



A TIMELYCARE INSIGHT REPORT FOR CAMPUS LEADERS

BEYOND CAPACITY

*How Campus Counseling Centers
Are Redefining Service Delivery*


timelycare™



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Counseling and psychological services (CAPS) leaders are sending a clear message: student mental health needs are rising, staffing and budgets are not keeping pace, and the traditional 9-to-5, office-based counseling model can no longer carry the full weight of demand.

A national survey of **130+ counseling leaders** found:

- **Demand is climbing faster than capacity**
- **Staff are deeply committed but stretched thin, with real burnout and attrition**
- **Access is fragile, especially during nights, weekends, and breaks**
- **Equity is a priority, but many leaders worry that too many students are still falling through the cracks**
- **Virtual care is now essential infrastructure, and leaders want partners who can prove impact, not just add appointments**

This report highlights what counseling leaders told us and how campuses are evolving toward models of care that are more responsive, more equitable, and more sustainable for both students and staff.



Campus counseling centers are no longer dealing with temporary spikes in demand; they're managing a new baseline that is higher, more complex, and more persistent.

The data shows a sector that is beyond capacity, but also one that is **actively redesigning how care is delivered.**



Seli Fakorzi

Director of Mental Health Services
and Client Liaison
TimelyCare



CARES

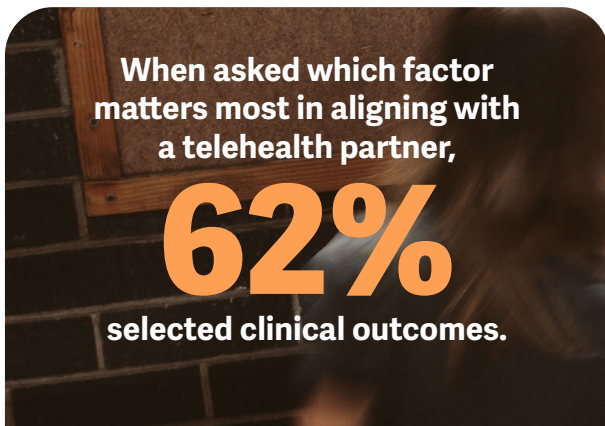
CLINICAL OUTCOMES: *Show Me It's Working*

Campus leaders are increasingly expected to answer a simple but high-stakes question: **Is this support actually helping students get better and stay enrolled?** Counting visits alone is no longer enough.

They want to know:

Is this helping students get better and stay enrolled?

From **our** survey, counseling leaders identified **clinical outcomes and data** as crucial when evaluating virtual care partners:



Leaders say they want clear visibility into:

- **Symptom reduction and treatment progress**
- **Engagement and completion of care**
- **Presenting concerns and acuity trends**
- **Student-reported experience and satisfaction**
- **How mental health support connects to academic functioning and persistence**

Open-ended responses reveal a clear shift: directors are being asked by vice presidents, deans, and boards to demonstrate **impact, not just activity.**

Asking only, 'How many students did we see?' doesn't give financial decision-makers the full picture, and students deserve more than an appointment utilization count.

*Beyond tracking utilization rates, **we employ measurement-based care, including validated tools like the PHQ-9 and GAD-7,** to track symptom change and progress toward student-identified goals over time. This enables us to translate treatment progress into clear, campus-ready insights for our partners, so*

they can demonstrate not just that students are reaching out, but that support is making a measurable difference in promoting student well-being, helping students stay engaged, and keeping students academically on track to graduate.



Dr. Jerry Walker

Executive Director of
Mental Health Services
TimelyCare



C A R E S

ACCESS:

We're Beyond Capacity, but Students Still Need Us

RISING DEMAND, FINITE CAPACITY

Counseling leaders overwhelmingly report that student mental health needs continue to rise:

- **86%** say needs are increasing (more than half say "significantly increasing")
- None report a decrease

According to the 2024-2025 Healthy Minds Study [data report](#), 38% of current college students said they received counseling or therapy for their mental or emotional health from a health professional. Reinforcing this trend, a [2025 TimelyCare study](#) found 65% of incoming first-year students have prior therapy experience, and 83% anticipated the availability of campus mental health support services.

