permanent record that could be viewed negatively. I still feel that there is a lot of stigma and the benefits of disclosing do not outweigh the risks.”

- Survey Respondent

Disclosure is legally required to receive accommodations in college. Choosing to not disclose can limit access to helpful accommodations and other resources that help students to succeed in school.

Survey respondents were asked if they have disclosed their diagnosis to their college. The responses were split 50/50 between yes and no.

### Have you disclosed your mental health condition to your college?



A higher number of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) survey respondents disclosed their mental health condition (62 percent). This is surprising since research shows that there is often a “double stigma” for this population.

Survey respondents provided the reasons for either disclosing or not disclosing to their schools. Many chose to disclose to secure accommodations but others cited fear of disclosing, especially within mental health degree programs where some respondents believe that stigma runs high.

#### Top five reasons why students disclose

- To receive accommodations.
- To receive clinical services and supports on campus.
- To be a role model and to reduce stigma.
- To educate students, staff and faculty about mental health.
- To avoid disciplinary action by the school and to avoid losing financial aid.

#### Top five reasons why students do not disclose

- Fear or concern for the impact disclosing would have on how students, faculty and staff perceive them, including within mental health degree programs.
- There is no opportunity to disclose.
- The diagnosis does not impact academic performance.
- Do not know that disclosing could help secure accommodations.
- Do not trust that their medical information will remain confidential.

## Tips on Disclosure

- \* Give willing students opportunities to reduce stigma and to educate others about mental health.
- \* Support programs that eradicate stigma on campus and help to make students more comfortable with disclosure.
- \* Make school policies on confidentiality and privacy visible and easily understood by all.
- \* Educate the entire campus community on mental health issues to eliminate the myths and stereotypes that make students uncomfortable with disclosure.
- \* Target mental health degree programs with stigma-busting activities to reduce the fear and concerns of students in these programs.
- \* Provide resources on the pros and cons of disclosure so students can make an informed decision about disclosing.

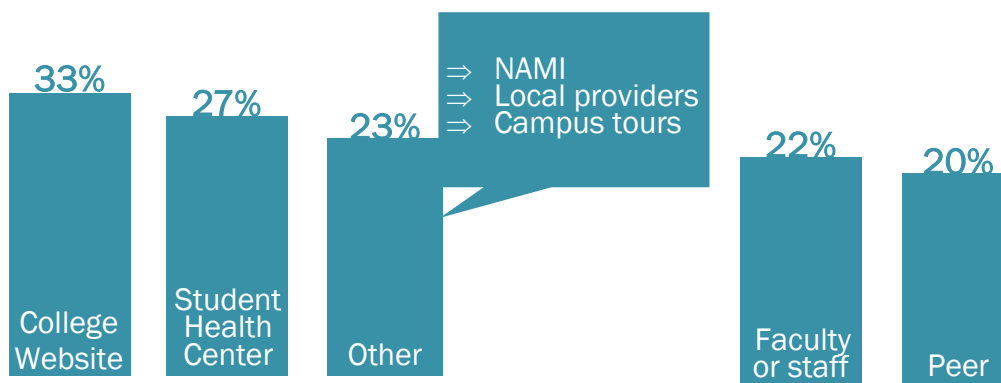
## Mental Health Awareness

“Before I even came to orientation, I was signed up for disability services and knew where the counseling center was because on the campus tour days there were signs and posters saying to visit these places.”

- Survey Respondent

In order to better understand how students become aware of resources available to them on campus, survey respondents were asked how they found out about their college’s mental health services and supports. They most often cited their college’s website as their primary source of information. This emphasizes the need for colleges to develop websites that include comprehensive, updated mental health information. The next section of this report includes detailed information on what should be included on college websites.

### How did you find out about your college’s mental health services and supports?



Survey respondents were also asked how important it is that their colleges offer various mental health awareness activities. A majority of students (79 percent) stressed the importance of offering mental health training for faculty and staff and ranked it as the most important awareness activity colleges can provide. See pages 19 and 20 of this report for training topic ideas.

### Mental health awareness activities rated extremely important



### Tips for Raising Awareness

- \* Include information on mental health on the main homepage of colleges websites.
- \* Increase education on mental health by training faculty, staff and students.
- \* Support student and peer-run groups designed to raise mental health awareness.
- \* Mention the importance of mental health at campus-wide events.
- \* Include information about mental health during orientation and campus tours.
- \* Have school leaders state publicly the importance of supporting mental health.
- \* Host suicide prevention activities and events.
- \* Initiate social activities on mental health in dormitories.
- \* Distribute and post promotional materials with information about mental health.

