



Campus Mental Health & Substance Use Issues in the West

Analysis drawn from the 2023-2024 Healthy Minds Study

Tonya Horn, Amanda Gentz, and Jesus Delgado

Campus Behavioral Health

NEA NEWS

The Mental Health Crisis on College Campuses

Rates of anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation on college campuses have never been higher. Meanwhile, faculty and staff are overwhelmed.



By: Mary Ellen Flannery, Senior Writer
Published: March 29, 2023

Self-Reported Rates of High-Risk Mental Health Concerns Remain Steady Among College Students

May 8, 2025

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• Among college students and college graduates (ages 20-28), data suggest more frequent conversations with both parents and peers about mental health is associated with positive outcomes

May 8, 2025) – UnitedHealthcare today announced new survey findings from its third annual [College Graduate Behavioral Health Report \(pdf\)](#). The survey data reveals that despite an overall decline in self-reported mental or behavioral health concerns¹ for the first time in three years.

FEATURE

Student mental health is in crisis. Campuses are rethinking their approach

Amid massive increases in demand for care, psychologists are helping colleges and universities embrace a broader culture of well-being and better equipping faculty to support students.

By [Zara Abrams](#) Last updated: October 12, 2022 Date created: October 1, 2022 14 min read
Vol. 53 No. 7
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[Mental Health](#) [Stress](#) [Resilience](#) [Teens](#) [Anxiety](#) [Depression](#)



By nearly every metric, student mental health is worsening. During the 2020-2021

Mental Health at College: What to Know

About 70% of students have struggled with mental health since starting college, according to data from a U.S. News survey.

By Sarah Wood | June 3, 2025, at 8:35 a.m.

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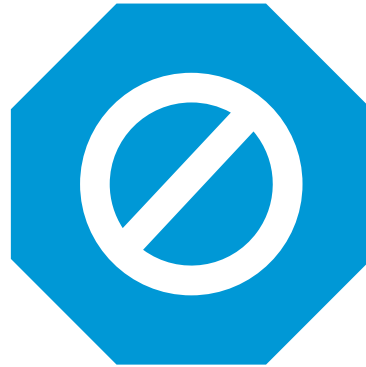
Campus Behavioral Health



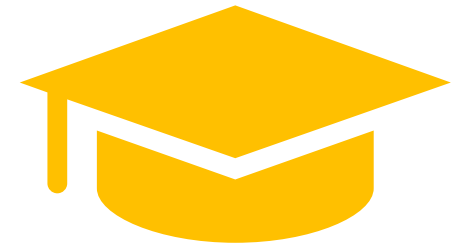
Over one third of all college students experience a significant mental health problem.

Less than half of students who expressed a need for help received it

(Lipson et al., 2015; Eisenberg et al., 2025)



Students with mental health problems are 2x more likely to leave their institution prior to finishing



Prevention and treatment services can improve student wellbeing and retention

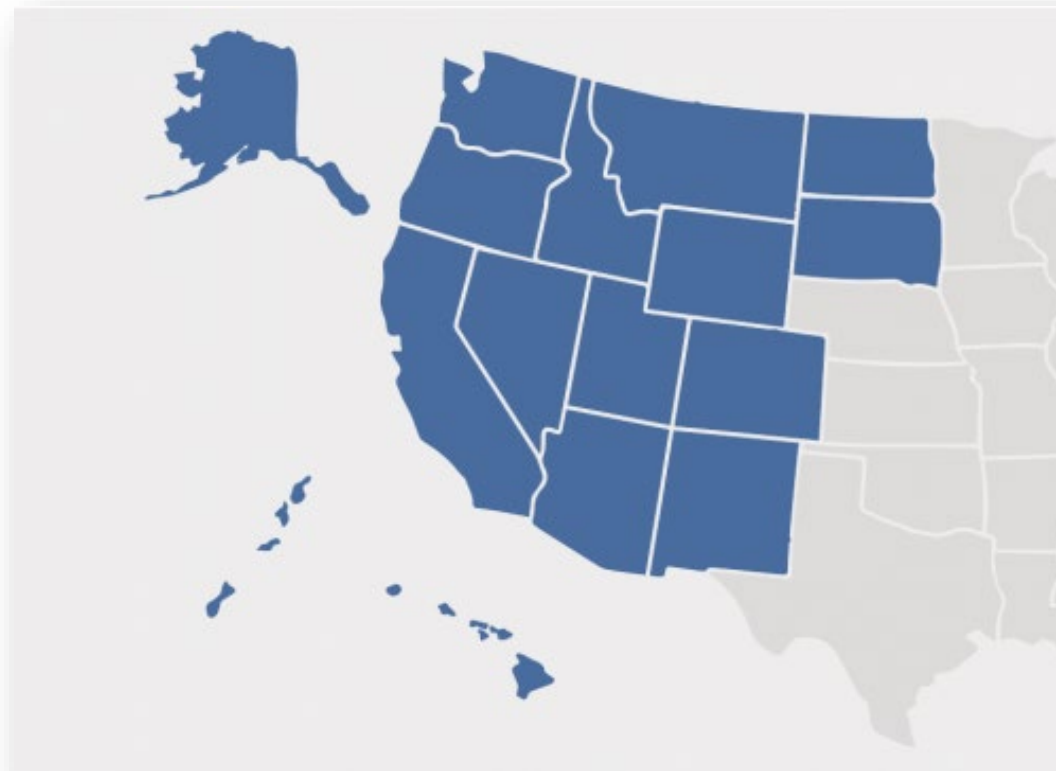
Healthy Minds Study

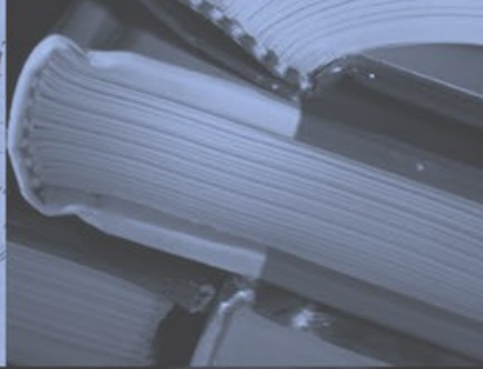
- Nationwide, cross-sectional, web-based survey
- Asks about mental health and related issues
- Participants are graduate and undergraduate students enrolled at participating higher education institutions
- Conducting survey for over 15 years



Current Study

Purpose: Provide information about the behavioral health needs and service utilization of higher education students in Western United States





Methods



Methodology

- Analyzed the **2023-2024** wave of Healthy Minds data
- Higher education institutions from WICHE states who participated in the HMS
- Included items from three sections in the standard modules of the HMS:
 - Demographics
 - Mental health status
 - Mental health service utilization/help-seeking



