



# COLLEGE ATHLETE MENTAL HEALTH

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## PROGRAM MANUAL

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RAISE **AWARENESS**. END **STIGMA**. PROMOTE **HELP SEEKING**.

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A manual created by the preeminent college athlete mental health program:

**M** | ATHLETES CONNECTED

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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Athletes Connected would not be possible without the time and effort of many stakeholders. Thank you to the student-athletes, clinicians, researchers, administrators, advisory board members, and so many more. Your collaborations and contributions have been instrumental in raising awareness, reducing stigma, and promoting help-seeking for mental health issues in student-athletes.

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A special thank you to those who have generously contributed to the Athletes Connected program. Thank you for believing in the holistic development of student-athletes, and helping prepare them for success in college and beyond. The program would not exist without your support.

**DISCLAIMER**

The University of Michigan (U-M) developed the Athletes Connected Program for student-athletes with careful scientific and health oversight, and has published outcome studies. For the public good, The University makes this Program Manual freely available. Use of the manual by others without U-M staff oversight is at the user's own risk. The University of Michigan, U-M affiliates, the authors, and the contributors to this manual assume no responsibility or liability for any content or initiatives that arise from the use of this manual without U-M staff oversight. Any initiative that is a result of the use of this manual should cite the manual as a source of guidance, but such use does not allow any external program to claim that it as being part of U-M's Athletes Connected program.

## BACKGROUND & HISTORY

In 2014, a collaborative team of faculty and staff from the University of Michigan Athletic Department, Comprehensive Depression Center, and School of Public Health was awarded an NCAA Innovations in Research and Practice grant to support student-athlete mental health. The resulting work led to the formation of the Athletes Connected program.

With the knowledge that many student-athletes experience mental health problems such as depression and anxiety, but they are often reluctant to seek help for a variety of reasons, the goals of the Athletes Connected Program are to:

1. Increase awareness of mental health issues
2. Reduce the stigma of help-seeking
3. Promote positive coping skills among student-athletes

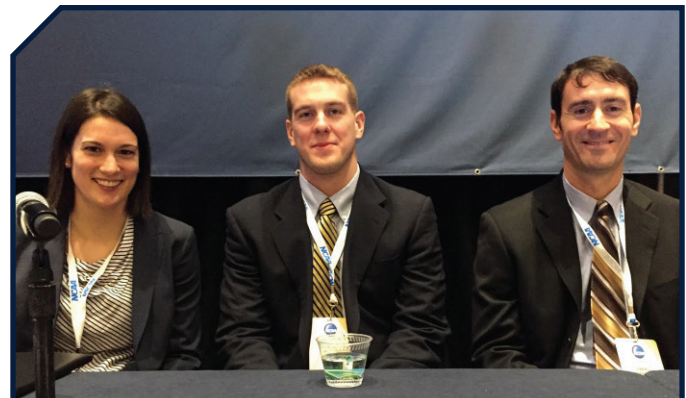
Based on the principles of the Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change (Prochaska, Johnson, & Lee, 2009) and motivational interviewing (Miller & Rollnick, 2012), the program aims to meet student-athletes wherever they are on the spectrum of well-being; whether a student-athlete is mostly well and seeking help for a performance-related issue, or unwell and experiencing negative impacts on their daily functioning due to mental health issues. This is accomplished through a variety of ways, but main program components include:

- Research
- Mental health education
- Student-athlete story-sharing through videos, articles, and speakers
- Coping skills and support groups

The Athletes Connected program also aims to support and educate coaches, athletic trainers, academic support staff, nutritionists, and other Athletic Department personnel, with the understanding that these gatekeepers play an important role in supporting student-athlete mental health and referring to support services.

### DID YOU KNOW?

In 2020, the University of Michigan School of Social Work became Athletes Connected's research arm, replacing the School of Public Health. The program thanks SPH for its years of support!



