

# Policy Priorities Annual Agenda 2024

## Summary

This agenda outlines the 2024 policy priorities for the American College Health Association (ACHA) -- the principal leadership organization for advancing the health and well-being of college students and campus communities through advocacy, education, and research.

As guiding principles, **ACHA** supports policies and government actions that:

1. Strengthen college health systems;
2. Advance the health and well-being of college students and communities; and
3. Help ensure accessible and quality college education.

## Federal Policy Priorities

### 1. **College Health and Well-being Index (CHI) creating legislation**

Similar to the existing and widely used CDC [School Health Index](#) (SHI), a CDC CHI would help colleges improve the health and well-being of their campus community.

ACHA would like to see legislation, administrative action, and/or appropriation that would direct the CDC to develop and promote the use of a CHI, which would allow colleges to voluntarily use an evidence-based assessment to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their schools' health and safety policies and programs.

### 2. **National Health Service Corps (NHSC) designation for college health systems**

The National Health Service Corps (NHSC) is a government program administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) that provides designees with various employee recruitment and retention incentives/tools. Under the current implementation of the program, colleges' health systems are not eligible for the NHSC designation, even though these provide necessary primary, mental, and dental health care to college communities and localities. For this reason, we want to pursue a change that would allow college health systems and clinics to be eligible for NHSC site designation. We envision these modifications being achieved through either administrative or legislative action.

### 3. **Investing in college student mental health**

The mental health of college and university students continues to be an enormous challenge on campuses across the country, which was only exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. College students are reporting mental health challenges at a growing and alarming rate.<sup>1</sup> While federal investments supporting mental health needs in our nation's K-12 schools have increased rapidly in recent years, college students have not had the same support. Thus, we call for meaningful investment in college mental health through:

- A. **New dedicated formula grant** – To meet this crisis, we support the effort for Congress to appropriate, over the next five years, \$6.9 billion to create a new grant program for a School and Campus-Based Mental Health Service program within the Fund for the Improvement of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/What-Works-Mental-Health.pdf>

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Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) which would be provided to colleges by way of a developed needs-based formula. The program would include interventions focused on student mental health generally and building campus resources for mental health improvement. Funding could be used by institutions of higher education to build out mental health services best fitting their specific campus.

- B. **Reauthorization of the [Garrett Lee Smith \(GLS\) Campus Suicide Prevention Grant \(42 USC 6A §290bb–36b\) funding](#)** – Alternatively, ACHA would like to see this important program fully funded in FY25 and reauthorized as part of any reauthorization of the Garrett Lee Smith Act. The program is currently authorized for \$7 million per fiscal year.

As part of the reauthorization, we would like the program to include CDC requirements to gather data and report to Congress on the status of college student mental health and college mental health services.

#### 4. **Continuity of health care access across state lines**

ACHA urges legislation or initiatives that would allow physical and mental health college professionals to provide services to students across state lines, such as when an out-of-state student is home or away from campus for some school activity to ensure continuity of care.

### Congressional Legislation ACHA Supports

Bills that fall within our Policy Platform, such as:

#### **Enhancing Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Through Campus Planning Act ([HR 5740](#))**

Sponsored by Rep. Susan Wild (D-PA), it would require the US Department of Education to coordinate with the US Department of Health and Human Services to encourage colleges to develop and implement comprehensive mental health and suicide prevention plans.

#### **College mental health services commission bills, “Higher Education Mental Health Act” ([HR 3451/S 1665](#))**

Sponsored by Rep. David Trone (D-MD) and Sen. Bob Casey (D-PA), it would require the US Department of Education to establish an Advisory Commission on Serving and Supporting Students with Mental Health Disabilities in Institutions of Higher Education.

ACHA would also support this legislation if reintroduced during the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress:

#### **Basic Assistance for Students In College (BASIC) Act ([S 2004/HR 3857](#) from the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress)**

Sponsored by Sen. Alex Padilla (D-CA) and Rep. Norma Torres (D-CA), it would fund college efforts to identify and meet the basic needs of students, including food, housing, transportation, and health care.

### Other Ideas for Consideration

#### 1. **Medicaid portability for college students**

Medicaid, as currently constructed, is locally focused, which does not make it a viable option for eligible college students who travel to school and travel for school (such as study abroad programs).

