

May 2025



Circle U.
Student Union

Political stance.

Student's Wellbeing in Circle U.

Mental Health and Well-Being for Students.

In the following paper, our goal is to outline CUSU's vision on the importance of Mental Health at universities and its impact on study experience.

Mental Health awareness and research has risen in the past years and thus, it is now known that it is severely linked to the social context that individuals live in. For students, this context is at least partly **influenced by university** and the social structures and pressures existing within it.

In our opinion, the challenge institutions such as universities are facing now is implementing useful **care networks for their students**. Therefore, we aim to discuss psychological support services already provided and further needed to offer equal Mental Health Care across Circle U. universities – for the universities' students and during participation in Circle U.'s joint programmes.

Services that Promote Students Well-Being

Universities to Student

We believe that it is crucial that universities offer Mental Health programs for their students as access to psychotherapy and other resources is often limited. Mental Health is an important condition to enable students to manage their everyday lives. In many countries, public healthcare systems are overcrowded and support can not immediately be offered when it is needed. People who are able to afford extensive insurance often have better chances at receiving quality psychological care. As students likely cannot afford comprehensive health insurance, it should be the **responsibility of the universities to provide their students with mental healthcare**.

We are pleased to see that many universities in the Circle U. alliance have already implemented tools and services for students' mental health. However, we notice that there are some **differences between universities**. As we believe that **all students across the alliance** should have **access to the same high standard of mental healthcare**, we want to highlight some examples of services that we believe to be especially helpful and adjusted to students' needs. We hope that these can set positive examples and serve as inspiration across the alliance.

At the University of Oslo, SiO (Student Welfare Organization) offers a health service which includes **Mental Health services**. SiO is partially publicly funded and partially paid for by students' semester fees. All of the mental health services offered through SiO are free and available for all students. The Mental Health Services include: up to ten free sessions per half year with a psychiatrist, up to ten free sessions per half year with a psychologist, group courses for different kind of mild mental health struggles such as mild versions of anxiety, or other common problems like procrastination, stress regarding exams, and heartbreak.

Similarly, the University Paris Cité offers Student Health Services including **free consultations** regarding psychological and sexual health, psychotrauma, addictions and other topics. A national program funded by the universities offers up to twelve free psychological consultations per year per student. Most universities such as the University of Pisa and Louvain also offer psychological counseling.

The Student Union at the University of Vienna, for instance, offers **financial support for psychotherapy sessions**. Students who live in precarious situations can apply to get a reimbursement covering up to € 550 after they have taken the sessions. For immediate help, the **Helpline of the Austrian Student Union (ÖH)** offers advice and suggests offers from public institutions.

We believe that every university should aim to offer services of funded **Mental Health consultations** for students. We especially believe the continuity offered through the high number of sessions offered per year or half year (which is preferable to include mobility students) is very helpful and should be adapted.

Additionally, we want to emphasize the University Health Management offered by the Humboldt-University of Berlin (Hochschulisches Gesundheitsmanagement) and its initiative for a student **survey on Mental Health** which was lastly held in 2022. We want to encourage other universities to directly ask their students about their mental health in order to identify issues and possible solutions such as useful programs tailored to students' actual needs.

We also believe that raising awareness and **destigmatizing mental health issues** by way of holding a **Mental Health week or month**, as the University of

Louvain and the Humboldt-University are doing, is a considerate initiative. We believe the implementation consisting of activities students can participate in to be encouraging for students to attend to their Mental Health. **As a result, we would suggest a Circle U.-wide Mental Health Awareness Month.**

Student to Student

While professional mental health services are crucial, peer-to-peer (student-to-student) support can play a unique and vital role in promoting well-being, reducing loneliness, and lowering the threshold for seeking help. Several universities in the Circle U. alliance already use **students as part of their support systems**, especially within Mental Health.

At Paris Cité, a program to attain a **Mental Health Diploma** (PSSM) on basic diagnosis, orientation and accompaniment during Mental Health issues in general was implemented. It teaches students, academics and staff these valuable skills so that they can raise awareness and be alert in their personal environments

In Oslo, psychology PhD students offer **low-threshold therapy sessions** through SiO, and at Aarhus University, the anonymous peer-to-peer hotline gives students other students to talk to. These initiatives are both **sustainable and relatable**: students may feel more comfortable talking to fellow students on a daily basis while universities build long-term mental health literacy and reduce pressure on professional systems.

In Aarhus, they offer a peer help-line called 'Studenterlinjen'. This is an anonymous helpline that offers open, and confidential conversations. From students to other students.