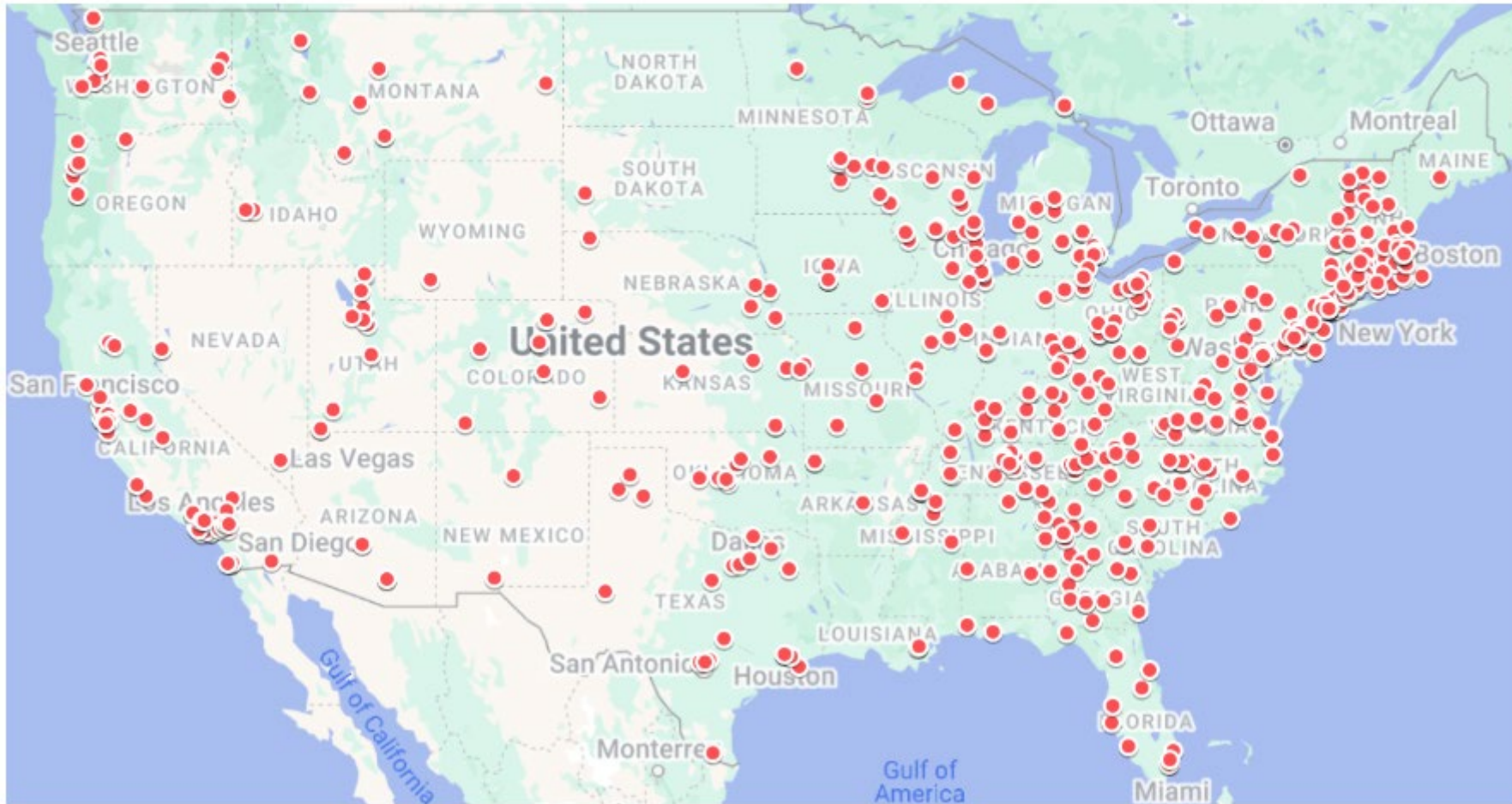
Sample

- ▶ **23,566** students*
- ▶ **37** higher education institutions from WICHE states (11 rural)
- ▶ Drawn from national sample of 104,729 students from 196 institutions



Participating Institutions

The map below shows the breadth of the distribution of post-secondary institutions that have participated in HMN's survey studies through 2023-24.



Source: <https://healthymindsnetwork.org/hms/>

Sample Demographics

*Comparisons to national sample are indicated in **YELLOW**

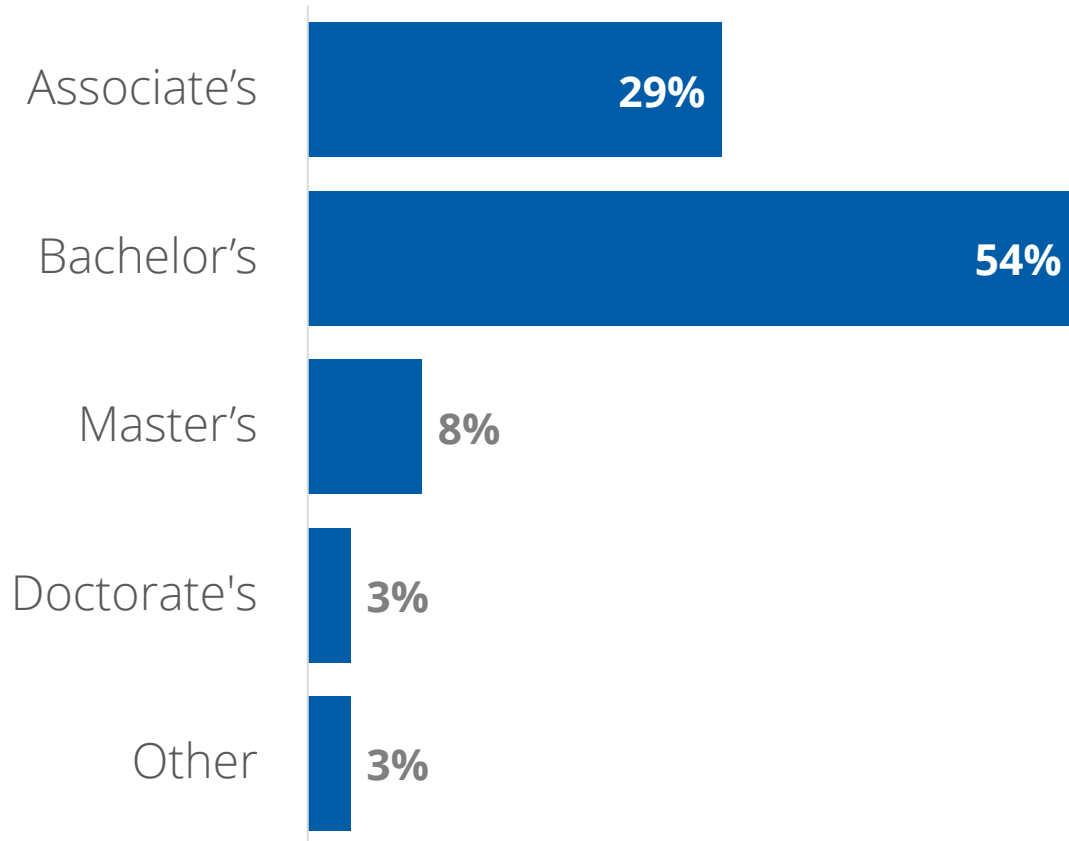
▶ Race:

