

# Mental Health Care for Underrepresented Undergraduate Students at UC San Diego: Exploring Stigma and Barriers to Access (2021)

By: Ashkan Hassani, Blasco Sanchez-Neira, Jasmine Almeria, Natalie Romero, Bonnie Kaiser, MPH, PhD, Nancy Binkin MD, MPH  
B.S. Public Health Honors Practicum | University of California, San Diego Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Longevity Science

By increasing funding to hire more diverse staff and strengthen student peer support, Student Health and Wellness can increase utilization of services and reduce clinician burnout.

Stigma is a product of intersectional identities

COVID-19 =  
↑ Normalization  
↓ Ability to seek care

Improving student peer education can increase knowledge of services



scan me!



Diverse staff

Peer support

Marketing

## INTRODUCTION

- Underrepresented students at UC San Diego access Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at lower rates than their Caucasian counterparts (25% vs. 30%)
- Obstacles to underutilization of services among race/ethnic minority populations not clear

## METHODS

- Semi-structured virtual interviews for clinicians (n=4) and students (n=21) over Zoom
- Participants were recruited with voluntary response sampling
- Common themes identified and constructed into codes, which were aggregated into key findings

## RESULTS

- Recruitment and retention of mental health staff from minority populations is a challenge
- Time, insurance, convenience, limited knowledge of resources, and COVID-19 hinder students from seeking general and mental health care.



- Mental health stigma is influenced by students' close relationships and the intersecting of student identities
- The timing and content of the university's mental health care outreach is reactive rather than preventative
- COVID-19 has increased normalization of mental health but reduced access

## CONCLUSIONS & POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Combating stigma and increasing access for underrepresented students needs a multifaceted and intersectional approach
- Requires combination of culturally competent marketing, peer education programs, and more conveniently provided services
- Peer consultations, outsourcing outreach initiatives, and cluster-hirings of representative clinicians can increase access and decrease clinician burnout

UC San Diego

Herbert Wertheim  
School of Public Health and  
Human Longevity Science