When asked to identify their **Top Challenges**, leaders most often named:

Increasing Student Demand

Budget Constraints

Staffing Shortages

Diversity of Providers

Burnout Among Staff

After-hours Coverage

Wait Times



*This isn't just a 'busy season' that will pass. It's a structural gap between need and capacity—one that is **prompting** more colleges and universities to adopt hybrid models of care to expand access without overextending counseling center staff.*



Matt Geracie

Director of Scheduled Counseling
TimelyCare



According to the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors 2023-2024 survey,



52.9%
of four-year institutions



35.3%
of community colleges

reported **contracting with a teletherapy vendor for support services.**

TimelyCare’s virtual mental health services significantly enhance access to care by removing traditional barriers; students can connect with a mental health professional within minutes through 24/7 on-demand support, and scheduled counseling appointments are typically available within days.

This consistent, around-the-clock availability is especially valuable during evenings and weekends, when campus resources are often limited, ensuring students receive timely intervention

before concerns escalate. For clinicians, virtual care helps alleviate wait-list pressures and strengthens continuity of care by meeting student demand without overextending staff, while enabling students to be matched with providers aligned to their individual needs.

Joseph A. Puccio, MD, FAAP

Executive and Medical Director,
USF Student Health and Wellness Center,
Associate Vice President, USF Health and Wellness



WAIT TIMES & AFTER-HOURS COVERAGE

Access is about more than whether services exist; it’s about when and how students can actually use them.

Wait Times for an Initial Appointment

- **40%** of centers report average wait times of **less than 3 days**
- **33%** report **3–7 days**
- **22%** report **1-2 weeks**
- **5%** **3+ weeks**




On paper, many centers appear to be managing wait times reasonably well. In practice, leaders describe a precarious balance: a single clinician being out sick, a campus-wide incident, or a spike in crises can quickly strain the system and push students further back in line.

After-hours and Weekends

Approaches to nights and weekends vary widely:

- **37%** partner with a **virtual care provider**
- **28%** rely on **on-call staff for emergencies only**
- **27%** use a **mix of hotlines, campus safety, and other solutions**
- **8%** partner with a **local care provider**

Leaders consistently see virtual care partnerships as a way to **stabilize after-hours access** so students always have a clear, high-quality option—**no matter the time of day or where they are**. According to TimelyCare utilization data, **more than half of virtual clinician visits in 2025 occurred outside of traditional business hours**. That means students are using care when campus offices are typically closed.



Mental health services that are available 24/7 are extremely helpful.

There's always somebody who's struggling. I know this for sure because I've been there at 3 a.m., kind of wanting to give up on life and finals and everything. Having that option for [after-hours] support is extremely helpful.



Myra Lynn

Student, Indiana University Indianapolis

◀ A college student who has used TimelyCare emotional support services explains the importance of having access during nights and weekends.





C A R E S

RETURN ON INVESTMENT:

We Need to Steward Resources Wisely

Budget constraints ranked among the top challenges for more than half of the respondents. Counseling leaders are being asked to **stretch every dollar** and to **clearly articulate why investments in mental health matter**.

From the survey and open-ended responses, ROI shows up in several ways:

RETENTION & PERSISTENCE

Leaders increasingly link mental health support to keeping students enrolled and progressing toward graduation, even if they aren't yet formally measuring it.

CAPACITY PER DOLLAR

Virtual care and hybrid models are seen as ways to extend capacity without requiring a one-to-one increase in on-campus staff.

EFFICIENT USE OF CLINICIAN TIME

Triage, stepped care, groups, and telehealth partnerships help ensure campus clinicians are practicing at the top of their license and not spending excessive time on after-hours coverage or low-acuity cases.

DATA FOR CABINET CONVERSATIONS

Directors want utilization and outcomes data from partners that they can bring directly into conversations with deans, vice presidents, chancellors, CFOs, and boards to demonstrate the value of mental health investments.



*Beyond simple utilization and satisfaction information, I think it would be helpful to have an understanding of **the impact of mental health treatment on academic persistence**. So, for example, how many students, if not for the treatment that they received, would have left the institution? I feel that this type of information helps us to begin to create a conversation about the ways in which the mental health treatment saves/makes the university money.*

Shenay Bridges-Carter, PhD

Licensed Clinical Psychologist and Executive Director,
University of Illinois Chicago Counseling Center



C A R E S

EQUITY:

Who's Actually Getting Help?

Access is only **truly access** if students feel a genuine connection and rapport with the providers they meet, feel **understood in their lived experience**, and can engage with care in ways that work for their lives.