- White **64%** (67%)
 - Hispanic/Latin(x) **17%** (14%)
 - Asian American/Asian **9%** (9%)
 - African American/Black **3%** (15%)
 - Other **6%** (7%)
- ▶ Most identified their gender as **woman (65%)** (55%)
- ▶ Average age is **23.9** years

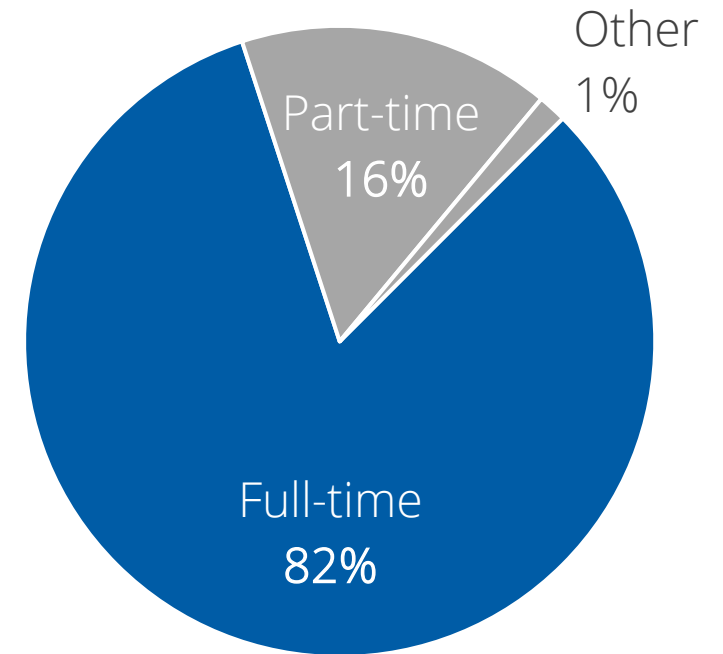


Enrollment Characteristics

Degree



Enrollment Status



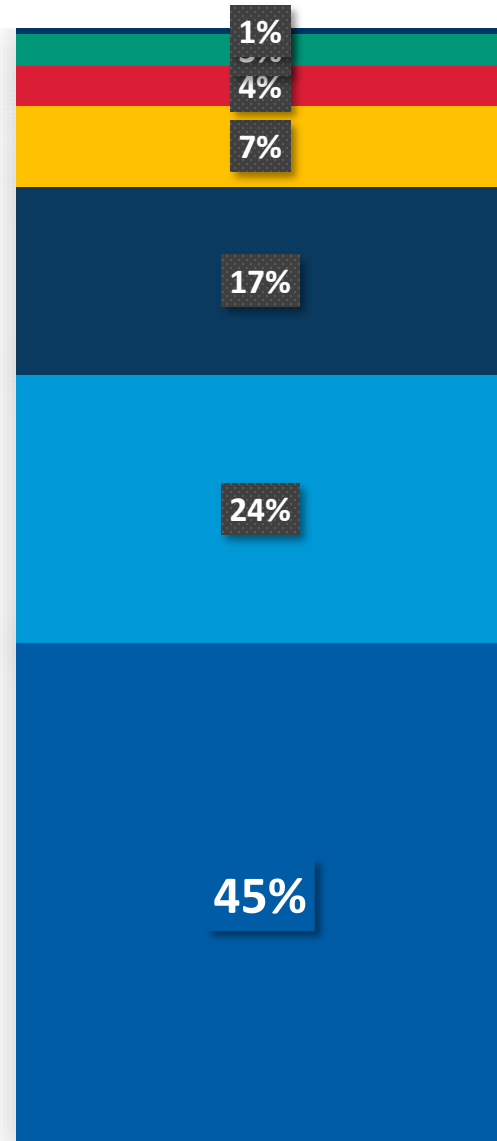
Class Format

► **In the last semester,**

- **52%** of students attended classes in person
- **36%** completed classes hybrid
- **11%** completed classes all online



Living Arrangements

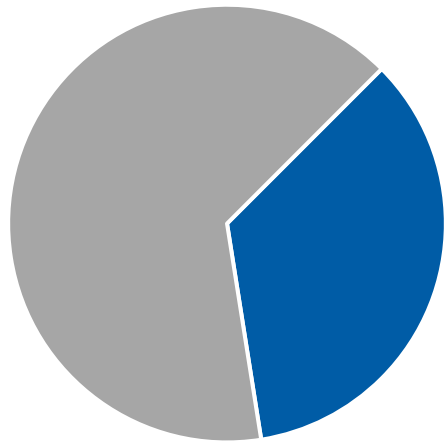


- Fraternity or sorority house
- Co-operative housing
- Other
- On-campus apartment
- On-campus residence hall
- With parent/relatives
- Off-campus, non-university housing



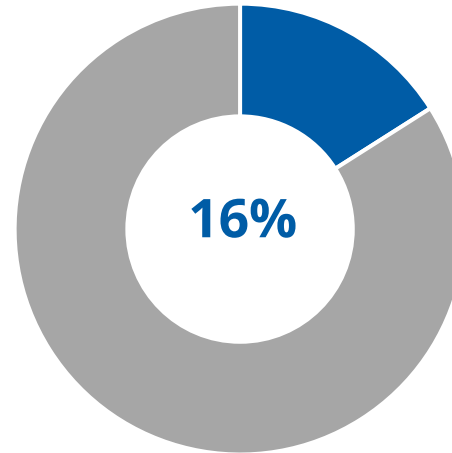
Mental Health Symptoms

*Comparisons to national sample are indicated in **YELLOW**



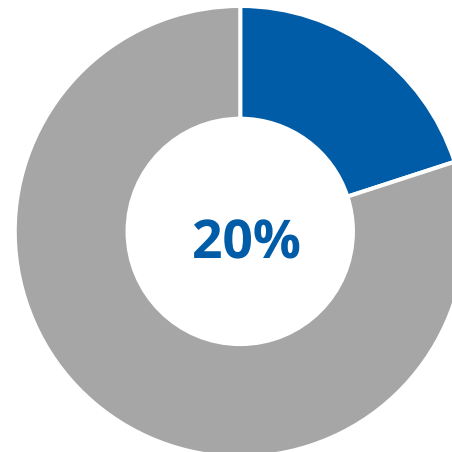
Only **35%** of respondents were identified as having positive mental health

