



The College Student Behavioral Health Report

New survey data on student and parent perceptions of mental and behavioral health care on campus—and how we can make it better

United
Healthcare





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Survey findings



Mental and behavioral health needs are real and widespread. Nearly half of students say they, or a roommate/friend, have sought help for behavioral or mental health concerns in the past year.



Students may hesitate to seek help even if they know they need it. Misconceptions about cost, wait times and availability are keeping those who self-report needing help from actually getting it.



Parents may under- estimate the frequency of serious mental health concerns. Students self- report eating disorders, depression and suicidal ideation and intent at significantly higher rates than parents perceive.



Parents and students may not know how to find help on campus. Many say they don't know how to access college mental health services or believe their colleges do not offer them.

A report to spark dialogue & action



To help inform strategies addressing the mental health crisis underway on college campuses nationwide, understanding student experiences and parent perceptions can be key.

In **The 2022 College Student Behavioral Health Report**, a survey commissioned by [UnitedHealthcare](#) and conducted by YouGov* among college students and parents of college students, new data helps to reveal gaps in communication and resources around behavioral and mental health care.

Armed with this information, parents and colleges may be better equipped to help identify, understand and support students' mental and behavioral health needs through effective education, additional resources and use of health insurance benefits.

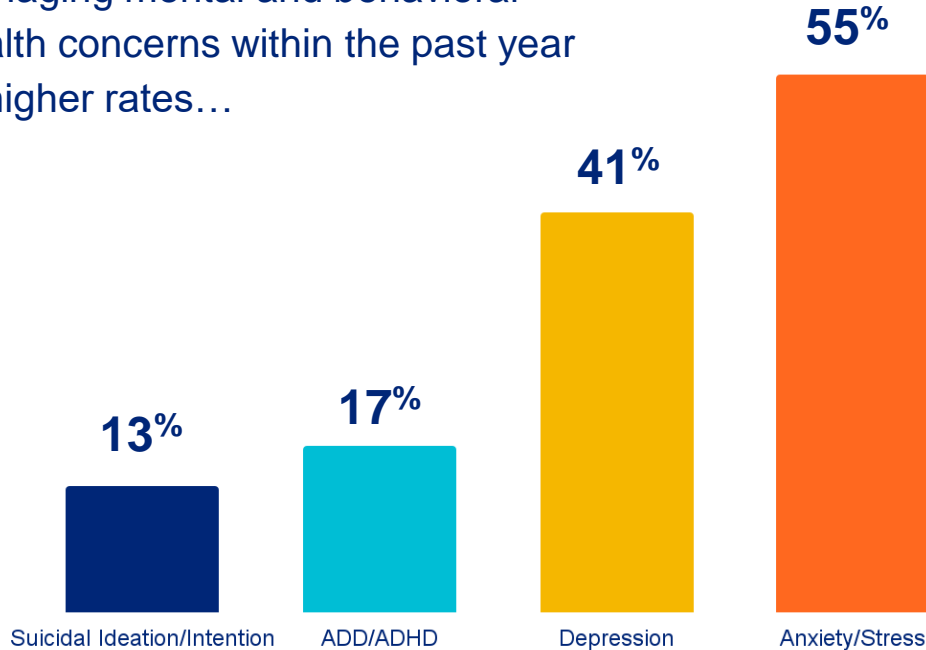
Chapter 1: A snapshot of student mental and behavioral health support

Students are encountering mental and behavioral health concerns at higher rates, making access to virtual care and insurance benefits more critical.



Students may need more mental health coverage

Students report encountering and/or managing mental and behavioral health concerns within the past year at higher rates...



...and nearly half say they, or a college roommate/ friend, have sought help for behavioral or mental health concerns in the past year.