## Website Information

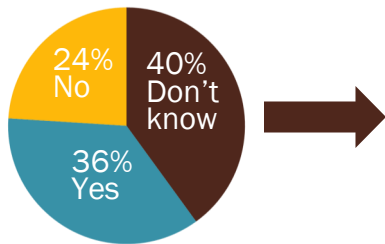
“The website provided information about services, but did not provide very much information about symptoms and risks of different mental health conditions.”

- Survey Respondent

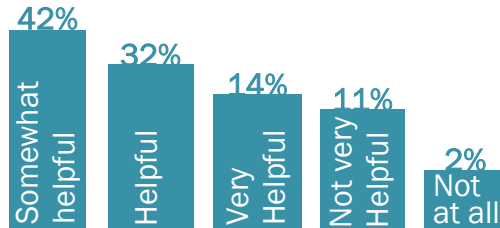
Survey respondents often became aware of mental health resources through their college’s website, making it all the more important for colleges to include critical mental health information on their websites.

Yet, when survey respondents were asked if their colleges’ websites include information about mental health, 64 percent responded “no” or “do not know.” Survey respondents who said “yes,” were asked how helpful the information is on their colleges’ websites and why they felt websites are helpful or not. More than 40 percent of survey respondents found their colleges’ websites to be only “somewhat helpful.” Survey respondents responded that the more information a website included about mental health issues and the services and supports available on and off campus, the better.

### Does your college’s website include mental health information?



### How helpful is the information on your college’s website?



### Explain why you found your college’s website helpful or not helpful.

Top five reasons students found websites helpful	Top five reasons students found websites not helpful
Provides information about resources available on and off campus.	Does not provide information on the typical mental health issues students experience in college.
Allows students to make appointments online.	Does not include information on how to access mental health resources.
Has an online mental health screening tool for students that links them to help when needed.	Does not have information for students unaware of mental health issues.
Includes frequently asked questions about mental health.	Does not include information on how to manage a mental health condition.
Shares information on where and how to access accommodations and free mental health services and supports.	Does not offer an explanation of the college’s policies and procedures related to mental health issues.

## Tips on What to Include on Websites

- \* FAQs on mental health conditions, when to seek help, what to expect in counseling and privacy rules.
- \* The services and supports available on and off campus, their locations and hours and how they are accessed.
- \* Mental health screening tools that link students to resources.
- \* Warning signs of mental health issues and what to do about them.
- \* How to help a friend who may have a mental health issue.
- \* How to access accommodations.
- \* Relevant paperwork, policies and procedures for getting help.
- \* Positive stories and videos from students living with mental health conditions.
- \* Resources on dealing with stress, bullying, loneliness and other issues.

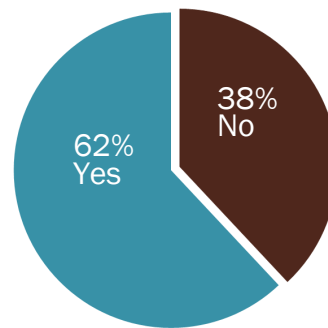
## Accommodations

“The Disability Resource Center did not understand how to accommodate my mental health condition.”

- Survey Respondent

Students living with mental health conditions can request accommodations that allow them to participate equally in their education. When asked if they know how to access accommodations for their mental health condition, most survey respondents said “yes.”

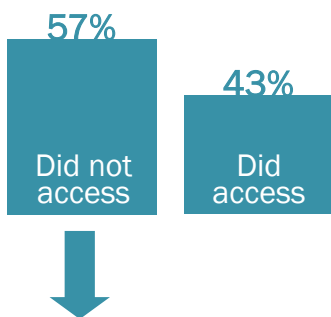
### Do you know how to access accommodations?



Survey respondents were asked how helpful their college’s Disability Resource Center (DRC) was in accessing accommodations. Surprisingly, 57 percent of survey respondents did not request accommodations from their school. These survey respondents provided reasons why they chose not to access accommodations. For students with mental health conditions, accessing appropriate accommodations can make the difference in academic achievement and earning a degree.

For those remaining survey respondents who did request accommodations from their college’s DRC, 18 percent found their school’s DRC very helpful, 18 percent found the DRC helpful or somewhat helpful, 7 percent found their DRC not very helpful or not helpful at all.

### Students who did or did not access accommodations from their school



### Top five reasons why survey respondents did not access accommodations

- Unaware that they qualified for and had a right to receive accommodations.
- Did not know the DRC is available for students living with mental health conditions.
- Fear of stigma.
- The process for obtaining accommodations is too burdensome and requires too much documentation.
- It is too expensive to obtain the documentation for accommodations.