38% of the national sample were identified as having positive mental health



indicted **severe anxiety** symptoms

16%

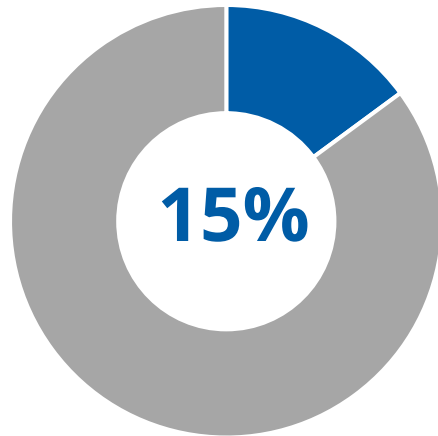


indicted **severe depression** symptoms

19%

Mental Health Symptoms

*Comparisons to national sample are indicated in **YELLOW**

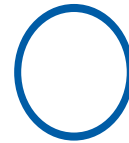


Endorsed suicidality



14% Thought seriously about attempting suicide (13%)

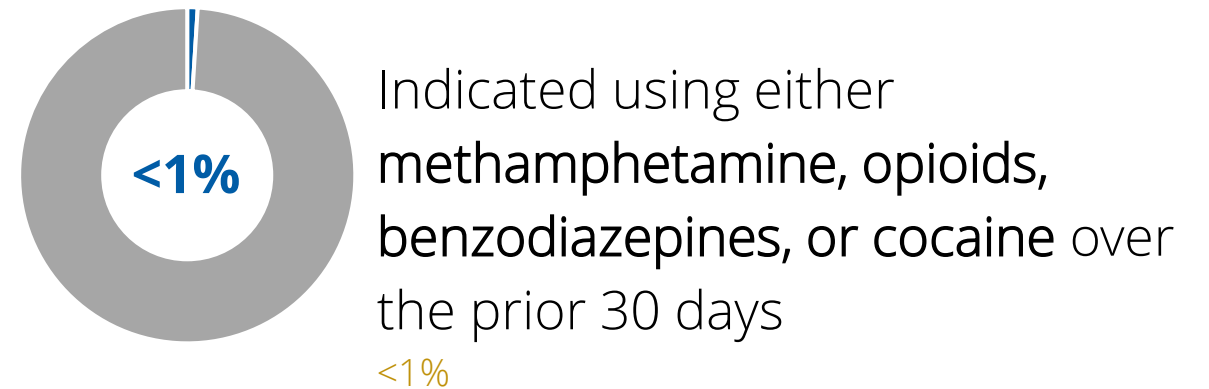
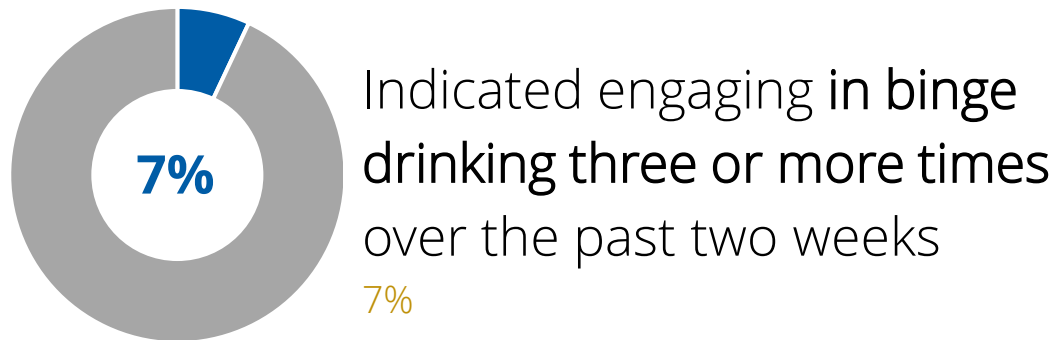
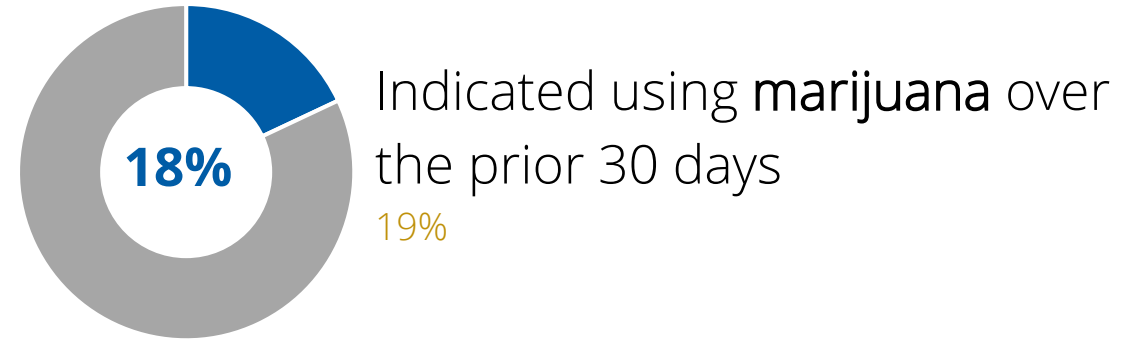
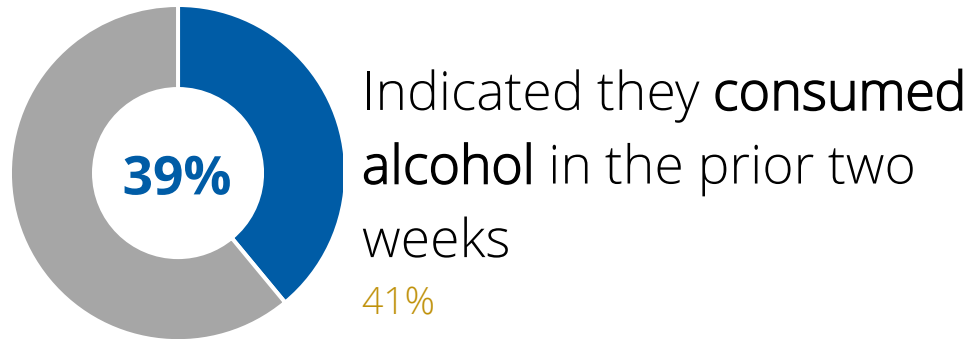
7% Made a plan for attempting suicide (6%)