*Former student-athletes Kally Fayhee (left) and Will Heininger (center) are pictured with Co-PI Dr. Daniel Eisenberg (right) at the 2015 NCAA convention in Fort Washington, Maryland. Kally and Will were featured in a pair of Athletes Connected videos. Will continues with the Athletes Connected program today and Dr. Eisenberg worked with the program from its inception until 2020.*

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## PROGRAM ROLES

Athletes Connected is a uniquely structured program, with partnerships across multiple departments. The program has found that it is important to be explicit about staff roles, responsibilities, and expectations. This holds true whether or not you are collaborating across departments. Below is a general overview of the current specific responsibilities and tasks held by the team and by each individual department.

### All Team Members

Participate in team meetings, event coordination, content creation (including web-based and in-person presentations), research assistance.

### Athletic Department Staff

Facilitate wellness and restorative yoga groups, oversee budget, program consultations, act as liaisons to other Athletic Department staff and student-athlete groups.

### Depression Center Staff

Program planning and evaluation, consultation on best practices around safe and effective mental health messaging, lead communications efforts including newsletter, website creation/maintenance, and social media.

### School of Social Work Staff

Lead student-athlete mental health research, form needs assessments, research design, data collection and analysis.

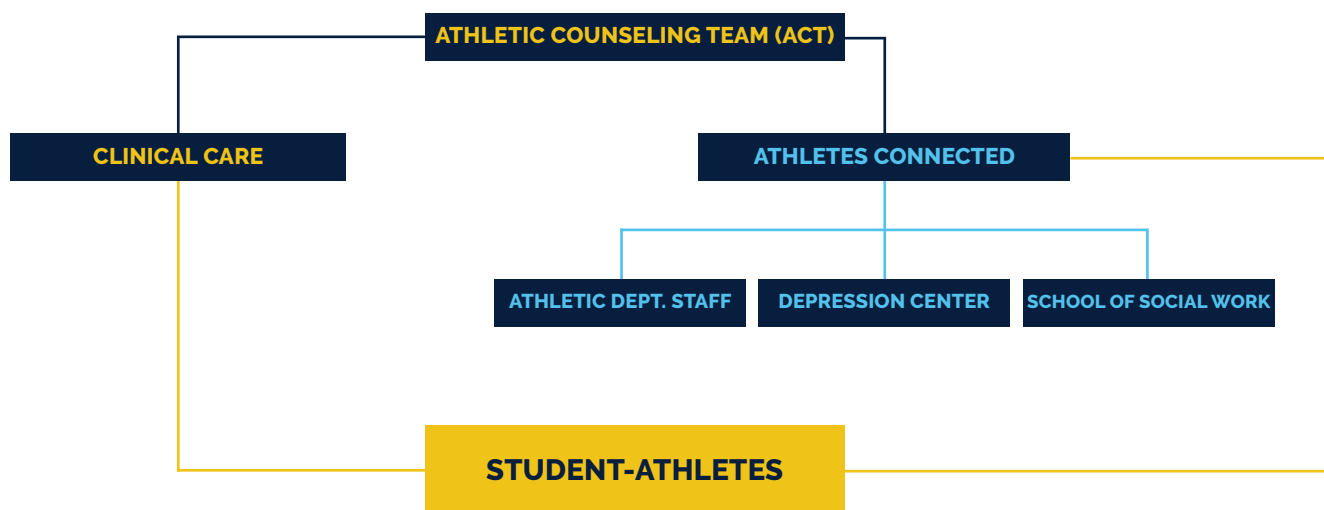
### DID YOU KNOW?

For the first five years of Athletes Connected, there were no staff members who were 100% full-time effort on the program. We benefit from the varying expertise of a multidisciplinary team to achieve goals in the key program components.

### KEY ROLE

It's vital to identify a program coordinator to facilitate communication and oversee the various components. This will create clarity and maintain momentum.

## PROGRAM STRUCTURE



## DOES IT WORK?

### THE CHALLENGE

On average, 36% of college students are experiencing any type of depression and 31% are experiencing any type of anxiety (Healthy Minds Study, 2019). Student-athletes participate in healthy coping mechanisms (e.g. exercise and social support) daily, yet still struggle with mental illness at similar levels to students who are not student-athletes.