## Tips on Improving Accommodations

- \* Ensure that students with mental health conditions understand their right to request accommodations.
- \* Streamline the process for obtaining accommodations so students who are entitled to them will have them.
- \* Educate and train staff and faculty to better understand mental health conditions and appropriate accommodations.
- \* Announce at orientation and during classes that accommodations are available for students who qualify for them.
- \* Include information about accommodations on college websites.
- \* Provide ongoing opportunities for students working with the DRC to provide feedback.

## Accommodations

“I am not sure I would still be in school without the DRC. If I ever have a problem they are right on it, fixing it.”

- Survey Respondent

Survey respondents were asked to explain what makes their colleges’ DRCs helpful or not. Many survey respondents responded that DRCs focus primarily on physical health conditions and not enough on mental health conditions. Survey respondents were also asked to choose from a list of accommodations that they consider most critical to their success in college.

### Why did you find your college’s DRC helpful or not helpful?

Top five reasons why students found DRC’s not helpful	Top five reasons why students found DRC’s helpful
DRC staff only focus on physical disabilities.	DRC staff includes mental health counselors who understand mental health issues.
Professors do not honor approved accommodations.	The DRC helps students communicate with their professors about their accommodations.
The DRC does not check in with students to ensure they received accommodations.	The DRC helps students develop a plan for addressing their mental health issues in school.
The DRC does not listen to student needs and concerns.	The process for securing accommodations is easy and clear.
The DRC does not proactively inform students about the resources available at the center and how to access them.	The DRC includes friendly, supportive and respectful staff who reach out to and check in with students.

### What accommodations are most critical to your success?



## Tips for Improving DRCs

- \* List and have available accommodations that help students living with mental health conditions.
- \* Train DRC staff to have a basic understanding of how to support students living with mental health conditions.
- \* Communicate to students that the DRC provides support for physical and mental health conditions.
- \* Reach out to students who are struggling in school to see if they need accommodations.
- \* Help students with the paperwork required to access accommodations and follow up.
- \* Promote the DRC and the services it provides to the entire campus.
- \* Create a process for students to report professors who are not honoring approved accommodations.

## Clinical Services and Supports

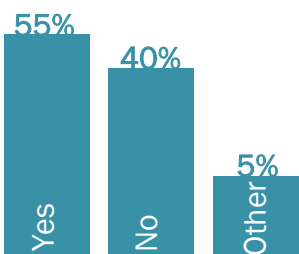
“While good services are available to students who need it, the rest of the campus is entirely unaware of mental health issues.”

- Survey Respondent

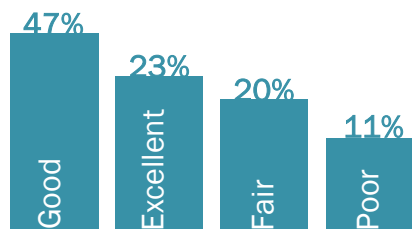
When asked if they have accessed mental health services and supports at their college, just over half of survey respondents had, leaving many who did not get help. Some survey respondents said that they did not know if their campus had mental health services and supports available.

Survey respondents who accessed mental health services and supports were asked to rate them overall. Most rated the services and supports as good or excellent. This points to the importance of having services and supports available to students. It is also important that students understand how to access mental health services and supports. Survey respondents also identified specific areas where mental health care can be improved and why the mental health services and supports on campus are good or poor.

### Have you accessed mental health services and supports on campus?



### How would you rate the services and supports overall?



### Explain why you found your college’s services and supports good or poor

Top five reasons students found services and supports good	Top five reasons students found services and supports poor
There is effective coordination between students, treatment providers, professors and the DRC.	There are a limited number of counseling visits allowed on campus and a limited number of resources.
There is free group and individual counseling offered on campus.	There are not enough adequately trained mental health providers .
There is variety and flexibility. Help is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.	The college does not recognize the importance of peer support.
There are permanent, qualified and caring mental health staff members, including on-site psychiatrists.	There is a lack of communication between mental health providers and others involved in students’ care.
There are supportive students, faculty and staff who participate in mental health groups and training.	The college is too quick to prescribe medications or hospitalize students with mental health issues.

## Tips for Improving Care on Campus

- \* Increase capacity, duration and availability of mental health services and supports.
- \* Provide more long-term, licensed mental health counselors and staff to prevent disruptions in care.
- \* Provide peer support services.
- \* Have feedback opportunities for students to evaluate mental health services and supports.
- \* Connect students to community mental health services and supports not available on campus.
- \* Coordinate with everyone involved in students’ care, including off-campus and on-campus providers.
- \* Provide targeted support for veterans, LGBT students and those with eating disorders.
- \* Follow-up with students who are referred to care.