2% Attempted suicide in the past year (2%)

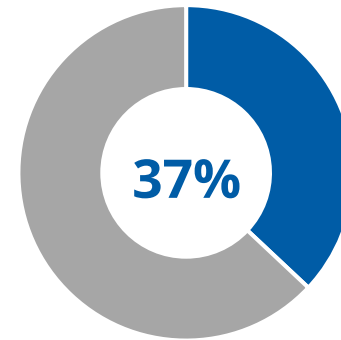
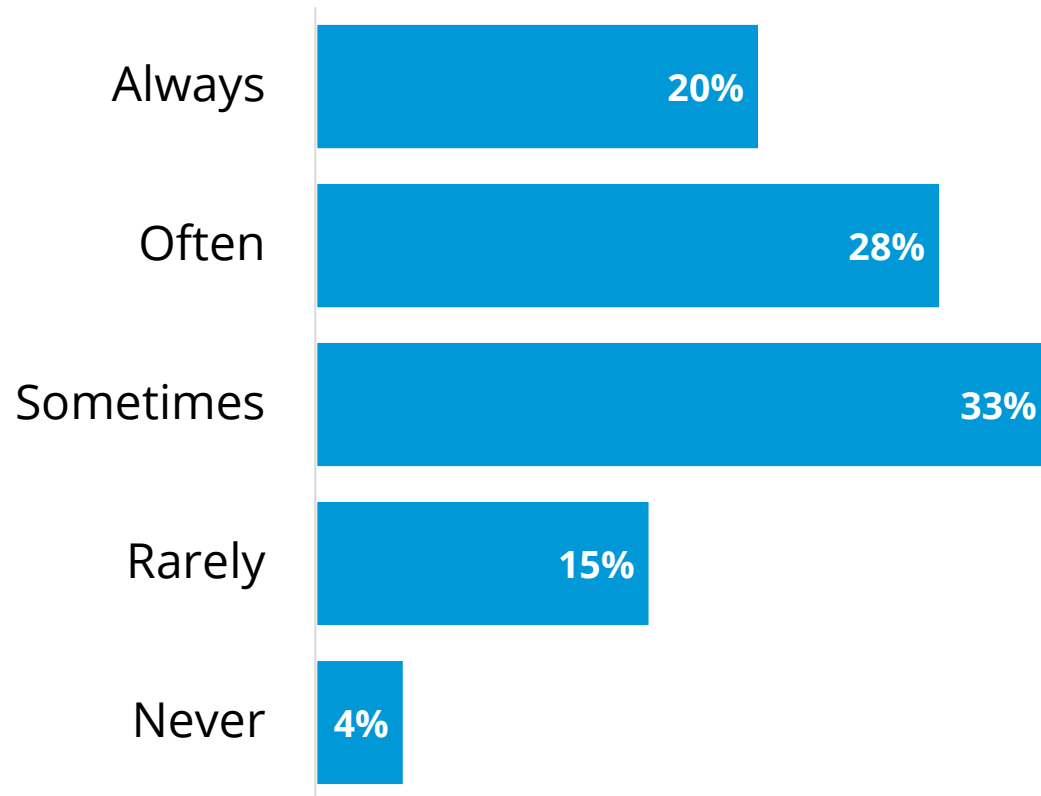
Substance Use

