

CARE + CONNECT

Delivering Mental Health Supports in Higher Education Institutions across Europe



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Project No: 2025-1-PL01-KA220-HED-000357751

CARE + CONNECT: A Comprehensive Blueprint for Mental Health in European Higher Education

Beyond the Tipping Point: Addressing a Systemic Crisis The modern academic landscape places unprecedented pressure on young adults, creating challenges that are universal across Europe. Institutional data and clinical meta-analyses confirm a rising mental health crisis across European Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

The college years represent a highly sensitive transition phase from late adolescence to adulthood, during which data shows a sharp rise in mental health issues. Crucially, early intervention is vital, as approximately 75% of all lifetime mental disorders manifest before the age of 24.

The scale of this challenge is reflected in the realities students face across different European nations:

- Spain: Recent surveys reveal that approximately 50% of university students exhibit symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- Romania: Student stress and anxiety levels escalated from 72% to 78.4% between 2022 and 2024, alongside recorded increases in suicidal thoughts.
- Poland: Data from the EUROSTUDENT report highlights that 40% of students experience emotional distress.
- United Kingdom: The proportion of undergraduate students reporting mental health difficulties rose from 6% to 16% between the 2016/17 and 2022/23 academic years.

Overcoming Institutional Deficits

Despite these alarming figures, institutional support remains drastically misaligned with student needs. A 2023 European Commission report on student well-being highlighted that only 40% of European HEIs offer dedicated mental health services. Furthermore, existing university systems are heavily reactive rather than preventive, leaving services underfunded, understaffed, and plagued by long waiting lists that frequently exceed six weeks in countries like Ireland.



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The CARE + CONNECT Solution: Data-Driven and Preventive

To shift cultures and fill these institutional gaps, the CARE + CONNECT project relies on scientifically validated, preventive interventions rather than temporary fixes.

- Internet-based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (iCBT): Meta-analyses show that digital platforms significantly reduce student anxiety and depression. Students using iCBT report a 42% reduction in anxiety symptoms and a 37% improvement in emotional resilience compared to non-intervention control groups.
- Structured Peer Support: A technological approach must be paired with genuine human networks. Research indicates that students engaging in structured peer mentoring experience a 30% improvement in mental health resilience and a 25% reduction in feelings of isolation.

Building Capacity: Empowering the Academic Community

A truly resilient university ecosystem requires the active, informed participation of its staff. Relying solely on reactive crisis intervention leaves both students and educators vulnerable. CARE + CONNECT focuses on three core pillars of institutional readiness:

- Elevated Teacher Preparedness: Through the CONNECT Professional-to-Professional (P2P) network, university educators, administrative staff, and advisors undergo comprehensive capacity building. This framework builds emotional intelligence and provides staff with cross-disciplinary strategies to confidently navigate student mental health difficulties.
- Systematized Escalation Protocols: Training gives HEI professionals a clear roadmap to recognize early warning signs of emotional distress. Rather than feeling overwhelmed, staff are equipped with secure referral frameworks to seamlessly hand off highly vulnerable individuals to specialized professional care or public health systems.
- Cultural Shift in Institutional Policies: The project transitions higher education wellness systems from purely reactive crisis management models to structured, proactive collaborative networks. The integration of deliverables into regular university work—such as pairing campus café activities with World Mental Health Day—solidifies mental well-being as a permanent, systemic component of long-term HEI policies.

By bridging the gap between digital accessibility, empathetic peer communities, and prepared faculty, CARE + CONNECT aims to transform university infrastructures into multi-layered ecosystems of support that are built to last.



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