



Pennsylvania  
Department of Education



# PA CARES

**Guidance from PA Colleagues to  
Advance Your Campus CARES Plans**

February 5, 2026



# Welcome & Warm-Up

Please share one-word replies  
in Chat:

*How would you describe the  
mental and emotional health of  
your students right now?*





# Agenda & Presenters

- Welcome & Warm-Up
- Remarks from Lynette H. Kuhn, Ed.D., Deputy Secretary and Commissioner for Post-secondary and Higher Education
- HESPC ACT 110 Overview – Rose Milani, Director, Garrett Lee Smith Youth Suicide Prevention, Dept. Of Human Services & Dr. Matt Wintersteen, Associate Professor, Thomas Jefferson University
- PA CARES Website Walkthrough – Lisa Balsamo, Higher Ed Associate II, PA Dept of Education



# Agenda & Presenters (cont'd)

- Campus Presentations:
  - Joel Rosencrance, Director, Geisinger College of Health Sciences
  - Jen Horowitz, Executive Director, Widener University
  - Eric Rosenthal, Associate Provost and Dean of Students, Northampton Community College
  - Alex Sipe, Assistant Director of Clinical Services, University of Pittsburgh
  - Emily Kirschner, HEART Clinician, University of Pittsburgh
- Panel Q&A
- Debrief & Next Steps

# Message from the Deputy Secretary and Commissioner for Post-Secondary and Higher Education



Lynette H. Kuhn, Ed.D.

# PA CARES (Act 110) Overview

Rose Milani, MPH, Office of Mental Health Substance Abuse Services  
Matthew Wintersteen, PhD, David Farber ASPIRE Center

Thursday, February 5, 2026

## PA CARES (Act 110) Overview Information

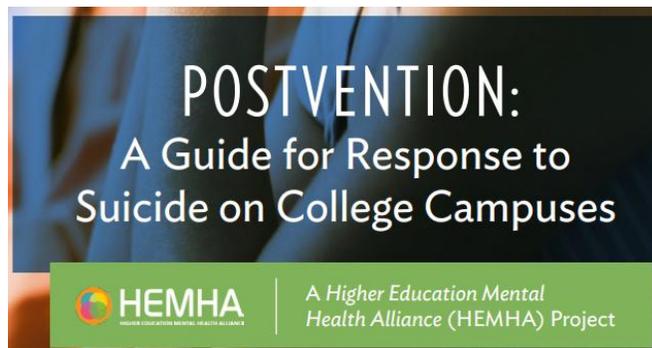
- Higher education institutions may develop and implement a plan to advise students and staff on mental health and suicide prevention programs available both on campus and off campus (Act 110 § 7103.)
- Many institutions already have policies and practices in place but may need to think through some key components
  - Crisis & Mental Health Services
  - Postvention
  - Communication
- Three overarching elements
  - Awareness: methods to ensure students and staff learn about where/how to access resource
  - Faculty & Staff Engagement: everyone on campus plays a role
  - Peer involvement: engaging students and elevating student voice as advocates

# Plan Components: Crisis and Mental Health Services

- Plan must contain:
  - Local and national resources to contact in crisis
    - Hotlines such as 988, Crisis Textline (741741), and Trevor Lifeline (866-488-7386)
    - Local crisis lines
  - Crisis Services
    - Contact for individuals with training and experience to intervene.
    - Available 24/7
  - Mental Health Services (including but not limited to)
    - Health promotion and wellness
    - Student health and counseling
    - Crisis services
    - Local mental health providers and mental health clinics

## Plan Components: Postvention

- Postvention: organized response to care for individuals and the community after death by suicide or suicide attempt.
  - Reduce risk and promote healing
  - Reduce stigma and promote help seeking
- Postvention plans to include
  - Effective communication with students, staff, and family members



## Plan Components: Communication

- Communication with students
  - **Outreach** regarding mental health services and suicide prevention
  - Crisis and mental health services and resources communicated to all incoming students
  - Crisis and mental health services information communicated **to students twice a calendar year**
- Suicide prevention plan and resources must be posted on a publicly accessible website
- Multimedia access, including:
  - mental health and suicide warning signs
  - services available to individuals at no cost
  - resources, which may include mobile applications



