

Statewide Collegiate Recovery Initiative: An Overview of Environmental Scan Findings

Lessons Learned from the State of Washington

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As part of the 2020-2021 State of Washington Collegiate Recovery Support Initiative, Washington State University (WSU) partnered with C4 Innovations (C4) to conduct an evaluation from February to June 2021. Part of this evaluation project was an environmental scan intended to identify and evaluate the formal and informal collegiate recovery supports¹ available to college students in recovery across the state. **Why are collegiate recovery supports important?** Effective collegiate recovery services provide support relating to social connectivity, education support and fostering of coping mechanisms and skills, and opportunities for students to find a balance between their recovery status and potential conflicting values with other college students (Ashford et al., 2018). In other words, they help students in recovery have success in college.

The team conducted a comprehensive mixed-methods environmental scan that drew from multiple sources including current literature, a brief survey, policy review, and state- and community-stakeholder interviews. This brief provides an overview of the findings from 2021 activities. For in-depth findings and recommendations, refer to the [full report](#).

Literature Review Methodology and Findings

C4 conducted a comprehensive literature review to identify the latest research in collegiate recovery, best practices in supporting youth and young adults in recovery, Native American populations, and other priority populations. For more information, refer to the team's literature review issue brief titled, [Statewide Collegiate Recovery Initiative: What Does the Literature Tell Us? Lessons Learned from the State of Washington](#).

Policy Review Methodology and Findings

A review was conducted of federal, state, and institution-level policies that impact students in recovery enrolled in institutions of higher education (IHEs) throughout the State of Washington. The complexity and interaction between federal, state, and local policies, various interpretations of decades-old legislation, and differences in structure, size, and location of IHEs are key to understanding recovery supports for students on campus. Recovery supports are driven by various policies and protocols that support a continuum of care and programs for students throughout their time on campus and can range from prevention and early intervention to behavioral health care services as well as reentry, which address a variety of contexts including disciplinary sanctions, a need for counseling or treatment, and a return to campus after a medical leave of absence to address substance use disorder.

1 Currently, the field lacks an agreed upon definition of collegiate recovery and what supports comprise collegiate recovery in institutions of higher education across the United States. For the purpose of this environmental scan, our team developed the following definition of collegiate recovery/ collegiate recovery supports to ensure a shared understanding during data collection, analysis and reporting: Services and/or programs that provide support to students in higher education who are in or seeking recovery from substance use disorders and/or co-occurring disorders.

Key Findings:

A lack of shared definitions and understanding of collegiate recovery impacts research and efficacious implementation

Comprehensive recovery supports are needed

A recovery-oriented system of care is crucial, but pathways and access are not well-established

Community recovery supports are inconsistently available and accessed

Barriers for students in recovery are significant

There is no consensus on how to fund and sustain collegiate recovery services

Collegiate recovery policies and implementation processes need to be reviewed, updated, and codified

Policy review findings revealed that there is a lack of federal and state policies that support the continuum of services for IHE students in recovery from substance use disorder. At the federal level, commonly referenced policies include the Drug Free Schools and Campuses Act (DFSCA; 1990), the Sober Truth on Preventing Underage Drinking (STOP Act; 2006), and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)’s *CollegeAIM* framework (2019). In the state of Washington, the Involuntary Treatment Act for Substance Use Disorders (Ricky’s Law; 2016) and the Blake Bill (2021) have profoundly impacted SUD services and supports. Policies and funding sources are largely prevention-focused and only minimally support universities in the development of evidence-based recovery supports on campuses. Expanded federal and state policies to more robustly include collegiate recovery supports are critically needed.

OTHER REVIEWED POLICIES THAT IMPACT COLLEGIATE RECOVERY EFFORTS IN THE STATE OF WASHINGTON INCLUDE...

CARA Act	Higher Education Amendments, 1998
Consolidated Appropriations Act	Ricky’s Law
Deficit Reduction Act	Mental Health Parity Act
Drug Addiction Treatment Act of 2000	Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act
Drug Free Schools and Communities Act	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
The Fair Housing Act	The Cleary Act
FERPA	SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act
Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act	The Blake Bill 2021
Higher Education Act	The STOP Act
Higher Education Amendments	Title IX of the Education Amendments Act