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To that end, Medicaid should provide portability for college students by, for example, allowing available college physical and mental health services to be covered by Medicaid.

### 2. Targeted efforts to address/study/improve the health and well-being of emerging adults

As the benefits of similarly targeted efforts for adolescents have shown, comparable efforts should be made for emerging adults. Emerging adults are often making decisions connected to their health and well-being for the first time by themselves. This is an important time in their lives to inform and craft healthy lifestyles, and thus there should be efforts targeted toward this cohort to study and encourage beneficial practices and prevent unhealthy behaviors from taking root.

### 3. Appropriations bill/report provisions that would:

- A. Strengthen health and well-being data collection at the collegiate level to improve the information collected on emerging adults.
- B. Advance health-promoting environments and health practices and policies on issues such as public safety, infection control, reproductive health, and prevention of high-risk alcohol use and other drug abuse, tobacco use, sexually transmitted illness, interpersonal violence, sexual assault, harassment, suicide, and discrimination of all types.
- C. Educate students on navigating the health care system and aid with the transition from parent-guided care to self-care.
- D. Set up systems to benchmark services and measure the impact of specific services on the health of college communities and the academic goals of colleges.
- E. Advance college collaboration with community and campus partners to create a network of care and leverage available resources. Campus partners may include but are not limited to disability services, athletics, recreational sports, housing, and academic departments.

### 4. Public health/prevention

ACHA would like to see and will support federal measures that:

- A. Assist in national efforts to promote public health/prevention in emerging adults, such as targeted efforts to evaluate the current health situation of college students and efforts to improve/address such. Examples include:
  - i. Funding and other support to integrate campus services with community services/resources
  - ii. Increasing vaccination rates in under-vaccinated or vulnerable populations
- B. Study health disparities within college populations
- C. Evaluate college health initiative effectiveness
- D. Include data on college health and well-being efforts

### Other Areas of Priority Concern

ACHA will also promote policies and capabilities related to the following areas concerning promoting campus safety and well-being:

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1. **Campus safety.** Through advocacy, research, and education, ACHA will address issues impacting the safety and well-being of college students, faculty, and staff. Ongoing threats to campus safety and student well-being include:

- A. Title IX/Sexual Harassment/Violence. ACHA is dedicated to preventing campus violence in all forms and to helping our members create safe and healthy campus communities. As a result, our organization supports the implementation of Title IX which fully ensures the health and well-being of students on campus.
- B. Antisemitism and Anti-Islamic Hate Language and Violence. As part of our commitment to promote diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and accessibility (DEIJA), ACHA is committed to preventing the spread of hateful messaging and communications in relation to Jewish and Muslim members of the college community.
- C. Gun Violence/Threats of Gun Violence. ACHA works to ensure that students and campus professionals have access to a safe environment free of violence. In recent years there have been dozens of shootings on college campuses, leaving deaths, injuries and long-lasting psychological scars on affected campuses. For this reason, ACHA is committed to advancing initiatives to mitigate the threat of gun violence on college campuses.

*See also: [ACHA White Paper on Addressing Gun Violence on College and University Campuses](#)*

2. **Sexual and reproductive health access**

ACHA supports students' unfettered access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services – including education, counseling, testing for sexually transmitted infections and HIV, access to contraceptive options, emergency contraception, preconception counseling, pregnancy and postpartum care, and abortion. While there are a variety of individual and institutional views on reproductive health care, access to comprehensive, evidence-based sexual and reproductive health resources is vital in supporting the long-term success and retention of students in higher education. Access to these services is also crucial in supporting students in completing their degree.

3. **Ensuring the healthcare needs of all students, including marginalized communities, are met**

Health care services should be made universal to all and should not discriminate in any way, whether this be based on age; race; ethnicity; sex; sexual orientation; gender; gender identity; marital status; physical size or ability; religious, spiritual, or cultural identity; neurodiversity; socioeconomic status; or veteran status. This is consistent with ACHA's long-held values of cultural inclusion, respect, equality, and equity. Therefore, ACHA opposes any policy, at any level, that restricts, limits, or discourages access to gender-related services for transgender and nonbinary youth and/or adults in our communities.

4. **Monitor and assist members, to the extent possible, with their state issues**

Our member institutions are located in all 50 states so ACHA will continue to monitor state policy activities and be prepared to assist members when state policy actions impact college health and well-being.