*Comparisons to national sample are indicated in **YELLOW**

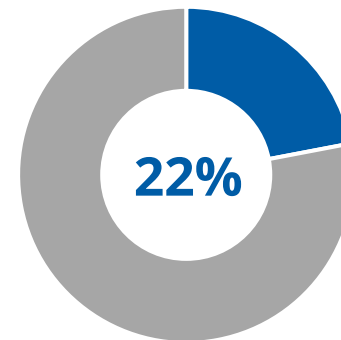


Financial Stress

Most students experienced **financial stress** at least some of the time

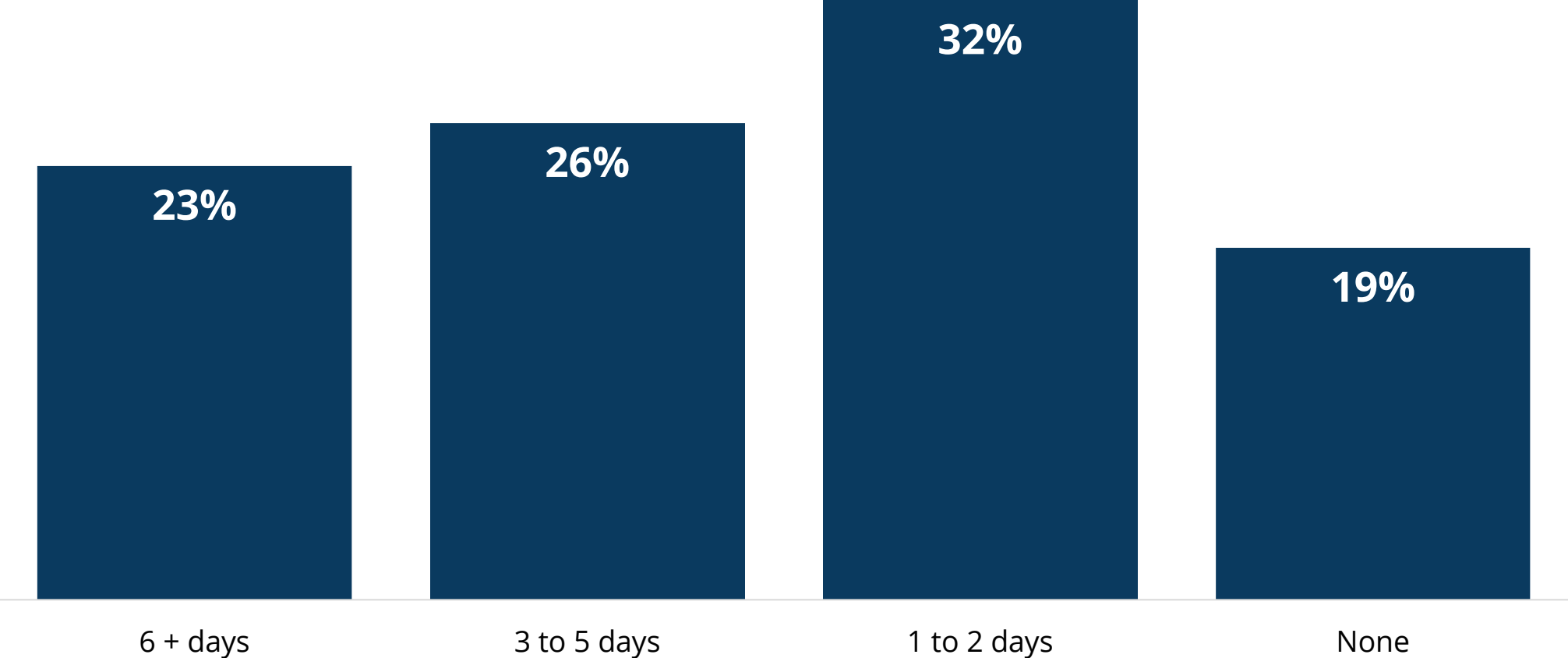


Experienced **food insecurity** at least sometimes



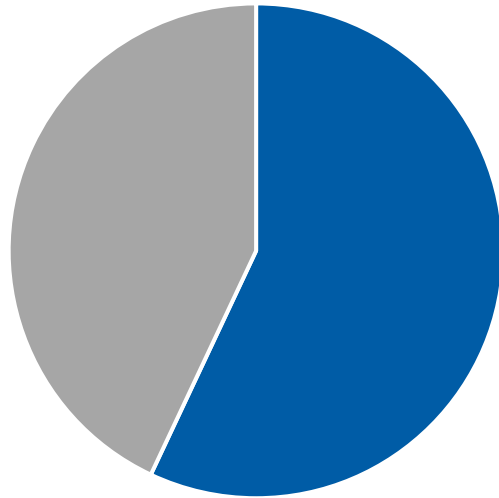
Experienced **housing insecurity** at least sometimes

Students indicated that their emotional or mental difficulties hurt their academic performance in the past 30 days:



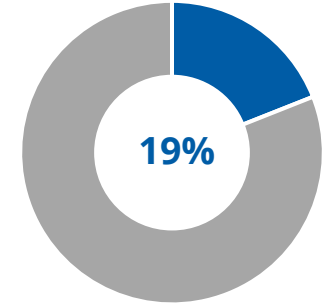
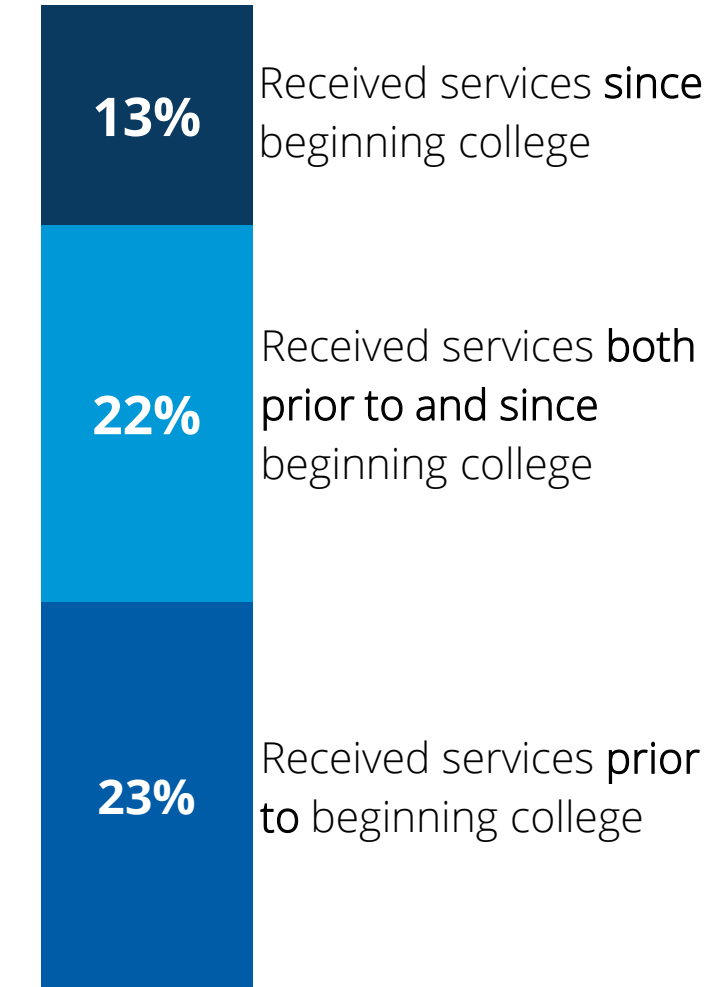
Mental Health Service Utilization

*Comparisons to national sample are indicated in **YELLOW**

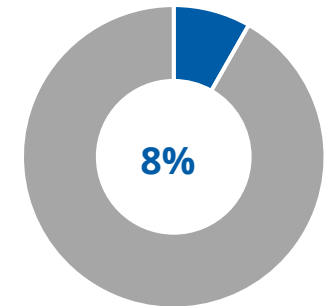


57% of respondents indicated that they had ever received counseling or therapy for mental health concerns