# Resources

- Higher Education Suicide Prevention Coalition (HESPC)
  - <https://hespc.org>
  - Monthly Web Meetings, Annual Conference, Mini-grants
- HESPC Act 110 page: <https://hespc.org/pa-act-110/>
  - Check list
  - Resources, including
    - Crisis lines
    - Higher Education Mental Health Alliance (HEMHA) postvention guide
    - Mental health and suicide prevention mobile apps
    - Jed Foundation – additional resource guides
- [PA CARES](#)
  - Act 110 information
  - PA CARES designated schools
  - Information on submitting plans



[hespc.org](https://hespc.org)



# HESPC Website: Suicide Prevention Plans Information



CONFERENCE RESOURCES CONTACT US [DONATE NOW](#)

## SUICIDE PREVENTION PLANS MUST INCLUDE

- Contact information for national, state, and local suicide prevention hotlines
- Crisis intervention services, which include providing contact information for services or individuals and ensuring trained individuals are available on campus **or** remotely 24/7
- Mental health services and access including information to access services
- Multimedia access, including mental health and suicide warning signs, services available to individuals at no cost and available mental health and suicide prevention resources, which may include mobile applications
- Student communication plans that consist of outreach plans regarding
- Post-intervention plans
- Institutions must post their suicide prevention plan and any free prevention materials on College/University website
- Institutions must provide incoming students with information regarding hotline contacts and crisis intervention services that are provided
- Must communicate with students at least twice a year by mail or email to provide hotline contact information and crisis intervention services information
- Must review and resubmit plan annually – [click here](#) for information on submitting your plan to the Pennsylvania Department of Education
- Scroll down for a printable checklist of the above inclusions



**CLICK BELOW FOR A PRINTABLE ACT 110 CHECKLIST**

[Act 110 Checklist](#)

# Important Information

## PA Act 110 Checklist

Please download and print

### § 7103(a)= Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan

- Contact information for national, state, and local suicide prevention hotlines
- Crisis intervention services
  - Contact information for services or contact information of individuals with training and experience in MH focusing on suicide prevention
  - Individuals with training/experience must be available to students on campus or remotely 24/7
- Mental health services and access including information to access services including but not limited to:
  - Health promotion and wellness
  - Student health and counseling
  - Crisis services
  - Local mental health providers and mental health clinics
- Multimedia access, including mental health and suicide warning signs, services available to individuals at no cost and available mental health and suicide prevention resources, which may include mobile applications;
- Student communication plans that consist of outreach plans regarding, at a minimum, mental health services and suicide prevention
- Post-intervention plans, including a process to create a strategic plan to communicate effectively with students, staff and parents after the loss of a student to suicide.

### § 7103(b)= Public Posting

An institution that adopts a plan under subsection a must post on their publically accessible website the following:

- The mental health and suicide prevention plan
- Applicable free prevention materials or programs

### § 7103(c)= Information for students

- The institution must provide all incoming students with information regarding hotline contacts and all crisis intervention services that are provided
- At least twice a calendar year, the institution must transmit to every student by mail or email the hotline contact information and the crisis intervention services information

### § 7103(d)= Review and Update

- Must review and update the plan at least once annually

# Upcoming Events

IN CRISIS? CALL 988 OR TEXT "HELLO" TO 741-741

HESPC CONFERENCE RESOURCES CONTACT US DONATE NOW

## 2026 HESPC CONFERENCE

May 20 & 21

### University of Pittsburgh

Pre-conference on May 19th

We are once again looking forward to the annual Higher Education Suicide Prevention Coalition Conference. Each year, we review your feedback to help create a conference that meets and advances your personal and professional development goals. We have heard from you about the unique challenges facing campuses today.

We have heard that you'd like more sessions with a technical and clinical focus. And we have heard your desire to keep the current structure of the conference, which allows you more time to address your own needs in the midst of all of the session content. We are committed to continuing our role to bring you one of the premier conferences focused on college mental health and suicide prevention. To this end, we are pleased to share with you this year's Call for Presentations. Full details can be found below. The deadline for presentation submissions is **Friday, February 13, 2026.**

Select to visit  
2026 Conference  
Page

**IN CRISIS? CALL 📞 988 OR TEXT "HELLO" TO 741-741**

Search ...



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# CALL FOR PRESENTATIONS

Click the buttons below for information and to submit a proposal to present at the 2026 HESPC Conference.