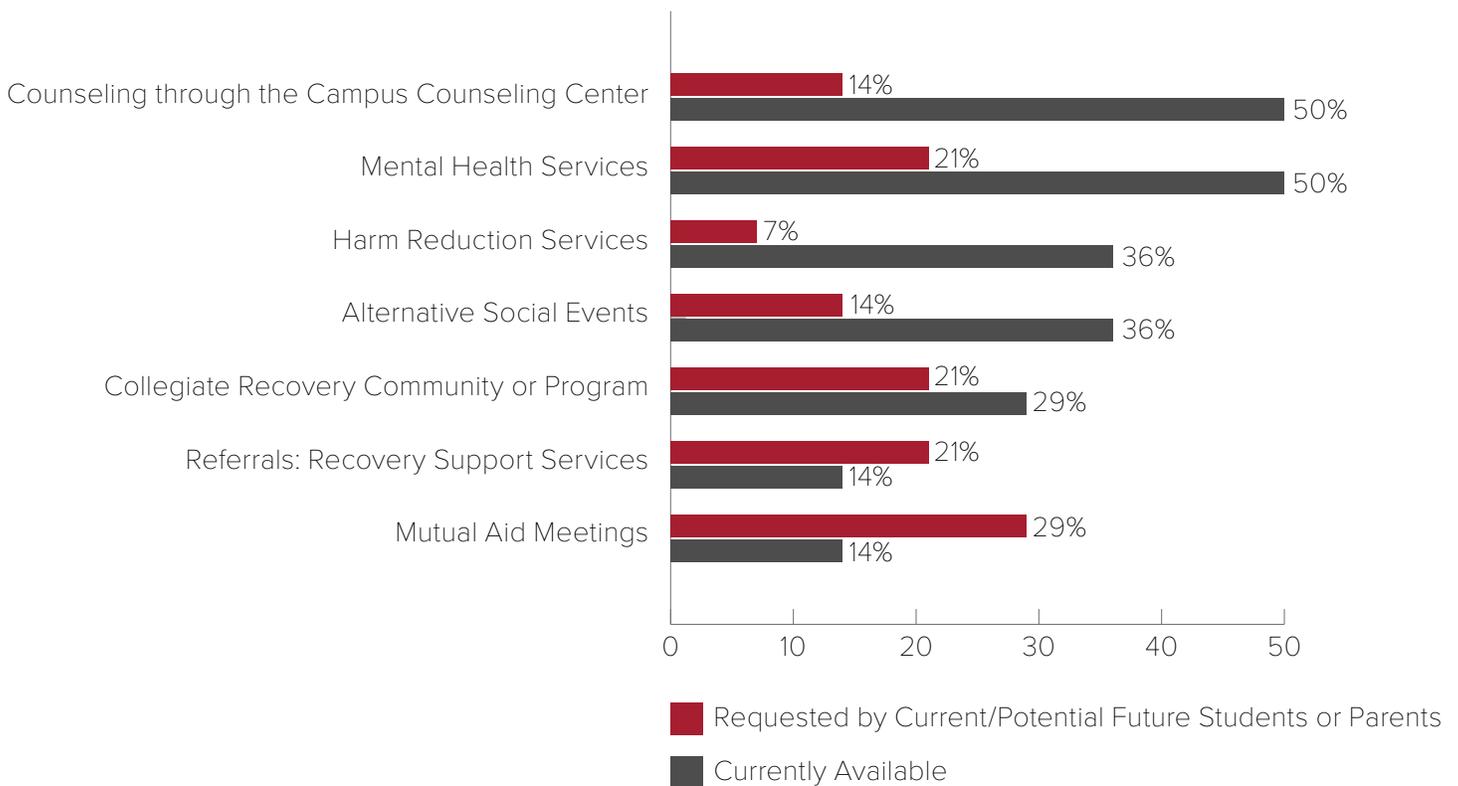
Further information on policies specific to collegiate recovery can be found in the team’s issue brief titled *Statewide Collegiate Recovery Initiative: Life Experience Meets Policy Lessons Learned from the State of Washington*. A comprehensive policy discussion is provided in the [full report](#).

Quantitative Data Collection and Findings

The team developed a survey to identify the availability of collegiate recovery supports and services available and requested by students and their families across the State of Washington. The brief, anonymous survey was administered to staff at admissions, counseling and/or health promotion departments at every IHE in the State of Washington to collect data about the types of programs, services, and supports available within each institution, regardless of whether it has an established collegiate recovery program or services. The survey was sent to over 60 staff and faculty at 36 colleges and universities, with responses from 14 individuals representing 7 colleges or universities for a response rate of 19.4%.

Respondents described the types of on-campus recovery programs or supports currently available to students, although these did not always match the needs reported by students or parents. See Figure 1 on this page for the top responses to this question.

Figure 1: Services or supports respondents identified as being currently available at their institution compared to services or supports requested by current or potential future students or their parents (n = 14)



While many of the services or supports respondents noted their institution had available to students overlapped with requested services and supports, some resources were commonly requested but not available at their institution. For example, 29% of survey respondents indicated that they had received inquiries about recovery housing, while no survey respondents indicated that recovery housing was a service available at their institution. Current and potential future students and parents also inquired about peer recovery specialists (21%), substance-free housing (21%), and recovery coaches (7%), but those services were not available at any of the surveyed institutions.

When asked about the biggest barriers to implementing additional recovery support services on their campus, the majority of respondents stated funding for staff, space and/or programming as a major barrier (42.9%). Respondents also cited not being able to identify, recruit, and retain students in recovery (29%), misunderstanding what recovery support services are and why they are needed on campus (14%), and stigma related to addiction recovery (14%).