54%; 36% in past year of the national sample

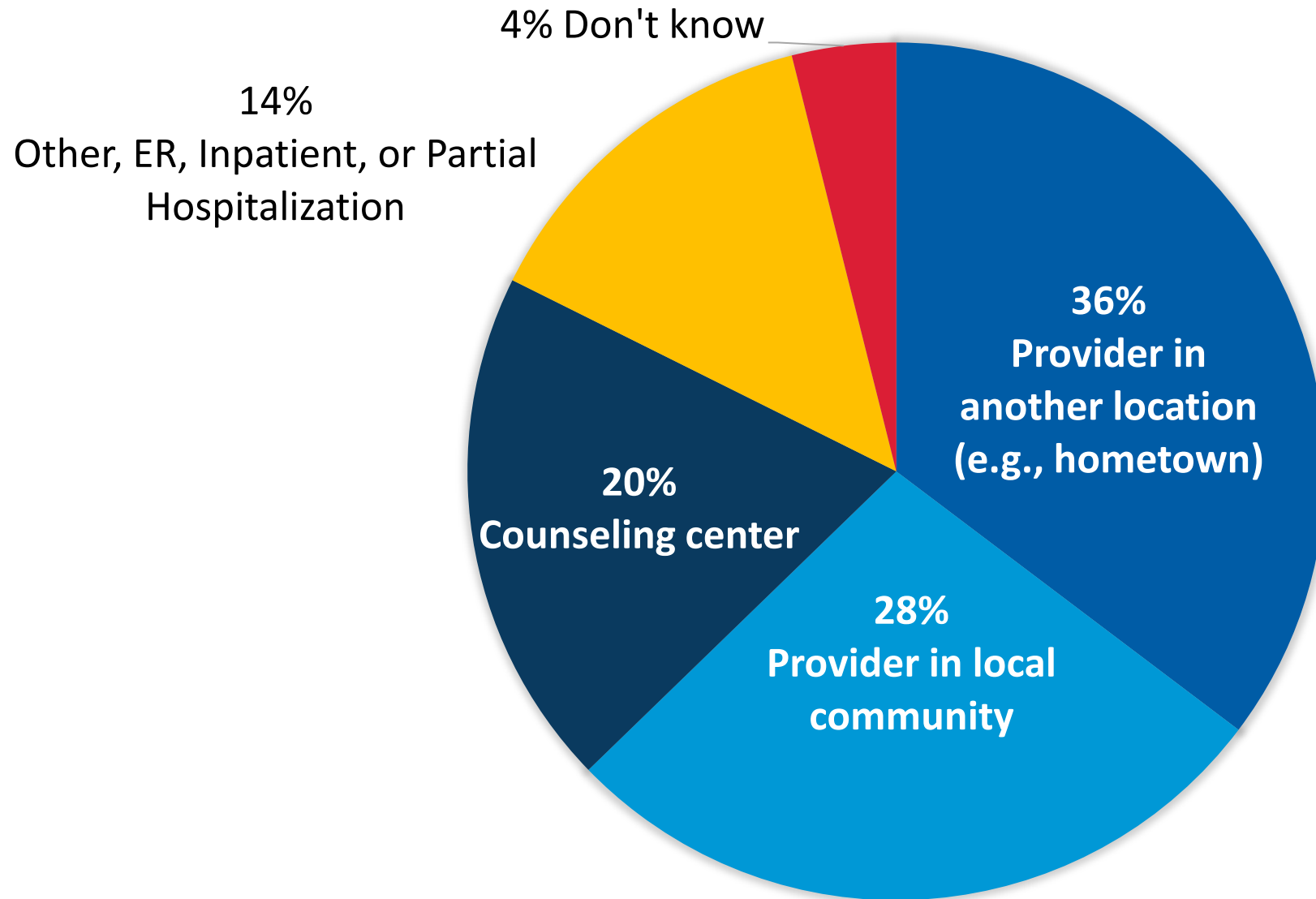


Took antidepressant medication in the prior year



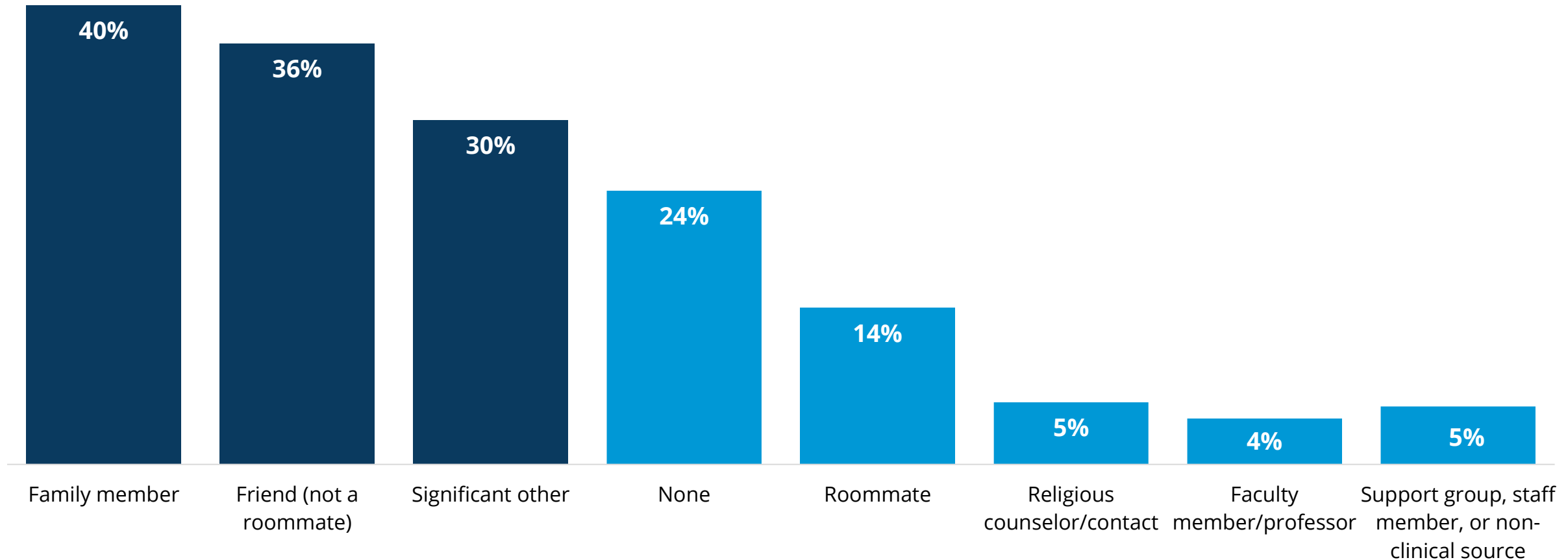
Took anti-anxiety medication in the prior year

