

STUDENT WELL-BEING IS



BY BECKY LAMAN

WHILE MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AND INFLATION CHALLENGE STUDENTS, COMMUNITY COLLEGES TURN TO VIRTUAL CARE SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE STUDENT WELL-BEING, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, AND RETENTION.

JOELENE JONES WAS STILL GRIEVING THE LOSS OF HER mother when COVID-19 hit and she lost her job of 17 years. She felt so distraught when she suddenly had no income, no medical insurance, and no family to help that she considered stopping out.

“The stress, the death of my mother, financial [worries] — those were my barriers,” she said.

As if her grief and anxiety weren’t enough, Jones was also attempting to navigate a complex and costly healthcare system in a rural part of California’s Central Valley, where wait times for counseling appointments were typically longer than a month, she said.

Fortunately, Jones had enrolled at Porterville College, one of 28 California community colleges that provides 24/7 medical and mental health support through a partnership with TimelyMD, the leading health and well-being provider in higher education. Without hassle or additional costs, she got the help she needed using TalkNow, which provides emotional support when students need it in the TimelyCare platform.

“I don’t know how many kids end up dropping out of college because

they’re having issues,” she said. “Because I was a student, I was able to access mental health services.”

Inflation adds increased costs — and pressure — for students

Unfortunately, skyrocketing inflation costs are further stressing a population of students already disproportionately impacted by the ongoing pandemic. With inflation at a 40-year high, grocery prices up 15%, and gas prices averaging more than \$5 a gallon, the stress that accompanies financial strain is a double whammy.

Community college leaders have long been at the forefront of embracing the “Maslow before Bloom” philosophy — the idea that students’ basic physiological needs must be met before they can learn — and with good reason. According to the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice at Temple University, 61% of community college students experienced basic needs insecurity during the fall 2020 semester. A 2021 TimelyMD survey found that 7 out of 10 community college students experienced stress and/or anxiety due to a lack of essential needs.

It has never been more important to support learners' health, well-being and essential needs, given recent enrollment declines across the sector. Add to that the fact that nearly two-thirds of associate degree students who considered stopping out in the past six months say emotional stress was the primary reason, according to a recent Gallup-Lumina Foundation report.

"We are all in this business because we want students to succeed," said Dr. Jill Zimmerman, dean of student life and services at Antelope Valley College in Lancaster, Calif. "Years ago, when a student would fall asleep in class, the perception was that the student is not interested or didn't care, and now it's understood that the student might be homeless. Faculty are now asking, 'What support can we provide?' We can help that student."

For students, free and equitable access to campus resources such as medical care, mental health support, and food assistance programs can make a huge difference on a spectrum from surviving to thriving. For community college leaders, trustees, and governing boards, supporting the whole student is imperative for student engagement, degree persistence, and workforce development — all of which impact the long-term success and economic stability of our institutions, communities, states, and nation.

For these reasons, TimelyMD's virtual health and well-being solution is a critical component to extending the reach of campus resources to empower students to be well and thrive in all aspects of their lives. Recognizing how social determinants greatly affect student health and their ability to be successful, TimelyMD has expanded its support for community college students with a basic needs service that provides critical wraparound support for students when they need it most. Care navigators connect learners with free or reduced-cost programs that provide support for services such as in-person health care, food and housing assistance, transit, bill paying, childcare, and legal services. After a referral, care navigators follow up with students within 48 hours to ensure their needs are being met.

Students appreciate and benefit from a personalized approach to care navigation. At Antelope Valley College, 84% of students would recommend TimelyCare, and 75% say they would not have done anything if TimelyCare wasn't available to them.

"Having that high percentage makes me smile that our students are using all of the resources and tools that create a healthy community," Zimmerman said. "Our relevance is important. If we're not taking care of them, they will go somewhere else."

A happy ending and a new beginning

As for Joeline Jones, she is now a proud community college success story who credits her TimelyCare visits with helping her stay focused and stay on track. She is now working as a counselor to inmates in a local prison, with a goal of someday joining the administrative team. She recently completed her associate in science for transfer (AS-T) in business administration — her second degree at Porterville College — and is pursuing her bachelor's degree.

"That was a goal I set, and I completed it," she says.

ACCT Corporate Council Member TimelyMD Fills the Gap

TimelyMD is trusted to care for over 1 million students — including one in every 10 community college students — at more than 200 colleges and universities nationwide. As community college leaders seek solutions that improve student well-being, engagement, and retention, they turn to TimelyMD more than anyone else for its award-winning TimelyCare platform with licensed providers available 24/7 in all 50 states.

Partnering with multiple colleges at once allows TimelyMD to extend care to a broader population of students. Available federal and state funding assistance, recent system agreements in Virginia, California, and Connecticut, and the addition of several schools in Texas, North Carolina, and Arkansas have fueled adoption of TimelyCare as the only complete clinical care solution in the two-year sector. In addition to mental health, medical care, and basic needs support, many students also have access to psychiatric care, health coaching, digital self-care content, and more.

Historically, many community colleges have followed a model of referring students in need of mental health services to local resources. However, community mental health resources are strained, and many regions do not have enough providers to serve all of the individuals who need support. A recent policy change made it possible for schools within Virginia's Community Colleges to contract out for services, which led to a partnership between 18 of the system's 23 schools and TimelyMD which has greatly reduced wait times and increased the diversity of providers available to students.

"Community college students need specialized services and support to be successful. Our students face too many challenges and must overcome too many obstacles on their path to a degree and social mobility," said Karen Campbell, vice president for student affairs at Tidewater Community College. "By eliminating the barriers of access, cost, and inequity that exist in the traditional healthcare system, TimelyMD empowers our students to take care of themselves."



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