

Budget Cuts Impact Mental Health Resources on Campus

Recent budget cuts at UNH have affected mental health resources at PACS and Health and Wellness

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“It was in January, I got an email from her saying that her job had been terminated and that she no longer works at the university,” said Emma Locher, first year Human Development and Family Studies major. “I felt like she was definitely nicer than what I experienced at PACS.” The former therapist from Health and Wellness declined to comment.

Located in the heart of campus on the third floor of Smith Hall, Psychological and Counseling Services (PACS) offers a wide variety of resources to University of New Hampshire (UNH) students.

“We had three open clinician positions eliminated last spring and we also lost funding for our summer administrative support, and other efforts consistent with those of a comprehensive college counseling center,” said PACS Director Elisa Bolton.

PACS offers a range of services including, academic support, stress management, mental health counseling, gender identity, eating behaviors, relationship difficulties, crisis intervention, medication consultation and referrals.

“Our capacity to provide education on suicide prevention, mental health, and well-being through social media and invited presentations as well as marketing of PACS services was reduced,” said Bolton.

Due to the budget cuts, specially trained staff have been let go, which not only directly affects those employees but also the students who sought out specialized help. PACS offering sensitive and confidential help to the UNH community means that when specialized care providers get cut, a lot of students suffer the losses.

“We had a say in some of the cuts but some of the cuts were made without our input,” Bolton said. “I am focusing on protecting and supporting PACS’s most essential services.”

However, it wasn’t just PACS who were affected. The budget cuts also affected Health and Wellness.

Located off of Pettee Brook lane and directly to Wolff, House UNH’s Health and Wellness mostly focuses more on the physical health of the community but can also coordinate care directly with PACS depending on the services needed.



UNH

Smith Hall, where the PACS office is located

Staffing has been dramatically decreased to a point where we can no longer be as comprehensive of a health and wellness center as we once were,” said Health and Wellness Director of Education and Promotion, Kathleen Grace-Bishop. “Remaining staff performing job responsibilities that they do not have background or training in or time for because positions have been unfunded, and these responsibilities need to continue because they are critical to the overall function of the organization.”

When asked just about how many staff at Health and Wellness were actually let go, Bishop said, “one well-being educator counselor, one alcohol, nicotine, and other drug educator counselor, one pharmacist, one hourly pharmacy tech, one hourly pharmacist, and one hourly massage therapist.

Initially, we could not continue to hire our student staff, wellness assistants, who receive financial work study.”

Averi Morse, a third-year Nutrition major, worked as a Wellness Assistant in Health and Wellness for three semesters. She helped out at events put on by Health and Wellness and occasionally worked the front desk.

“I worked at the front desk a bit because they were already having trouble getting someone to work there because they were already on a tight budget,” Morse said.

Despite being let go, Morse was one of the few student workers that was offered her position back months after being let go.

“I do think it’s unfortunate that a lot of resources that were already struggling beforehand have been minimized,” said Morse, “I know the people who work there genuinely care about the students and everyone’s a little bit frustrated.”

Not only do the budget cuts affect the removal of elective resources but also have forced the discontinuation of the on-campus pharmacy due to the high drug prices, competition increase, and lower insurance reimbursement rates.

“We will close the UNH Pharmacy at the end of the academic year,” Bishop says, “Low utilization and an operating deficit also contributed to this decision. This will enable resources to be directed to other Health and Wellness operations and programming.”

With that many staff being let go and the remaining of Health and Wellness staff having to pick up the slack, Bishop explained that they have to discontinue campus-wide events such as Wellness Fest, Sextober and Sleep Expo. These are events that not only spread awareness and education to students, but were events that students looked forward to attending. Luckily, Paws and Relax was reinstated by a donation after being delayed and on the verge of being canceled as a result of the budget cuts.

Locher had been utilizing Health and Wellness’ Living Well services from early October up until winter break.

“It was a good two and a half months of us talking,” Locher said, “I’d see her pretty regularly, like once a week, and I thought that was important and it was definitely very helpful. I felt like there was a lot going on in my life and she was very supportive of me.”



Health and Wellness

Similarly to how Locher found out about her therapist being let go, Morse also received an unexpected email regarding her long-term position working at Health and Wellness.

“A week or two into the semester, I got an email from my supervisor there,” Morse said, “She was basically explaining that they were trying to figure stuff out to get us back but that because of the budget cuts they were struggling with maintaining that position which I totally understood.”

Bishop expressed that these cuts have reduced their overall position to make a larger impact on campus. “We have less of an ability to go beyond individual work to impact larger number of students by increasing awareness, providing information to support healthy choices and teach skills through these efforts.”