CALL FOR PRESENTATIONS  
INFORMATION



LEARNING OBJECTIVES  
GUIDELINES



CALL FOR PRESENTATIONS  
APPLICATION FORM



# PA CARES WEBSITE WALKTHROUGH

[Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plans | Department of Education | Commonwealth of Pennsylvania](#)

# PA CARES Act 110 Planning & Insight

Geisinger



# Geisinger College of Health Sciences Overview

3 Schools, 5 campuses, 1 Center for Student Well-Being

- Breakdown of students by school
  - MD – 470
  - Graduate School (MBS/GC) – 46
  - Nursing - 108
- Our institution is uniquely positioned throughout Pennsylvania, creating a wide footprint, requiring a unique approach to student support
- Medical Campuses – Scranton/Wilkes Barre, Danville, Guthrie, Lewistown
- Nursing School – Based in Lewistown, growing in popularity
- Graduate School – In person cohort in Scranton, online cohort of students as well, additional program expansions on the horizon

# PA MASLOW Mental Health & Wellness Student Stipend

“Taking care of myself will enable me to take the best care of my patients, and to do my responsibilities with excellence” – Michelle Peachey



# Act 110 – Planning to Plan

GCHS' plan started with the PA CARES Launch

- Our institution had just firmed a collaboration with the Northeast Suicide Prevention Initiative, a local organization, to bolster suicide education, prevention and responses
- Also, at a point of taking inventory of supportive resources for accreditation
- Now that we know this is a worthwhile pursuit, where do we even begin?
  - What's in place?
  - Who needs to be involved?
  - What gaps could there be, who can I check with?
  - What are the outward ripples of the plan?

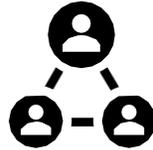
# Planning Pillars

Throughout planning and implementation, keeping the framing of the work in this light has been tremendously helpful



## Student Support

The North Star for planning – how does this information help students?



## Leveraging Resources

Talks/webinars, the PA CARES site & team, campus partners



## Collaborative Conversations

Discussions around resources, support and connection have led to new insights



## Continued Quality Improvements

Our information on supports must evolve as our knowledge grows

Thank you

Geisinger

# Widener University

Jennifer L Horowitz, PhD

Executive Director, Counseling & Psychological Services



# PA CARES Designation

*All things in context, right?*

- New leadership, new vision
  - Institutionally
  - departmentally
- Improved campus partnerships
  - Enhanced cross collaborations
  - New synergies
- New community partnerships
  - JED Campus
  - Crisis resources, IOP and other mental health organizations



## ***Take aways***

- Time investment needed
- Turn to campus mental health advocates and partners
- Review what you already have
- Consider who else might be beneficial to advance this

## ***Bottom line-***

You know this information and you don't need to do this alone





## **Northampton Community College mental wellness resources**

Eric Rosenthal, Ph.D., Associate Provost and Dean of Students

# Counseling Services

- 6 full-time and 3 part-time master's-level counselors on 2 campuses
- Full-time counselors are tenure-track faculty
  - Integrated with faculty and staff
- Diverse expertise
- Bilingual Spanish
- Personal counseling (6-8 sessions per semester)
- Crisis intervention during business hours
  - After hours – Public Safety
  - Residence halls
- Outreach, prevention & consultation

# THRIVE

- Interdisciplinary mental wellness alliance
- Faculty, staff and students
- Origin – suicide prevention
- Four pillars:
  - Suicide prevention
  - Reducing stigma
  - Increasing help-seeking
  - Promoting mental wellness
- Primarily focused on campus outreach programming
- <https://thrive59.wixsite.com/my-site>

# QPR trainings

- Suicide prevention “gatekeeper” trainings for laypersons
- QPR = Question, Persuade, Refer
- Train-the trainer approach
  - 3 trainers
- Since 2021, trained 338 students, faculty and staff

# Mental health screenings

- Free, anonymous mental health screenings via Counseling Services website and learning management system (LMS)
- Physical kiosks since fall 2023
- Refers students to on campus and external resources
  - Including services with immediate crisis response
- Over 5,000 screenings taken since January 2019
- Results have informed programming efforts

# Zen Zones

- Low-sensory space on each of NCC's three campuses
- Allows students to reduce stress and practice mindfulness in a soothing, peaceful setting
  - Silent breathing exercise on flat screen
  - Mindfulness & calming materials
- Seating to accommodate neurodivergent students
- Relative privacy
- Funded by private donor

# Wellness Wagons

- Portable storage cart with mental wellness materials
  - Inspirational stickers, stress balls, adult coloring pages, breathing Buddha
- Go where the students are (“in their flow”)
  - High engagement
  - Pop-up programs
- Bethlehem & Pocono campuses
- Funded by College Life Committee, mini-grants and donor

# Contact information

Eric Rosenthal, Ph.D.