Student-athletes have additional pressures and demands on top of the stressors that their collegiate peers are experiencing. Among collegiate student-athletes, it has been shown that barriers to seeking help could be reinforced by expectations of toughness, invulnerability, and battling through adversity (Etzel, Watson, & Gardner, 2007). In addition, the increased demands that student-athletes face—including time demands, physical demands, and travel demands—may increase their chances of experiencing psychological health problems (Etzel, Watson, Visek, & Maniar, 2006).

### HOW ATHLETES CONNECTED COLLECTS DATA

Athletes Connected (ACX) has always been a data-informed program. Data is consistently collected from student-athletes and the broader athletic department to create and revise programming based on student-athlete needs and to analyze program effectiveness. A more intensive data collection process occurred during the program's pilot phase and five years after that.

During its pilot phase in 2014, ACX provided in-person educational presentations to every athletic team (approximately 900 students). All student-athletes who consented to study participation were given pre- and post-test surveys to assess changes in knowledge and attitudes toward mental health before and after the presentations. A variety of in-person focus groups, surveys, and online evaluations were also used to assess the impact of videos depicting student-athlete stories and wellness groups.

In 2019, ACX surveyed all eligible student-athletes again on their use of mental health services and programs, attitudes and knowledge about mental health, and coping skills via an online survey. Additionally, ACX continues to gather feedback from team presentations, wellness groups, and restorative yoga sessions from participating student-athletes.

### THE IMPACT

Following team presentations, student-athletes were:

- More comfortable discussing mental health issues with their teammates;
- More confident in their ability to identify a teammate who may be struggling with mental health;
- More confident in their ability to help a teammate access mental health care/other support services on campus;
- More likely to consider seeking help if they were having a personal problem that was bothering them;
- More knowledgeable about depression;
- More willing to accept someone who has received mental health treatment as a close friend.

When asked about the video content created sharing stories of student-athletes with mental health issues:

- 99% felt the videos were engaging and relevant;
- 96% of the student-athletes felt they were at least somewhat likely to use the information presented.



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For wellness groups, we found:

- Attendees reported improved mood following participation in the groups;
  - Words to describe mood prior to group: anxious, sad, frustrated, overwhelmed, tired, stressed;
  - Words to describe mood following the group: clear-headed, connected, content, excited, inspired, positive, relieved;
- Following the group, attendees were more likely to speak with the following people if they were experiencing serious emotional distress: Professional clinician, teammate, support group;
- Group participation increased attendee's readiness to seek further information about available mental health support services;
- 92.3% of attendees expect to apply lessons or skills learned in the group;
- 67% of respondents to a follow-up survey reported that they had implemented one or more strategies learned in the group—examples include meditation, relaxation, positive thinking, communication.

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## WHY THIS MATTERS

The value in the Athletes Connected program lies in the education and stigma reduction that leads to more open communication about mental health issues, formal help-seeking, and adoption of positive coping skills. Given that student-athletes are unable to perform their best if they are not emotionally well, the impact of the program may translate to improved athletic and academic performance, while also better equipping students for post-college life.

## DID YOU KNOW?

The Athletes Connected pilot program has been published in the *Journal of Clinical Sports Psychology* (Kern et. al, 2017). If you would like to view a full copy of the manuscript, please contact us at:

[athletesconnected@umich.edu](mailto:athletesconnected@umich.edu)

After attending the restorative yoga sessions, in its first implementation year, nearly all (94%) participants reported experiencing at least one important benefit, with the most common responses being less stress (78%), more happiness or better mood (74%), and better sleep (46%).



*Athletes Connected was featured at the President's Tailgate prior to a football game in 2018. Pictured here (from left-right) are Lizelle Salazar and Jeremy Fallis of the Depression Center, past program coordinator Emily Klueh, and Will Heininger.*

## MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION

Providing education around mental health is extremely important, especially when starting out. Having a common knowledge base allows all student-athletes, coaches, and other involved staff to have shared language around mental health, and helps build a community-based approach to conversing about and supporting mental health experiences.

