

Enhancing Mental Health Services Through Strategic Planning: The East Tennessee State University Counseling Center's 2024-2028 Plan

Authors : R. M. Kilonzo, S. Bedingfield, K. Smith, K. Hudgins Smith, K. Couper, R. Ratley, Z. Taylor, A. Engelman, M. Renne

Abstract : Introduction: The mental health needs of university students continue to evolve, necessitating a strategic approach to service delivery. The East Tennessee State University (ETSU) Counseling Center developed its inaugural Strategic Plan (2024-2028) to enhance student mental health services. The plan focuses on improving access, quality of care, and service visibility, aligning with the university's mission to support academic success and student well-being. Aim: This strategic plan aims to establish a comprehensive framework for delivering high-quality, evidence-based mental health services to ETSU students, addressing current challenges, and anticipating future needs. Methods: The development of the strategic plan was a collaborative effort involving the Counseling Center's leadership, staff, with technical support from Doctor of Public Health-community and behavioral health intern. Multiple workshops, online/offline reviews, and stakeholder consultations were held to ensure a robust and inclusive process. A SWOT analysis and stakeholder mapping were conducted to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges. Key performance indicators (KPIs) were set to measure service utilization, satisfaction, and outcomes. Results: The plan resulted in four strategic priorities: service application, visibility/accessibility, safety and satisfaction, and training programs. Key objectives include expanding counseling services, improving service access through outreach, reducing stigma, and increasing peer support programs. The plan also focuses on continuous quality improvement through data-driven assessments and research initiatives. Immediate outcomes include expanded group therapy, enhanced staff training, and increased mental health literacy across campus. Conclusion and Recommendation: The strategic plan provides a roadmap for addressing the mental health needs of ETSU students, with a clear focus on accessibility, inclusivity, and evidence-based practices. Implementing the plan will strengthen the Counseling Center's capacity to meet the diverse needs of the student population. To ensure sustainability, it is recommended that the center continuously assess student needs, foster partnerships with university and external stakeholders, and advocate for increased funding to expand services and staff capacity.

Keywords : strategic plan, university counseling center, mental health, students

Conference Title : ICMHW 2025 : International Conference on Mental Health and Wellness

Conference Location : Houston, United States

Conference Dates : February 10-11, 2025