46% report seeking help in the last year



The majority of college students are covered by health insurance, most often via family plan

According to both students and parents, most college students are enrolled in a health insurance plan.



as part of their family's health plan



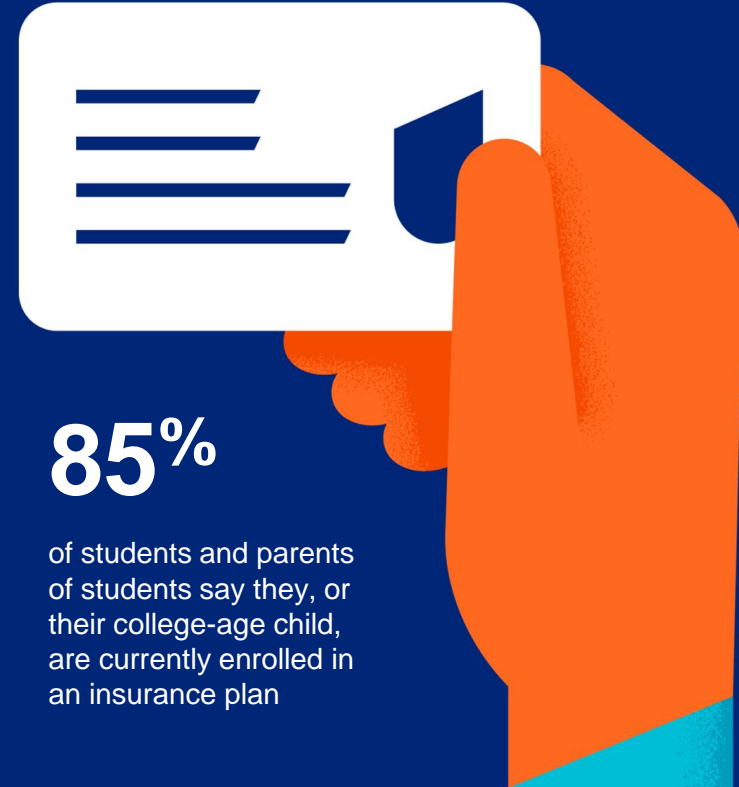
as an individual, with a student plan offered through the school



as part of another type of plan



as an individual, with a plan purchased through the Affordable Care Act (ACA)*

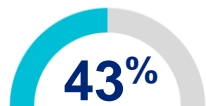


Parents prioritize different insurance needs than students

Parents

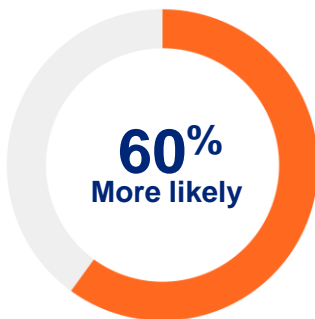


Just 1 in 10 parents rank mental health coverage as their **#1 consideration*** when choosing a health plan (aside from monthly cost).



Don't include mental health benefits at all among their top 3 considerations* when choosing a health plan (aside from monthly cost).

Students

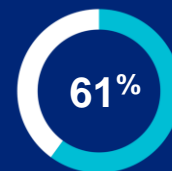


Than parents to list **mental health coverage** as their **#1 consideration*** when choosing a health plan.

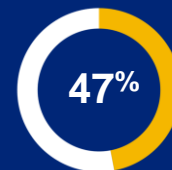
Spotlight on: Virtual care



College students report using, or being willing to use, virtual / telehealth appointments for mental or behavioral health care needs at significantly higher rates than parents perceive.



Students said they have used or would consider using virtual / telehealth for mental/behavioral health needs



Parents said their child has used or would consider using virtual / telehealth for mental / behavioral health needs

Chapter 2: Minding the gap: Understanding the disconnect between parent perception and student reality

Parent perceptions don't match student reality regarding mental health concerns — creating obstacles in students' path to accessing help.



42%

of respondents say they, or a college roommate/friend (or their college-age child, or their child's roommate/friend), have **sought help for mental or behavioral health concerns in the past year**