### FIRST YEAR

At the onset of the program, the Athletes Connected team facilitated educational presentations for all coaches and each athletic team, with information on:

- how to recognize the signs and symptoms of depressive illnesses;
- strategies for prevention, self-care, and help-seeking;
- how to support teammates who may be struggling;
- campus mental health resources, including the drop-in support groups for student-athletes.

Coach presentations were facilitated prior to and separate from the student-athletes.

Student-athlete presentations were mandatory, and ranged from 30-100 attendees each, with students from various teams attending the sessions at one time.

The presentations included:

- Psychoeducation about depression and anxiety in athletes and where to seek help, facilitated by an athletic counselor;
- Athletes Connected video;
- Discussion and Q&A with student-athletes whose stories were represented in the Athletes Connected videos.

### SECOND YEAR & BEYOND

Ongoing educational sessions are provided by Athletic Counseling staff throughout the year to individual teams. Presentations are non-mandatory and topics may change based on team-identified needs. It is important to continue to educate coaches and student-athletes since there can be turnover and there is no harm in re-stating these important messages.

At the University of Michigan, some portions of presentations are done specifically by Athletics staff, based on content and qualifications. All of the Athletic Department staff members involved in Athletes Connected and Athletic Counseling Team are licensed mental health providers.

Presentations regarding signs and symptoms or other specific mental health education are done only by staff with appropriate credentials.

## VIDEOS

Brief, engaging videos and personal stories have been an important component of the Athletes Connected program. They provide a positive example of help-seeking, and help to reduce stigma and promote coping skills among student athletes.

The videos have also allowed us to reach a broader population beyond current U-M student-athletes. Videos focus on student-athlete mental health stories and coping skills practice.

Videos can be seen at:

[athletesconnected.umich.edu/videos](https://athletesconnected.umich.edu/videos)

**See appendix** (page 14) for key considerations when finding and developing student stories.

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## COPING SKILLS & SUPPORT GROUPS

Another program component, the drop-in support groups, provide a safe space for student-athletes to talk about mental health, practice coping skills and feel a sense of community.

These are held in convenient, non-stigmatized locations (meeting rooms in the athletic facilities). From 2014-2018, the groups were offered bi-weekly for one hour in the evening and facilitated by a clinical social worker. Each session would include psychoeducation on a particular topic that impacts student-athlete mental health, followed by a facilitated discussion. Example topics included effective stress management, positive self-talk, and relationships and well-being.

After continued input and feedback from student-athletes, the groups have since shifted to focus more on specific issues including injury, LGBTQ+, and specific skill practice such as restorative yoga and mental skills trainings. Groups are facilitated by clinical social workers from the Athletics Counseling Team (ACT).

### QUOTABLE

“The group is your time to talk to each other, rather than have information given to us. It’s good to hear different perspectives of the other students.”

*Former program coordinator Emily Klueh and the Depression Center’s Stephanie Salazar represented Athletes Connected during Yoga at the Big House in 2017. Athletes Connected instituted restorative yoga for student-athletes the following year.*

## RESTORATIVE YOGA

Athletes Connected started offering restorative yoga (RY) sessions following the release of promising research by Penn and Ali Tomlinson that showed efficacy of restorative yoga on both mind and body recovery, a connection that may be especially beneficial to student-athletes. These sessions are led by an ACT staff member who has been trained in restorative yoga. Sessions are held bi-monthly and equipment is provided to student-athletes.

### QUOTABLE

“Just the kind of mental restoration we need! I would love to see this offered weekly throughout the school year.”

## ADDITIONAL INITIATIVES

Athletes Connected continues to spread awareness in a variety of ways, including via the website, social media, as well as in-person events. Examples include hosting mental health awareness games, concerts, professional athlete speaking engagements, and student-led fundraisers.





## START WITH THE ATHLETES

When considering how a program like Athletes Connected could look on your campus, it is important to start with your student-athletes, and involve them throughout the process.

Although there are assessment questions that you will need to answer regarding budget, available personnel, existing programming, and/or human capital, start with your most valuable human capital: the student-athletes.