## Clinical Services and Supports

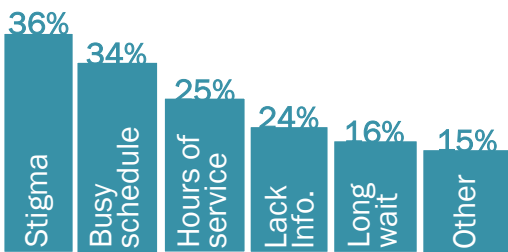
“Publicizing services helps reduce stigma. Also, when you are having a crisis, calling all over the campus or searching the website for hours would be the last thing on your mind.”

- Survey Respondent

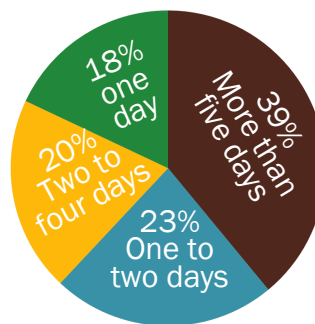
Survey respondents were asked what barriers, if any, exist in accessing services and supports on campus. Stigma remains the number one barrier to students seeking help. Colleges can play an important role in reducing stigma. Survey respondents also cited busy personal schedules as a significant barrier to accessing care, showing the importance of having flexible service hours.

Survey respondents were also asked, on average, how long they have to wait for an appointment. Many have waited more than five days to receive care.

### What barriers exist in accessing mental health services and supports?



### Appointment wait times



### Other barriers to accessing help survey respondents identified

The mental health center is in a high traffic area and fear of being seen by peers.

The mental health center employs peers who they do not want knowing about their mental health issues.

There is a cap or limit on mental health services and supports and staff available.

Excessive documentation is required to access mental health services and supports.

There are no mental health services and supports available on campus or there are inexperienced providers providing care on campus (e.g., graduate students).

There is a poor referral system for mental health services and supports.

Do not know how to access services and supports on campus.

There is a high rate of staff turnover, disrupting care.

### Tips for Reducing Stigma

- \* Provide information to the campus community on how common mental health conditions are and the importance of getting help.
- \* Spotlight students, faculty and staff who have achieved success living with a mental health condition to fight stigma and offer hope.
- \* Host on campus educational activities and campaigns that combat stigma.
- \* Assemble celebrity speakers to talk about mental health.
- \* Offer training for students, faculty and staff to learn the facts about mental health.
- \* Treat mental health conditions with the same importance as other physical health conditions and integrate services and supports.

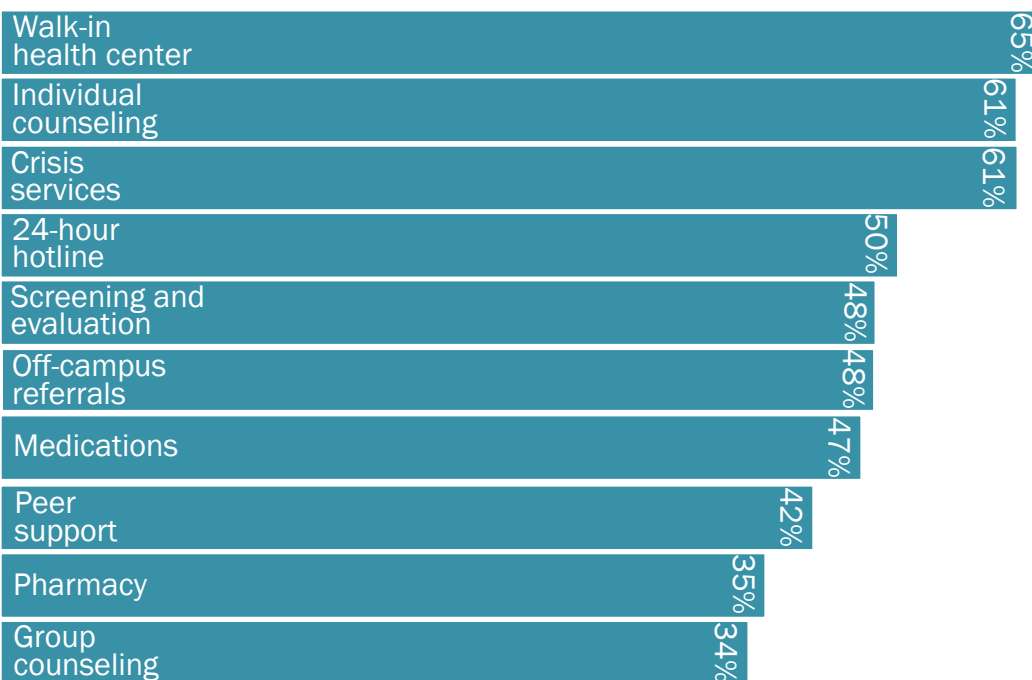
## Clinical Services and Supports

“I have been more than satisfied with the counselor I see on campus and getting different housing was also important. However, the services are not heavily publicized and they are confusing going into.”