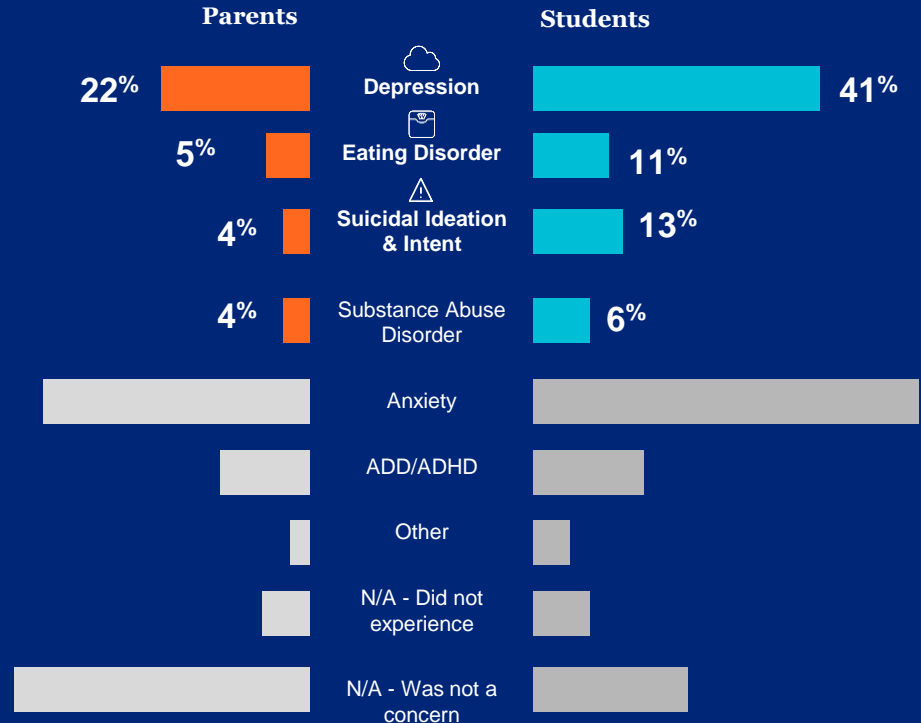


More than just exam stress

While students self-report higher rates of mental or behavioral concerns, parents don't seem to realize that students may be struggling.

Survey data show **disconnects between student experience and parent perception** when it comes to depression, eating disorders, substance abuse disorder and, most concerning, suicidal ideation and intent, while attending college.

Behavioral or mental health conditions/concerns encountered and/or managed by college students in the past year, according to:



Parents may be in the dark about students' mental health reality

Parents surveyed were **2 times more likely** to report their child (or their child's roommate/friend) did not experience a behavioral or mental health concern in the past year, compared to what student respondents self-reported.



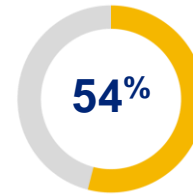
For every **10** students who reported seeking help* in the last year,



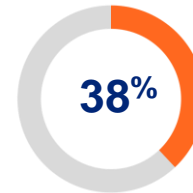
only **8** parents reported they knew their child had sought help*.



Parents believe their children or their children's friends would talk to a trusted adult when they need help. They might not.



of **parents** ranked "talk to a trusted adult" in the top two resources they **expect** their student (or their friends) to seek first



of **students** ranked "talk to a trusted adult" in the top two resources they or their friends would seek first

Chapter 3: Barriers to mental and behavioral health support, as told by students

Many students don't know where to turn for help or seem to have misconceptions about cost and appointment availability that may keep them from seeking it.



Gaps in parent understanding may reflect gaps in student knowledge (and vice versa)

Nearly **1 in 3 respondents (31%)** said they or their student either did not know how to access on-campus behavioral/mental health services, or **believed their school does not offer them.**

Not Applicable - my/my college-aged child's school **does not offer** behavioral or mental health services health resources

14%



No, I do/my college-aged child **does not know how to access** on-campus behavioral or mental health services through Student Health nor through my insurance plan

17%



Yes, I know/my college-aged child knows how to access on-campus behavioral or mental health services through my insurance plan

29%



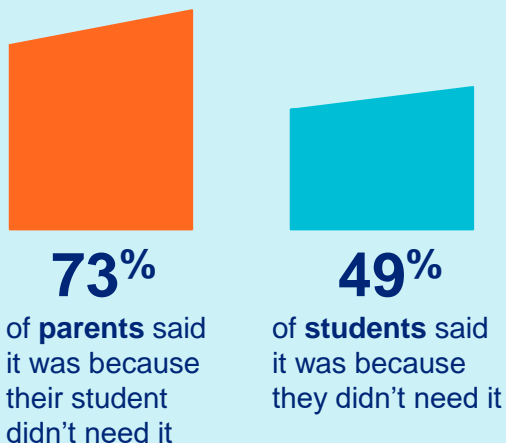
Yes, I know/my college-aged child knows how to access on-campus behavioral or mental health services through Student Health

51%



Parents think their children don't need help — but they do.