Our survey surfaced significant equity concerns:

- When asked to identify top challenges their counseling centers were facing, **diversity of providers** was the fourth most commonly cited response (behind student demand, budget constraints, and staffing shortages)
- **63%** feel their office is successfully addressing the needs of diverse student populations, while **37%** say they are not



In open-ended responses, leaders described a range of efforts to widen and deepen equity in care, including:

- > **Recruiting more diverse and bilingual staff**
- > **Embedding counselors in cultural and identity-based centers**
- > **Partnering with community and specialty providers** (e.g., focusing on students of color, LGBTQ+ students, international students, and first-generation students)
- > **Designing groups and workshops tailored to specific communities**
- > **Leveraging virtual networks to expand identity and language options for students seeking a particular kind of provider**



Even with this progress, many leaders acknowledge that students from historically marginalized communities still face higher barriers to care, including:

- **Stigma**
- **Prior negative experiences with healthcare**
- **Lack of trust in institutions**
- **Limited options for culturally responsive providers**

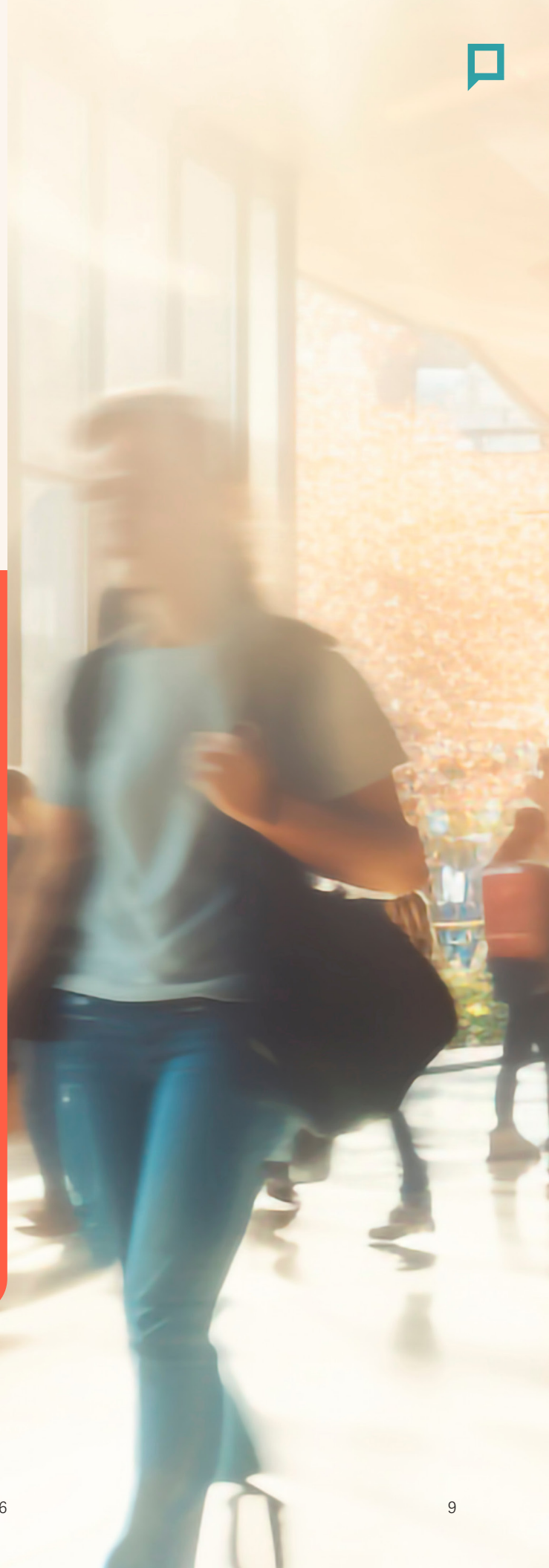
Equity is not just about offering services. It is about who actually feels able to use them.

Our research shows that when students can access providers who reflect their identities, speak their language, and understand their lived experiences, engagement increases, especially for students from historically marginalized communities. That is why we focus on building diverse provider networks, enabling identity and language-based matching when students need it, and using data to understand who we are reaching and where gaps remain.