- Survey Respondent

Survey respondents were asked to choose the mental health services and supports that are critical to their success in college from a list of options. Colleges should aim to provide a broad array of critical services and supports for students with mental health care needs, just as they do with other health care conditions. Survey respondents indicated that when schools cannot provide essential services and supports, they should have a link to and referral system for community-based care.

### What services and supports are critical to your success in college?



### Other essential mental health services and supports survey respondents identified

Mental health training for the entire campus community.	Information about providers (e.g., bios, credentials and areas of expertise).
Drug and alcohol programs that are integrated with mental health.	Appointments scheduled and triaged based on need.
Social skills training.	Vocational rehabilitation.
Online appointment scheduling.	Transportation to treatment.
Coaching and mentoring.	Integrated care.

## Tips on Supporting Students

- \* Provide the services and supports identified as most important in response to this question.
- \* Provide referrals to and coordination with off-campus services and supports when care is not available on campus.
- \* Address the unique needs of student veterans and LGBT students.
- \* Make mental health and peer advocates available to help students access help.
- \* Provide peer support services.
- \* Encourage student clubs like NAMI on Campus and others.
- \* Support coaching and mentoring.
- \* Provide assistance with forms and paperwork in accessing mental health services and supports.
- \* Follow-up and check in once students access care.



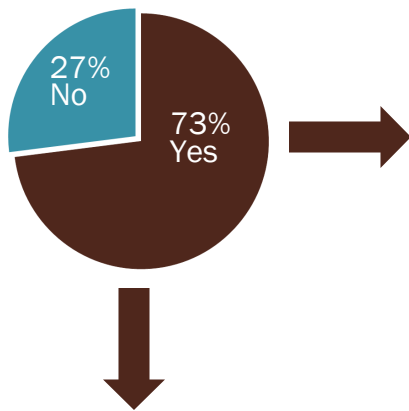
## Crisis Services

“The school in which I was medically dismissed from did not respond well. They were too afraid to address the issue at hand; they just sent me away.”

- Survey Respondent

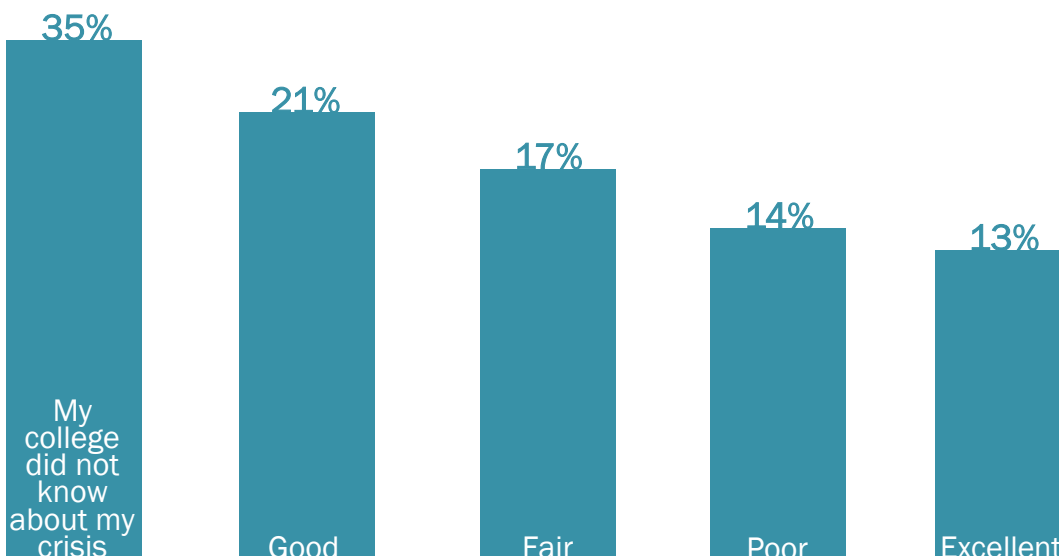
Survey respondents were asked if they have experienced a mental health crisis while at college. A surprisingly high percentage (73 percent) had. These survey respondents shared what triggered their mental health crisis and how well their colleges responded to the crisis. In most cases, colleges were not aware of mental health crises. Survey respondents also provided tips on how colleges should address mental health crises.