They are experts in being student-athletes at your institution. They know which issues are important to them broadly, as well as which issues are affecting them and their peers at your school specifically. If the intention is to create or enhance existing programming that supports student-athlete mental health and wellness at your institution, who better to tell you what they need than the student-athletes themselves?

Find out what their needs are through focus groups, interviews, and surveys to inform what programming is necessary to best support them.

## IDENTIFY EXISTING RESOURCES

Take stock of existing campus programming and personnel who work in mental health within and outside of the athletic department. Chances are, there are already people on your campus who possess helpful expertise and experience.

You need not reinvent the wheel, or start from scratch. While it is prudent to be cautious about who you collaborate with, it's also worthwhile to partner with bright minds across campus, especially those with relevant expertise.

You might ask yourself:

- What resources exist currently?
- How accessible are they to our athletes?
- To what extent do our athletes utilize them?
- What is our referral process?

In addition to Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS), many colleges and universities have wellness centers that offer support and programming for college students, and cover issues from sexual health and sleep, to substance use, disordered eating, and other issues related to mental health. Additionally, there may be ongoing research on campus, or faculty/staff projects, that are relevant to your cause.

Remember, one doesn't need to be sick first, in order to start getting better. Prevention is key. Making connections and strengthening partnerships on the front end can save valuable time and energy in the event of a crisis. Additionally, if student-athletes have multiple supports and feel connected to campus, it can help prevent crises, or lower the likelihood.

## GET BUY-IN

Support from leadership in Athletics—both coaches and administrators—is essential in getting started and sustaining success. If you also collaborate or partner with other entities at your institution, you will want to garner support and buy-in from their respective leadership, as well. Below we share some tips.

### EXPRESS HOW THIS IS ESSENTIAL FOR ATHLETE SUCCESS

Most Athletics administrators would agree that it is negligent to not offer their athletes programming and resources to improve physically (i.e. strength & conditioning). Clearly, there is an advantage to training versus not training the body.

It affects the student-athletes' chances of being successful, staying healthy, and of course, winning. When it comes to the brain and the mind, it is similarly negligent not to offer programming and resources to increase their mental fitness and mental health.

If anyone is expected to perform well—at any task—their brains need to be functioning well at the time of performance. When we fail to prepare and train the mind, we truly prepare to fail.

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## FIND AND KNOW YOUR MENTAL HEALTH ALLIES ON CAMPUS

They often have experience gaining buy-in, and may have tips about how (not) to approach the conversation(s) with leadership.

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## PROVIDE COMPELLING DATA

After the pilot phase of Athletes Connected concluded in early 2015, being able to show that 63% of student-athletes reported their performance was affected by a mental or emotional health issue one or more days in the prior month was powerful. The data revealing 99% of student-athletes found the content relevant and engaging was similarly influential.

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Although it is hard to have primary data before getting approval, some schools and universities have conducted needs assessments to successfully demonstrate their case for new and/or additional programming and resources. It is highly recommended that you collect data and measure impact as you launch your programming, whether or not you can gather primary data before programming begins.

## SHARE WHAT HAS BEEN DONE ON OTHER CAMPUSES

Athletes Connected is one of many mental health programs for student-athletes across the country. You can use the success of these existing student-athlete mental health programs as part of your pitch to your athletic department.

Ultimately, every athletic department wants its student-athletes to be successful. Those who take vested interests in their student-athletes' well-being often realize that, because they are better able to handle stress and navigate adversity, they are trained and prepared to achieve that success.

## HOW TO FIND FUNDING

Finding funding for programming is an ongoing consideration. Athletes Connected looks forward to the day when mental health programming and training is a no-brainer budget item. That said, there are still a number of ways to find funding.

### TRADITIONAL DONOR OR PHILANTHROPIST

It is recommended to work with your development team or office of advancement to identify potential donors with interest in mental health or wellness.

### APPLYING FOR GRANTS

As public awareness about mental health issues has increased in recent years, there is more and more grant funding each year, including the annual continuation of the NCAA Innovations in Research and Practice grant that originally funded ACX.