Although we believe it is the universities' main responsibility to provide Mental Health aid, this kind of **peer-led support system** should be implemented across the alliance - **supplementary, not replacing**. It creates a more inclusive and empathetic study environment while also empowering students with experience and interpersonal skills. As such, we want to encourage other universities across the alliance to implement such services in addition to the support they already offer.

Organizations to Student

A lot of universities in the Circle U. alliance utilize different organizations to provide mental health services for their students. The offers provided by these organizations vary greatly among the different universities in the alliance, however, they generally offer a form of counseling, often in the form of **courses and helplines** for people to call during mental health crises. Another commonality is that a lot of organizations utilized across the alliance offer apps or other digital tools for mental health services, an example for this is the **DR.HU App** provided by Humboldt University.

Both Aarhus University and University of Oslo additionally offer **dialog centers** for spirituality and reflection. Some organizations offer free, anonymous websites to ask questions regarding their students' experiences. These questions range from bigger mental health issues to less severe issues that might include exam anxiety.

The University of Paris Cité is partnering with a third party organization called "**Women Safe**" for cases concerning Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. In addition, they work with "**Nightline**", an external telephone line for talking to people and psychologists.

Underlying fundamental offers provided by the state complete the services provided by the universities. Nevertheless, we believe it to be an important task for the universities to **provide further help resources** that might be available more directly in situations of crisis.

We are aware that universities' budgets are limited. Therefore, we believe that partnering with and advertising third party organizations which already offer high quality Mental Health support is an important addition to university to students offers.

Challenges and Going Forward

Challenges

Lack of Clear Information

Looking forward, we believe it is important to ensure **better utilization of the programs and structures already implemented** by the different universities across the alliance. While support is available, there's often little information about how to access it. This gap in communication makes it harder for people to find the help they need. **Therefore, we recommend placing information about Mental Health services more prominently**, both on campuses and on universities' websites, as well as in the Open Campus.

Lack of Prevention Strategies

We want to address that it is important to notice that mental illness could diminish the motivation and ability to look for professional help when it is actually needed the most. **Focusing on prevention, education and spreading information** so students are able to recognize the warning signs of psychopathologies should be a priority. This would also decrease public treatment expenses and reduce overcrowding of public mental health services.

Stigma around Mental Health

Social stigma surrounding mental illness remains widespread and contributes to the systemic marginalization of individuals in need of psychological help. These biases and prejudices are deeply embedded in society and must be actively challenged. As stated above, a Circle U.-wide **Mental Health Awareness Month** might be a way of achieving this.

Ensuring Standards in University Mental Health Services

Furthermore, we believe that all Circle U. students have the right to receive **equal** and up to date mental health support. Many mental health professionals still rely on models reducing mental illness to a diagnosis, overlooking the complexity of the individual. **It is essential that university-affiliated professionals stay up to date with the latest psychological and therapeutic approaches** to provide more holistic and person-centered care.

Going Forward: Objectives

- 1) We want to ensure that all students participating in physical Circle U. activities are informed about the Mental Health support services available at the host university.
- 2) It would be valuable to include a collection of available activities and support services about Mental Health within the Open Campus.
- 3) Circle U. universities should actively share good practices on the topic of student wellbeing, and should create a task force for that matter.
- 4) Circle U. should actively promote a culture of Mental Health awareness and support across all its member universities, for every type of mobility activities.
- 5) In this paper we have laid out best practices across the alliance. We ask that the universities not yet providing these to implement them to achieve equal access for all Circle U. students.

Conclusion

Students' well-being and ability to perform in their studies, learn, reflect and participate in discourses heavily depends on their Mental Health. It should thus be a key objective for Circle U. universities to implement comprehensive services as an addition public healthcare to ensure that all students have equal access to support.

We believe it to be important for Circle U. universities to learn from each other and possibly **share resources**. We hope a **taskforce can be created** to unify the different offers and increase fairness amongst the alliance to promote a high standard of student well-being across the alliance.

We want to suggest further increasing the visibility of services already implemented so that they are more well-known by students and can **easily be accessed in mentally challenging situations**. It is unfortunate that the universities' effort that has already gone into creating supportive initiatives currently cannot fulfill its potential as **services are not broadcasted enough**.

Finally, we see it as our duty as a Student Union **to advocate for supporting students in their Mental Health and Well-Being** and hope that the suggestions made in this paper will meet sympathetic eyes and active hands.