### Have you experienced a mental health crisis while in college?



What triggered your crisis?
Extreme feelings of anxiety, panic, depression about school and life.
Difficulty adjusting to a new routine and environment.
Feelings of homesickness, loneliness and isolation.
Stressed or overwhelmed about course load.
Posttraumatic stress disorder episode triggered by class content.
Medications stopped working.

### How would you rate your college's response to your mental health crisis?



## Tips on Addressing Crises

- \* Work with students on how to prevent mental health crises and how best to address them when they happen.
- \* Provide resources, referrals and help immediately. Schedule follow-up appointments within 24 hours of a crisis.
- \* Do not penalize students or revoke financial aid.
- \* Support students in contacting family, friends and their support network.
- \* Help students notify professors if they miss classes and/or assignments.
- \* Be empathetic, non-judgmental and understanding.

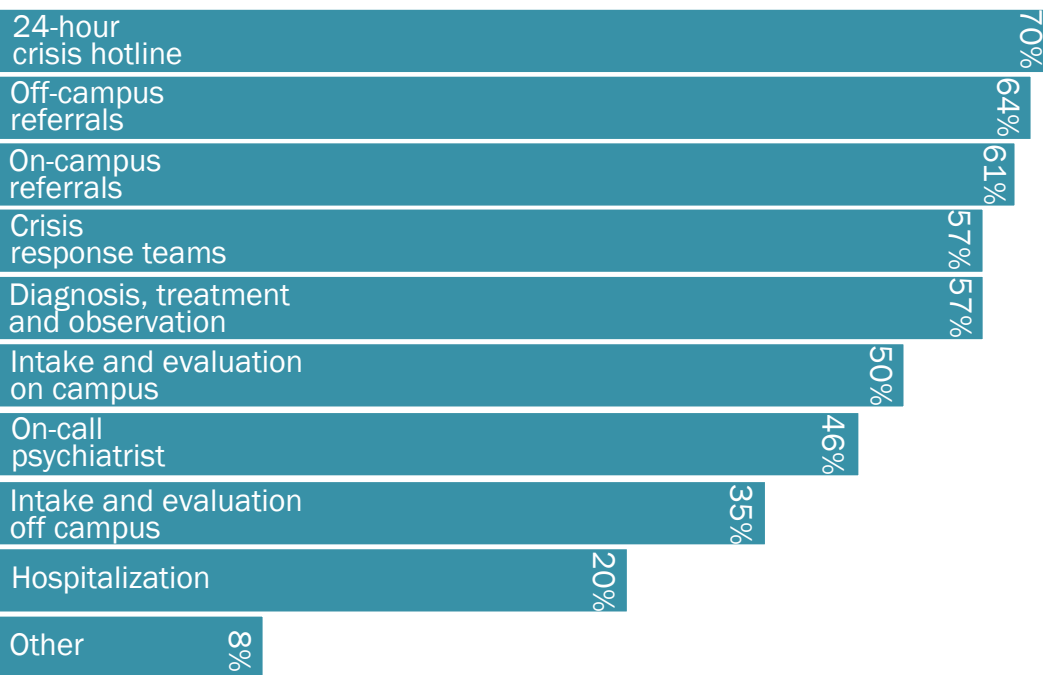
## Crisis Services

“I was scared to let anyone know about my crisis because I did not want people to worry, did not know who I could turn to and did not want to get in trouble.”

- Survey Respondent

Survey respondents were asked to choose the mental health crisis services and supports they considered most important on college campuses from a list of options. The majority of survey respondents chose a 24-hour crisis hotline as the most important crisis service colleges should offer to students. They did not want to just be offered hospitalization or to be sent away during a mental health crisis but to receive services and supports that would help them stay in school and prevent crises from happening in the future. Survey respondents also identified services and supports that should be available to prevent crises from happening.

### What mental health crisis services and supports are critical on campus?



### Other mental health crisis services and supports identified as critical

Substance abuse-free housing and understanding of substance abuse.	Medication management by a psychiatrist.
Post-crisis services and supports.	More visible information on how to address an emerging mental health crisis.
Campus police training on mental health crises.	Inclusion of peers on crisis response teams.
Mental health training for faculty, staff and students.	Help with leave of absences and returning to school after an absence.