Where Students Access Counseling/Therapy



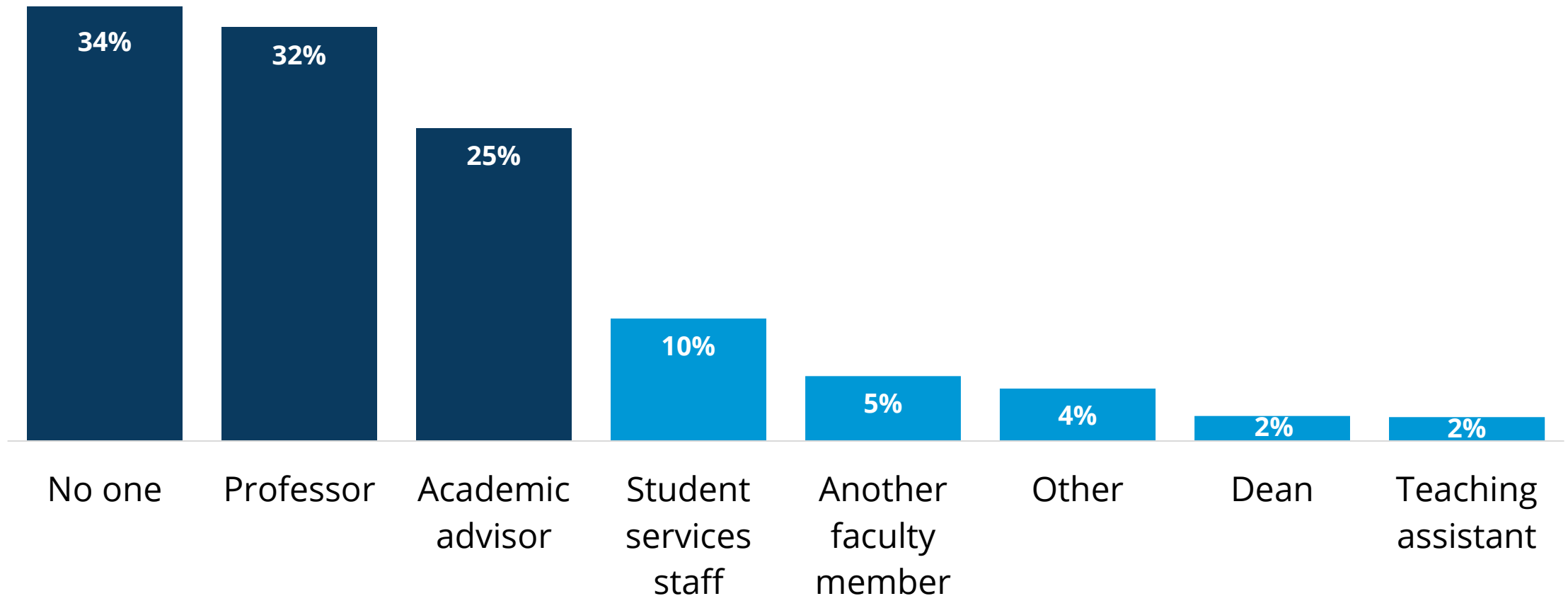
Informal Help Seeking

Sources of support for mental/emotional health:

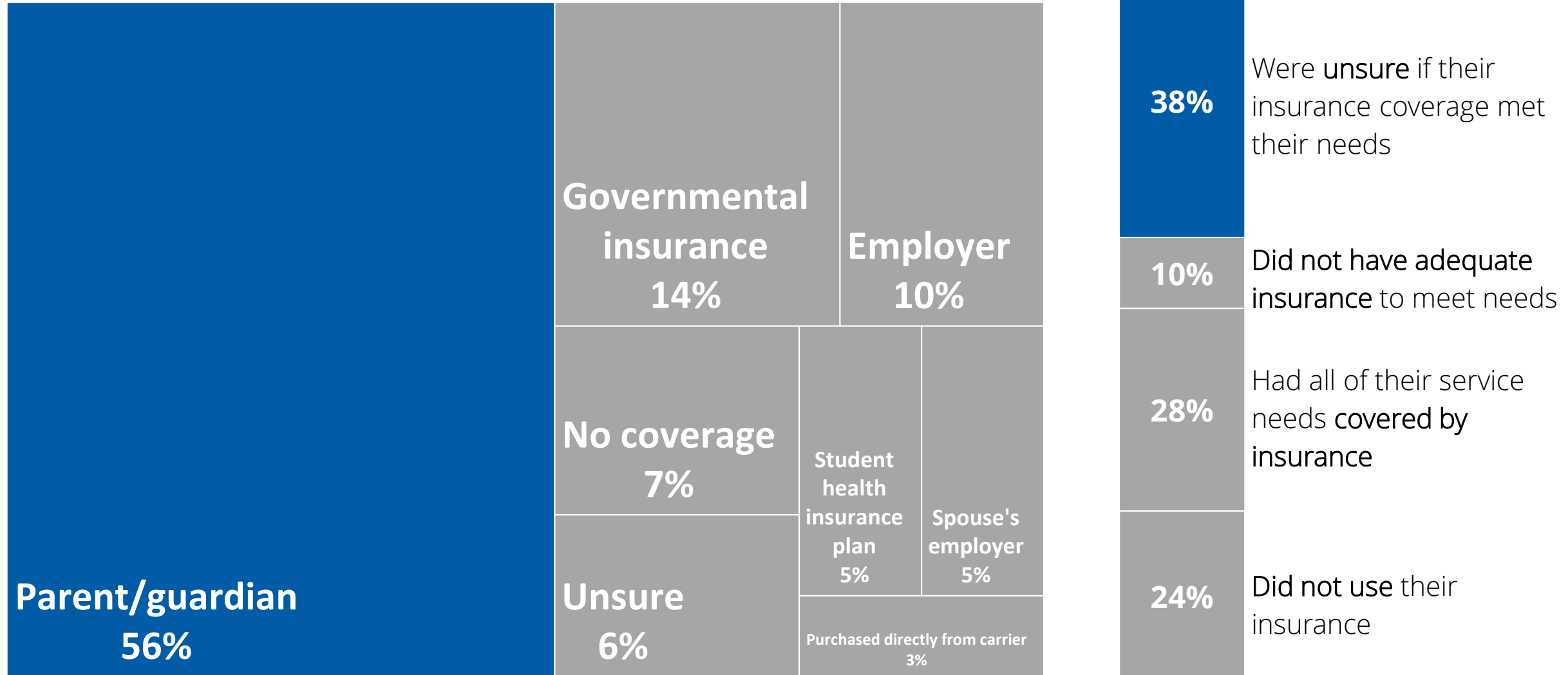


Informal Help Seeking – Academic

If you had a mental health problem that you believed was affecting your academic performance, which people at school would you talk to...



Insurance Source & Adequacy



Discussion Question

What findings stuck out
to you the most?





Implications and Discussion



Limitations



Non-representative sample with unknown generalizability



Analyzing large, aggregate samples obscures real differences



Cross-sectional design – did not look at trends over time



Self-reported data – potential for response bias



Limitations associated with survey design

Key Takeaways

- ▶ Students in higher ed are a group of concern for mental health symptoms, with needs increasing over time
- ▶ More than half of students had ever received counseling or therapy services
- ▶ 87% reported they had health insurance
- ▶ Students most commonly access mental health supports from off-campus sources
- ▶ Most common sources of informal support were parents, friend (not roommate), and significant other
- ▶ 2/3 of students reported they would talk to an academic source if their mental health impacted their academic performance, mostly from a professor or academic advisor



Implications

- ▶ Students may need help understanding their insurance benefits and how to access care, including from off-campus sources
 - Role for on-campus Care Navigators/Coordinators
- ▶ Strengthen support and training for professors and academic advisors
 - E.g. Warm hand-off to campus-based care coordination services
- ▶ Provide information and training to family members, peers to strengthen informal supports



Research Next Steps

- ▶ Subgroup analysis needed to understand experiences of unique groups (e.g. gender, race), and inform targeted prevention and intervention efforts
- ▶ Qualitative studies are needed to contextualize students' experiences, needs, and preferences
- ▶ Promote more participation in the HMS by institutions in the West



Discussion Question

How do these findings
impact your work?



Discussion Question

Given the unique constraints of community colleges (e.g., commuter students, limited resources), what approaches feel most realistic for improving student mental health support?



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Questions?



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