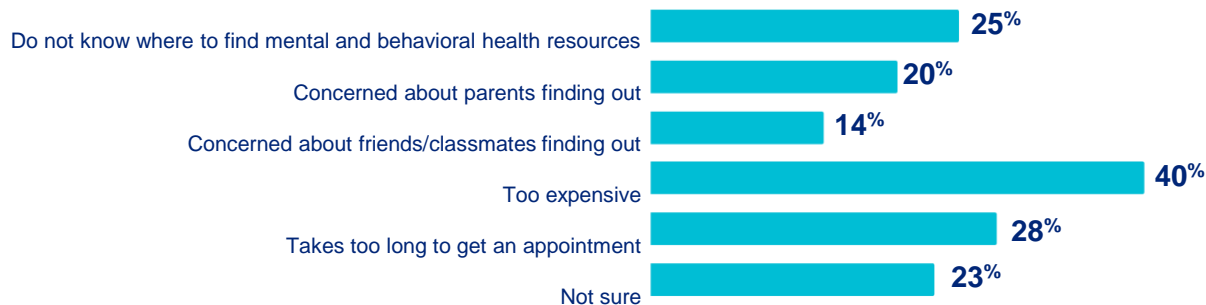
Among parents and students who reported they **didn't seek help** for mental or behavioral health in the past year, when asked **why** they didn't seek help:



Despite insurance coverage, students may struggle to obtain mental and behavioral support, even when they need it

1 in 4 students and parents of students **who needed behavioral health support** in the past year say **they didn't seek help** because they don't know where to find mental/behavioral health care resources

Among those who did not seek help, but said they needed it, reasons included:



Spotlight on: Accessing help



1 in 5 respondents who self-reported encountering mental or behavioral health concerns in the past year **don't know how to access help**, including:



Of people reporting an eating disorder



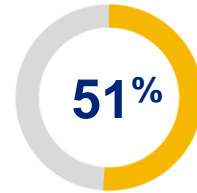
Of people reporting suicidal ideation and intent



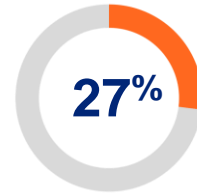
Of people reporting substance abuse disorder

Cost, time, access: Student misperceptions may be key barriers to care

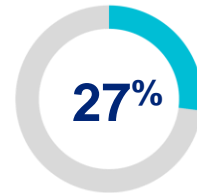
Among students who did **not** seek help for behavioral or mental health concerns, **51%** self-reported they or a college roommate/friend **did** need help, but **didn't seek it**, for the following reasons:



Too expensive



Don't know where to find behavioral or mental health resources



It takes too long to get an appointment



Chapter 4: Addressing a new reality: How parents and colleges can better support students

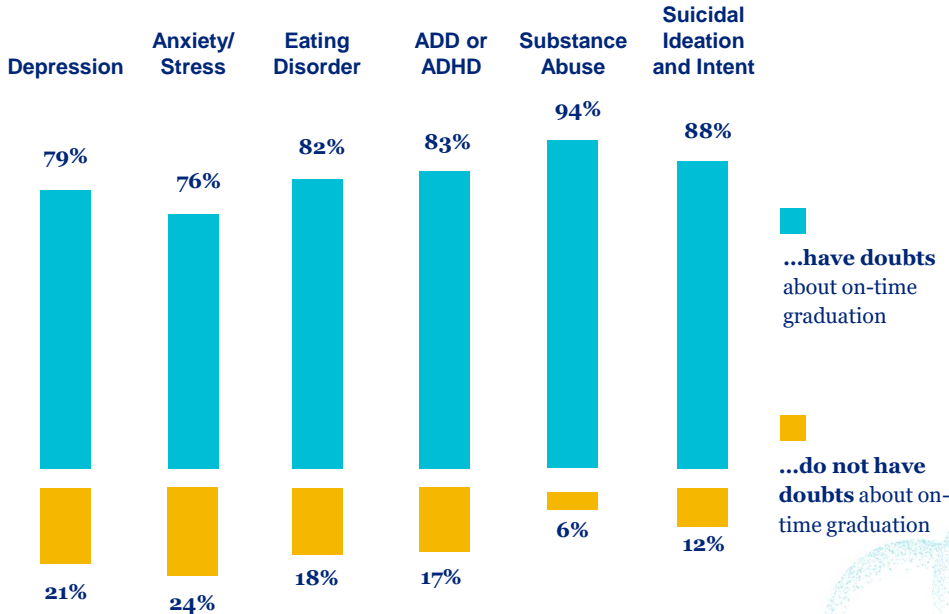
Mental and behavioral health concerns may impact students' doubts about graduating on time, but parents and colleges can help.