## Tips on Preventing Crises

- \* Provide the crisis services and supports listed on this page as most helpful to students.
- \* Encourage students at campus-wide events to seek help and access mental health resources early and before issues worsen.
- \* Establish an easy protocol for how students can get help during the week, weeknights and on weekends. Reduce burdensome paperwork.
- \* Share resources on how to manage stress, maintain mental and physical health and wellness and cope with negative feelings.
- \* Train all students, staff and faculty to recognize the early warning signs of mental health crises and what to do.
- \* Reach out to students who show signs of being at risk for a crisis. Connect them with care and follow up with them.

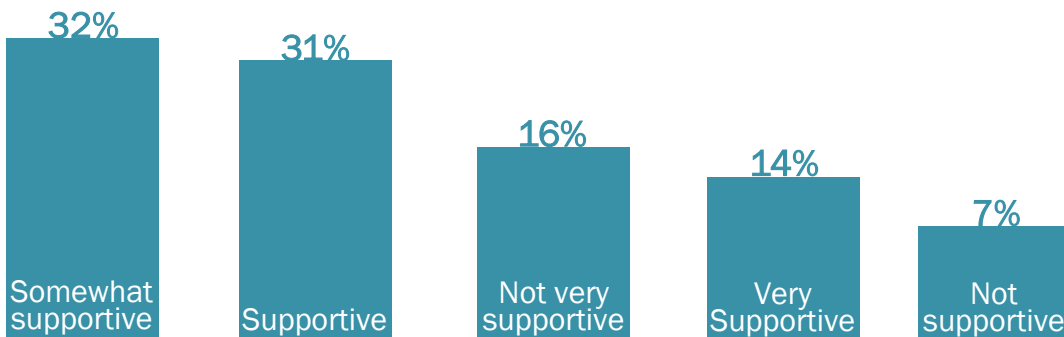
# Supportiveness of Colleges on Mental Health

“They need to publicize mental health issues more, instead of waiting until a student commits suicide to focus on problems.”

- Survey Respondent

Survey respondents were asked how supportive their college is on mental health issues. They were also asked to explain why they felt their colleges are supportive or not supportive. Survey respondents also provided suggestions on how colleges can be more supportive on mental health issues.

## How supportive is your college on mental health issues?



## Explain why you found your college supportive or not supportive

Top five reasons students found colleges supportive	Top five reasons students found colleges not supportive
There are advocates on campus who help students understand their rights and access services and supports.	The school does not educate faculty, staff and students on mental health. Thus, stigma persists and professors do not follow accommodations.
The school understands that college can be stressful and that mental health is a priority. The college educates faculty, staff and students on mental health.	They do not publicly acknowledge or discuss mental health issues with the campus community and the impact these issues can have on students.
The college links with community mental health services and supports if there are not enough available on campus.	There are not enough mental health staff members and/or care available to students. There is a lack of follow-up once students access help.
The college provides walk-in appointments, easy appointment scheduling, 24/7 care, unlimited counseling and support groups for students.	The college does not openly welcome students living with mental health conditions. Students are penalized for their mental health conditions.
All students are aware that help is available.	Mental health services and supports on campus are not publicized. Students have to seek them out.

## Tips on Creating More Supports

- \* Let students know everyone is welcomed on campus.
- \* Require training on mental health for faculty and staff.
- \* Offer a mental health and wellness course for students.
- \* Focus on stigma reduction.
- \* Increase visibility, publicity and promotion of mental health issues and resources.
- \* Create policies and procedures that support students living with mental health conditions.
- \* Create a supportive community beyond the mental health center.
- \* Remind students about the importance of mental health.
- \* Provide students with tools for making healthy choices, developing coping skills and dealing with stress. Have materials for student veterans.

## What Students Need to Know

“I think there should be a mental health and wellness course that is mandatory for the first semester of all incoming students.”

- Survey Respondent

Survey respondents were asked what they would like their peers to know about mental health. Their responses provide great topics for mental health training programs for students. Survey respondents also expressed the value of having students share their personal experiences with mental health issues and success stories to help reduce stigma and provide hope to other students experiencing challenges.

### What do you want your peers to know about mental health?

**Prevalence and risk of mental health issues in college.** It is more common than you think and you are not alone, people just do not advertise it. Everyone should take care of their mental health since there are increased risks during college. Mental health is affected by the stress of college life. It can happen to anybody. Everyone has problems, stresses and challenges in life and sometimes need help to address them. More people than you realize are getting help. Everyone will experience a mental health issue at some point in their lives and need to be aware of it so it is not detrimental to their health.

**Mental health is as real and important as other physical health conditions.** Mental health is very important to overall health and academic success. Students should get regular mental health checkups just like physical checkups and should not neglect their mental health.