Associate Provost and Dean of Students

[erosenthal@northampton.edu](mailto:erosenthal@northampton.edu)

2026



HIGHER EDUCATION ASSESSMENT &  
RESPONSE TEAM



Ashlee Wolfgang, PsyD (she/her) – Interim Executive Director,  
Associate Director of Clinical Services

G. Alexander Sipe, LCSW (he/him) – Assistant Director of  
Clinical Services

Emily Kirschner, LPC (she/her) – HEART Clinician

Taro Sekikawa, MSW, PsyD – HEART Clinician

Not Pictured: MSW Program HEART Interns – Giavonna Harris  
and Christopher Alexander



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## What is a Co-Response Model?

- Trained police officer & mental health professional respond to incidents involving behavioral health crises or welfare concerns
- Aims to improve the experiences and outcomes of persons in crisis by providing:
  - effective crisis de-escalation
  - diversion from criminal justice system
  - connection to behavioral health services
- Reminder: NOT co-response if clinicians respond alone





# Advantages of a Co-Response Program:

- Decreased Hospitalizations & ER Visits
- Enhanced Support for BIPOC Students in Crisis
- Reduced Stigma for Marginalized Students
- Effective De-escalation of Situations
- Lower Repeat Encounters with Law Enforcement
- Minimized Use of Force
- Less Traumatic Encounters with Law Enforcement
- Improved Collaboration with Campus and Community Resources
- Accessible Services for Those Hesitant to Seek Help



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## Advantages of the Model:



Decreased hospitalizations & ER Visits



Accessible services for those hesitant to seek help



Less frequent and/or traumatic encounters with law enforcement



Minimal use of Police presence/force



Reduced stigma and advanced support for marginalized students



Improved collaboration with campus departments and community resources



Clinical assessment vs required hospital evaluation



Transportations outside of a police car or ambulance



# Current Structure at Pitt:

HEART Clinicians are housed in the UCC offices and assist with other higher-acuity services and transports between crisis calls\*

HEART responds to any emergency call with a mental health/welfare component for a student which come through Pitt Police Dispatch within their jurisdiction.

HEART deploys at the same time as Pitt Police, collaborating on the call and providing lead intervention

HEART responds to residence halls, university affiliated and non-affiliated campus buildings, as well as off-campus

Welfare checks within university housing includes collaboration with residence life staff on duty



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## NEXT STEP:

- Step-up or Step-down short-term program between levels of care
- Up to 5 hours a week: Individual session, skills training, groups, workshops
- Case Management
- Higher acuity students than standard UCC Model

The logo for NextSTEP, with "Next" in blue, a stylized orange staircase icon, and "STEP" in blue. Below the main text is the subtitle "Short-Term Treatment & Evaluation Program" in a smaller blue font.

**NextSTEP**  
Short-Term Treatment & Evaluation Program



# Questions to Guide Evaluation Planning: Stakeholders

Who are the stakeholders involved in the program?

What program outcomes are most important to them?

What kinds of data are they expecting to demonstrate progress?

How frequently do they need to see updates/progress reports?



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What data sources will be used for evaluation?



What existing data collection processes can be used?



Where do new processes need to be developed?



Who is responsible for data collection, storage, analysis, and reporting?



Which specific data point(s) will be used as indicators of each outcome?



# PITT: Resources

- Crisis Co-Responder Program Development Guide
- The Chronicle of Higher Education Case Study
  - *Police-Clinician Co-Response Calms Mental Health Crises*



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# Crisis Co-Responder Program Development Guide



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# Case Study: The Chronicle of Higher Education *Police-Clinician Co-Response Calms Mental Health Crises*



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# PANEL Q & A

Please put your questions in the chat for one or all of our presenters