Key Informant Stakeholder Interviews

Semi-structured key informant interviews were conducted with seed grantee staff, state-level policy makers, community stakeholders, and other subject matter experts in order to capture data at the policy and system, IHE, and program levels. Several themes emerged from the qualitative data related to defining collegiate recovery; referral pathways to collegiate recovery; IHE services and supports; community supports; barriers for students seeking recovery; funding challenges, and policy issues.

A shared definition of collegiate recovery is elusive. Few interview participants could clearly articulate a definition for collegiate recovery and others noted that it constantly shifts. One policy maker stated: *“Most college administrations haven’t heard of collegiate recovery.”* Although collegiate recovery supports should be tailored to the needs of students within each community, having a shared definition of collegiate recovery supports reduces ambiguity related to policies and funding and provides a standard for what services and supports should be available as part of collegiate recovery, thus creating clarity for IHEs, service providers, peer supporters, families, and students.

Comprehensive supports needed for students, range from counseling services and support/mutual aid meetings to dedicated sober space to academic support. Components of collegiate recovery identified as important to offer included adequate counseling services and dedicated recovery/sober safe spaces, activities, and housing. Respondents also noted the importance of academic support including disability services, advising, and tutoring; support from peers/individuals in recovery (both students and staff or faculty); accommodations for students seeking treatment, and access to student health services.

A recovery-oriented system of care (ROSC) is crucial, but pathways are not well-established or easily navigated. Services were described as fragmented and primarily based on discreet programs that varied across IHEs, with inconsistently accessible community supports and unclear referral processes. Respondents also described what was needed: clear pathways and referrals from high schools to IHEs, referrals to appropriate services and supports *within* the IHE, smooth transitions from IHEs to community-based services (either for additional supports or more restrictive care) with an equally smooth return.



Community supports are critical but inconsistently available or accessed. Supports vary significantly by community with some areas having robust external community supports and others requiring up to a two-hour drive depending on what is available in the area and the rural location of the school. Further, students often have limited transportation options, creating another significant challenge. Along their learning and recovery path, students need local recovery support services that are easily accessible, affordable, and relevant to their needs.

Barriers to collegiate recovery supports for students are significant. Students face several challenges when seeking or maintaining recovery including stigma, finances, academic workloads, employment, and awareness of relevant recovery supports available on campus. Some students may also fear disciplinary consequences for reaching out for support for substance use.

There is no consensus on how to fund collegiate recovery services. There appears to be no single, clear path for funding collegiate recovery services and supports. Respondents had mixed views about where funding for collegiate recovery *should* come from, with some interviewees stating that it should be built into the budgets at IHEs, not having to rely upon external funding. Other respondents suggested funding should come from the federal or state government, as they are more sustainable than endowments.

Policies at the state and federal levels need to be reviewed and updated; processes at the IHE level need to be codified into policies. Policies related more to police/safety issues, withdrawal and reentry, student codes of conduct, and alcohol use. Supports for students in or seeking recovery were described more as procedures or processes and appeared inconsistently utilized, with a dearth of codified policies related to recovery. Further, the processes appeared to be often driven by individual staff/faculty who were champions for collegiate recovery, making sustainability of this work a significant challenge. Respondents stressed the need for top-down policies, as schools will otherwise find excuses not to provide the needed supports.



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Recommendations for provision of collegiate recovery services and supports

- 1 Listen to students.** Findings emphasized the importance of listening to students and their families regarding the needs of those in recovery, rather than assuming the types of programs and supports needed when implementing collegiate recovery supports.
- 2 Create shared and widely understood definitions.** The creation of shared definitions for terms used in the field of collegiate recovery offers clarity in legislation and funding and informs IHEs developing collegiate recovery supports within a campus-based system of care.
- 3 Strengthen Recovery Oriented Systems of Care, referrals, and lines of communication.** A clearly delineated system of care, referral process, and strategies for communication across all stakeholders greatly benefits students in collegiate recovery. Transparency related to the types of supports available and referral pathways; clear outreach, marketing, and recruitment strategies from IHEs; and communication strategies between community-based, IHEs, and high schools are all critical.
- 4 Develop policies that support collegiate recovery; update current policies.** IHEs need to codify campus processes for creation of collegiate recovery supports and referrals to those supports. Further, state and federal policies that address collegiate recovery need to be reviewed and updated to include recovery supports within a continuum of care, increasing the likelihood of systemwide change and sustainability.
- 5 Strengthen funding for collegiate supports.** Engage in collaborative planning for consistent funding of collegiate recovery services and supports, with commitment and accountability at multiple levels (federal, state, IHE). A combination of multiple sources of funding and accountability will be required.



Evolving Contexts in Collegiate Recovery Support Development

The State of Washington is in the beginning stages of developing a sustainable state-wide system of care of collegiate recovery support services for students that are linked to the broader continuum of care services provided on college campuses. There is still much work to be done. This evaluation project gives impetus and challenge to policy makers, state agencies, IHEs, community partners, and others to build “welcoming places” (Snethen et al., 2021) for students in recovery through the creation of inclusive environments and relationships on campus and in the surrounding community that offer an accessible needs-based continuum of recovery supports and services for students.

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