**How to support friends.** Peer support is one of the greatest gifts to give to someone living with a mental health condition. Share ways to help and support others and yourself. Learn about anti-stigma practices and language. Understand how to be a friend to someone living with a mental health condition. Do not label or patronize, be empathetic.

**The facts about mental health conditions and what it means to have a mental health condition.** Know the signs and symptoms of mental health conditions. Be conscious of changes in sleep patterns, eating habits, behaviors, perceptions and social interactions. There is nothing wrong with people who have a mental health condition. They should not feel embarrassed, ashamed or guilty. Mental health conditions are not character flaws or weaknesses. They do not define a person, change who she or he is or have to do with his or her worth as a person. People do not choose to be unhappy. Life with mental health conditions can be manageable, happy and fulfilling. A mental health diagnosis is not a death sentence. People living with mental health conditions are not dangerous. There is no need to be afraid of them.

**There is help, there is hope.** Mental health conditions are treatable and help is available. It is okay to ask for and seek help. Do not wait until it gets worse. There is no shame, only courage and honesty in getting help for a mental health issue. The sooner you get help, the better. Make yourself your priority. Treat yourself well because you are worth it.

## What Faculty and Staff Need to Know

“Professors should be trained and educated to recognize some classic signs of depression, mania, etc. Then they should have instruction on how to approach said student to recommend them for treatment.”

- Survey Respondent

Survey respondents were asked what they would like faculty and staff at their colleges to know about mental health. Their responses provide great topics for mental health training programs for faculty and staff. Survey respondents felt that faculty and staff are in positions of influence. How they respond to mental health issues will impact how students feel about themselves and about seeking help for any issues.

### What do you want faculty and staff to know about mental health?

**General education on mental health conditions.** Information on the warning signs, symptoms, prevalence and treatment of mental health issues. They need to know mental health conditions are real, what they look like in students and how hard it can be for students living with mental health conditions.

**How to support students.** Faculty and staff should know what to do if they see a student experiencing mental health issues or if a student shares information with them. They should be proactive in connecting students to help and encouraging them to seek help. They should also know what to do during a mental health crisis.

**How to communicate with students.** Faculty and staff should be trained on how to express care and concern and be sympathetic, empathetic and understanding when talking about mental health issues. Faculty and staff should hear them out and be respectful, non-judgmental and sensitive to their issues. They should also address mental health in the classroom and let students know they are available to talk.

**Mental health conditions are real.** Faculty and staff should know that mental health issues are as real and as serious as other physical health issues. They are not used as an excuse for being lazy, irresponsible or a bad student. It is not a scam or a choice.

**Students can be successful with accommodations.** Students living with mental health conditions want the chance to succeed in college just like everyone else. They can be successful if faculty and staff respect and enforce accommodations that students need. Faculty and staff should understand the effects of mental health conditions on students and their academic performance. Students living with mental health conditions can be successful but just need to complete the work in different ways.

## Conclusion

“It is extremely difficult for students to come out and talk about mental health problems and they may not want to tell you this is why they are falling behind, missing class, seeming disengaged, etc. Please be sensitive and understand mental health problems are ‘real’ problems. Encourage them to find help through the health center and academic advising.”

- Survey Respondent

Throughout this report, NAMI provided colleges with important information on the lived experience of students living with mental health conditions and tips on how to address their needs. The information and tips included in this report come directly from students living with mental health conditions.

These students advised colleges on the services and supports that are needed, the barriers that exist to accessing services and supports, steps that colleges can take to reduce stigma and prevent crises and much more.

An increasing number of students with mental health conditions attend colleges across the country, colleges need to take these issues seriously. This survey report clearly shows that some schools have taken seriously the need to address the mental health needs of students. All schools need to take this seriously. NAMI encourages colleges to survey their students to learn even more about their mental health needs and how to create a supportive environment for all students.

NAMI is launching a major initiative to support colleges interested in more effectively addressing the needs of their students. Given the prevalence of mental health conditions, this issue is of great importance.

To learn more about NAMI’s major focus in supporting colleges and improving the academic and social experience of students, please visit [www.nami.org/namioncampus](http://www.nami.org/namioncampus). NAMI will continue to provide resources for students, faculty and staff to help them address mental health issues on college campuses. These resources will include more detailed information on the mental health conditions most prevalent in college students, how to respond to students in crisis, how students can request accommodations, how students can start NAMI on Campus clubs to raise awareness about mental health and much more.



**National Alliance on Mental Illness**

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

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

NAMI Helpline: 1 (800) 950-NAMI (6264)

Twitter: NAMICommunicate

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/officialNAMI](http://www.facebook.com/officialNAMI)

