

IMPACT

Healthy Minds are a Priority: Promoting Mental Health and Wellness of Black College Students



DR. JAN COLLINS EAGLIN (RIGHT) OF THE STEVE FUND JOINS UNCF ICB'S VICTORIA SMITH, ESQ., TO ANNOUNCE THE LAUNCH OF THE BLACK COLLEGE MENTAL HEALTH COMMUNITY OF ACTION DURING UNITE 2022 IN ATLANTA, GA.
PHOTO CREDIT: ANDREW HUTH

The lengthy COVID-19 pandemic and heightened racial tensions across the United States intensified the urgency of increasing the reach and impact of mental health programming to support the mental health and well-being of students, faculty and staff at HBCUs and predominantly Black institutions (PBIs).

To address this situation, UNCF established a partnership with The Steve Fund, the nation's leading organization focused on promoting mental health and emotional well-being of young people of color.

Through the partnership, UNCF and The Steve Fund launched a newly established mental health initiative with customized strategies, content, programs, resources and events all designed to build knowledge and establish a community of action around mental health and emotional well-being of students, faculty and staff on HBCU and PBI campuses.

The partnership kicked off with a survey to announce the new initiative, which was distributed to HBCU students, faculty and staff to gauge the state of mental health on HBCU campuses. The organization received responses from 342 students and 419 faculty and staff representing 47 HBCUs. Among the findings:

- Students, faculty and staff all agree the top three mental health concerns for college students are: stress, anxiety and depression.
- More than 65% of students shared that in a mental health crisis, they are most likely to speak to friends or family members.
- While 83% of students believe their campuses are addressing mental health and well-being, 45% of students surveyed said they would not speak to anyone if they were in a mental health crisis.
- An overwhelming majority of students, faculty and staff shared that they would like to keep informed on resources about mental health and well-being, yet 25% of faculty/staff shared there is no training available about student mental health and wellness.
- 72% of students are aware of their options for mental health counseling through their college/university, but only 52% feel comfortable visiting the university counseling center when a mental health issue arises.

“The Steve Fund is working to position UNCF students to achieve optimal mental health by equipping them with the skills, tools and knowledge they need to thrive as young adults, scholars and leaders,” said Dr. Annelle Primm, senior medical director at The Steve Fund. “Through our collaboration with the UNCF, the Steve Fund expands its important partnership with higher education to foster the emotional well-being of students of color through productive dialogue, effective policies and successful promotion of access to potent, culturally salient resources. It is imperative that the Steve Fund supports HBCUs in their critical mission. Our partnership in the mental health initiative is a strategic investment which will enhance cultivation of student potential and success.”

The objectives of the new partnership are to:

- Reduce stigma and promote knowledge, dialogue and awareness around the mental health needs of HBCU and PBI students
- Engage HBCU campus leaders and mobilize a commitment to prioritize mental health support systems and services on their campuses
- Provide curated mental health recommendations to help HBCU and PBI administrators support their students
- Support HBCU and PBI institutions in their vitally important mission by assisting them as they promote student potential and success
- Provide the necessary tools, resources and supports HBCU and PBI students need to remain or become mentally well so they can advance their personal goals to matriculate through college and become the future leaders of tomorrow

“COVID-19 revealed just how much infrastructure and additional staff are needed to adequately support students, faculty and existing staff on HBCU campuses. We already know that the students we serve and their educators must respond to generational trauma, racism and disinvestment to thrive—each of these challenges takes a toll on student and faculty mental health. Our schools and institutions need support to develop new and sustainable ways to provide care, mentorship and compassion to students, staff and community members,” said Dr. Michael L. Lomax, president and CEO, UNCF. “Through this partnership with The Steve Fund, we will begin to develop programs and resources that will aid HBCUs in creating an environment conducive to mental health and the emotional well-being of students.”