Spotlight on: Graduation

For students who self-reported mental or behavioral health concerns, doubts of on-time graduation skyrocket – but parents don't have the same perception.

Students who self report...

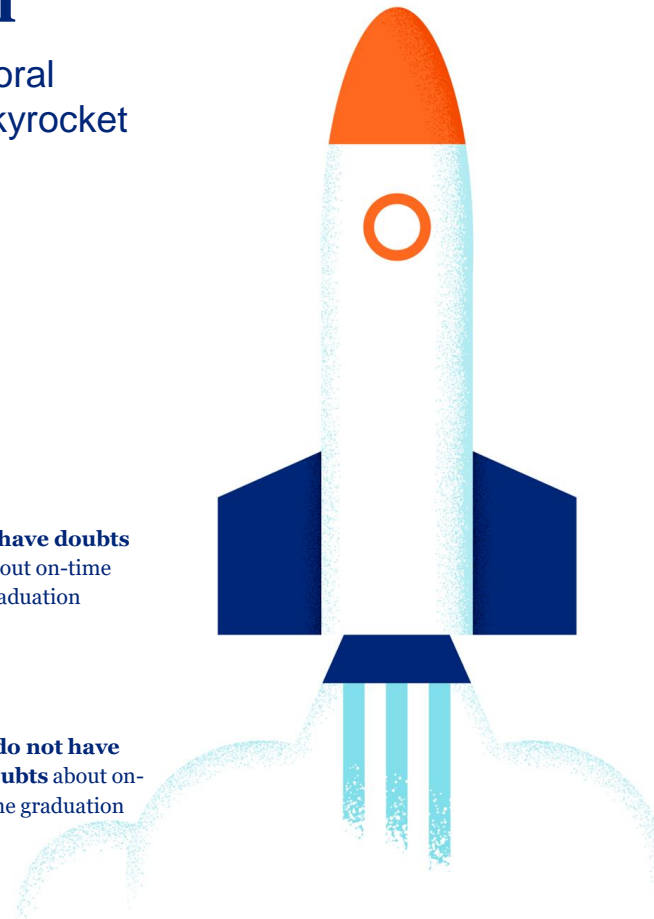


51%

Of parents say their child has **not doubted** their ability to graduate on-time, but **65% of students** say they have

2x

Encountering a mental or behavioral health concern **more than doubles** the likelihood of doubting the ability to graduate on time



Where do we go from here?

Changing communication to shift perceptions and outcomes



Parents

Opportunity to proactively seek information about campus mental or behavioral health resources (and share with their children)

46%

say their child's college has never shared that these services are available, or, that they don't know how their child's college has communicated about these services

Colleges

Opportunity to better target information to students, families

29%

of respondents say they don't know how info on mental or behavioral health has been communicated

11%

say their college has never shared info on mental or behavioral health



Moving forward: Next steps



With youth mental health in crisis, parents and colleges can take proactive steps to discuss mental and behavioral health – and how students can access supportive care.

Though sometimes difficult, frank conversations with students can help to reverse misconceptions about seeking and accessing needed support, help ease fears about graduating and can assist in our students' well-being.

To help ensure healthy college experiences and successful graduation, colleges, families, providers and health plans can work together to help provide resources and support – when and where they may need it.



The bottom line?

Conversations at home can be a good first step, but continued support and education must also surround students on campus:

- ✓ Increased communication from colleges on how and where to access care
- ✓ Guidance on understanding health insurance — what plan they have, how to utilize services such as virtual care and how to talk to their families about their benefits
- ✓ Efforts to dispel myths around cost, wait time and appointment availability when seeking professional help
- ✓ Recognition from adults in students' lives that the issues facing college students right now may go beyond stress about schoolwork



Methodology

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,034, of whom 528 were parents of college students and 506 were college students currently enrolled in an institution of higher education across the country. Fieldwork was undertaken between August 8 and August 14, 2022. The survey was carried out online.



About UnitedHealthcare

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