Nassim Bickham

Vice President of Care Transformation
TimelyCare





C A R E S

SERVICE QUALITY: *Students Deserve Compassionate, Personalized Care*

Service quality is the difference between access and meaningful support.
High-quality care:

- Drives **better outcomes**
- Improves the way students experience **access**
- Supports **equity** by building trust and safety
- Ultimately strengthens **ROI** by helping students stay and succeed

PERCEPTIONS OF VIRTUAL CARE QUALITY

When asked about their confidence in virtual care's ability to deliver quality, personalized experiences:

57% of leaders reported feeling very or somewhat confident

26% are unsure

17% are not confident





Comments suggest that confidence is highest where:

- Virtual providers are well integrated with campus counseling centers
- Communication and handoffs between on-campus and virtual teams are clear
- Students receive consistent, high-quality experiences regardless of modality
- Partners share transparent outcomes and student experience data

Where confidence is lower, leaders often raise concerns about continuity of care, privacy, alignment with campus culture, and the need for stronger two-way communication.

QUALITY FOR STUDENTS AND CLINICIANS

Counseling leaders also drew a direct line between **service quality** and **staff experience**:

- Nearly **4 in 10** report losing counselors due to burnout in the last 1–2 years
- Only about **1 in 4** have been able to **reduce caseloads** in response

Quality suffers when clinicians are overwhelmed. To protect both students and staff, leaders describe moving toward:

- **Stepped-care models** that align service intensity with student need
- Increased use of **groups, workshops, and single-session formats**
- **Telehealth partnerships** that integrate with campus counseling centers to provide coordinated care across acuity levels, while expanding coverage and supporting clinician sustainability
- More intentional **supervision, consultation, and professional development**



Quality in virtual care is about consistency, accountability, and trust.

When virtual care is well-integrated with campus counseling teams, students experience a single, connected system of support.

That's why at TimelyCare we invest in rigorous clinical protocols, ongoing supervision, clear escalation pathways, and transparent measurement of both the student experience and the providers quality and effectiveness, so virtual care complements, rather than fragments, campus-based care and remains sustainable for clinicians.



Bob Booth M.D.

Chief Care Officer
TimelyCare



THE NEW PLAYBOOK

Across the survey, a consistent “new playbook” emerges, one that reflects where campus mental health is heading.



Clinical Outcomes

Use validated tools and shared data to track progress and tell a clear, credible story of impact for students and senior leaders.



Access

Combine in-person, virtual, and stepped-care models to meet students where they are whether on campus, online, after hours, and across time zones.



Return on Investment

Leverage hybrid models and robust data to maximize impact per dollar spent and build the case for sustainable funding and staffing.



Equity

Design services that intentionally reach and serve diverse student populations with culturally responsive, identity-affirming care.



Service Quality

Invest in strong clinical practice, thoughtful integration between partners, and staff well-being so every student encounter is safe, personalized, and effective.

Closing

Counseling centers are beyond capacity, but they are not out of ideas, courage, or commitment. They are reimagining how care is delivered, building hybrid ecosystems, and insisting on solutions that are effective, equitable, and sustainable.

TimelyCare is honored to listen to these leaders, learn from them, and partner with them. Together, we can build campus mental health systems that truly care for students, for clinicians, and for the future of higher education.

METHODOLOGY

TimelyCare conducted an online survey of college and university counseling and psychological services (CAPS) leaders across the United States.

- **Participants:** 130+ respondents, primarily directors and senior leaders.
- **Fielding period:** [11/24/2025 - 12/18/2025].
- **Question types:** Multiple-choice, multi-select, rating scales, and open-ended responses.
- **Focus areas:**

- Trends in demand and caseload
- Staffing, burnout, and retention
- Access and after-hours coverage
- Virtual care and telehealth partnerships
- Equity and provider diversity
- Data, outcomes, and strategic priorities



How TimelyCare Partners with Campuses

TimelyCare is designed to be a capacity multiplier and equity amplifier for campus counseling centers, not a replacement.

TimelyCare offers:

CLINICAL OUTCOMES:

Measurement of symptom change, engagement, and student experience, with reporting that campuses can use in cabinet-level conversations.

ACCESS:

24/7 on-demand and scheduled care across time zones, plus a range of modalities (video, phone, self-guided, and more) to meet diverse student needs.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT:

Scalable support that expands capacity without requiring a direct 1:1 increase in on-campus staffing, paired with data to connect mental health investments to student success.

EQUITY:

A diverse provider network and identity-affirming options, with attention to language, culture, and the unique needs of historically marginalized students.

SERVICE QUALITY:

Rigorous clinical standards, robust supervision, clear escalation pathways, and continuous quality improvement across all services.