### EVENT FUNDRAISER

Whether a team puts on a 'Mental Health Awareness' game (like a breast cancer awareness game), holds a dinner/auction, or puts on a unique event, like Mock Rock (U-M's annual student-athlete 'talent show'), dedicating an event to mental health is one way to raise funds while also raising awareness.

### SUGGESTION: DEPARTMENT FUNDS

While recognizing it is not possible for all institutions, having department funds to cover staff time, even in small percentages, is helpful. It both lessens the burden of finding soft funding, and establishes an investment in student-athlete well-being from athletics.

## STARTING SMALL IS OKAY

What you see now is not where our program started; it started with two videos and groups, and has grown from there.

Athletes Connected is committed to adding new programming and content every year. It is often best to do a few things well rather than a lot of things unsuccessfully, especially if resources are limited. Then, add to your program as things become established.

## HAVE STRONG ADVOCATES WITHIN ATHLETICS

Having support from well-respected athletics staff was critical at every stage. The individual does not always have to be the same, and ideally would help increase the number of allies through advocacy. Nonetheless, support from staff in athletics helped in writing the grant, implementing programming, involving SAAC, and getting support from athletic leadership.

## ADDRESSING TIME CONSTRAINTS

Student-athletes are busy (surprise)! There may not be one 'best time' for programming, and if there is, it will likely change each semester.

Connect with your student-athletes and other stakeholders (coaches, administrators, etc.) to determine what might work best for your institution. When having these conversations, consider travel days, mandatory vs. non-mandatory hours, etc. It is also worth evaluating the pros/cons of presenting to multiple teams at once (large group), versus presenting to teams individually.

## BE PATIENT, BUT PERSISTENT

It takes time to gather student-athlete feedback, reduce mental health stigma, and receive administrative buy-in. You may encounter barriers along the way, but keep advocating for the well-being of your student-athletes. The need is not going away.

***Make sure support resources are in place BEFORE implementing Tier 1 programming.***

## CREATE A MENTAL HEALTH SAFETY NET FOR YOUR ATHLETES

Athletes Connected can help all student-athletes along the wellness spectrum. Nevertheless, it does not provide clinical services for those at-risk student-athletes.

By using a preventative public health-based structure to raise awareness, reduce stigma, and promote help-seeking for mental health issues, the program hopes that more student-athletes feel comfortable seeking out mental health services. If they do seek help, they need to have services that are both available and accessible to them. This is why a 3-tiered system is in place to best support our student athletes:

### Tier 1: Primary Prevention

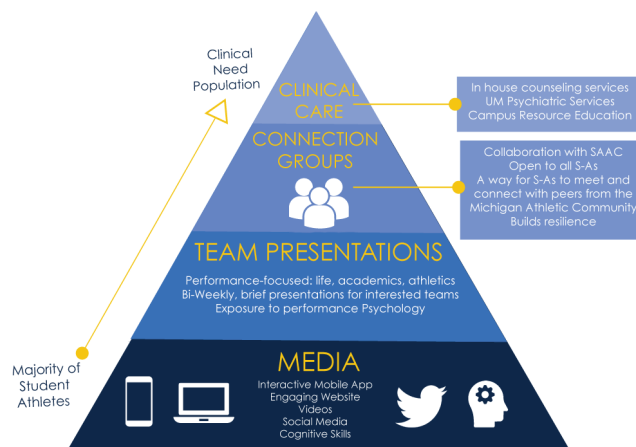
All student-athletes get tier 1 services. Examples of tier 1 programs include presentations, the website, and articles that are accessible, prevention and education-based, and may or may not be mandatory.

### Tier 2: Early Intervention Resources

At-risk student-athletes and/or student-athletes who are passionate about wellness can be referred to or choose to opt in to tier 2 resources. These have included wellness groups and restorative yoga.

### Tier 3: Clinical Services

Athletes Connected does not provide tier 3 services. However, Athletes Connected does promote help-seeking behaviors and links/refers to available tier 3 services. One incredibly important consideration before and during the creation of your program will be to ensure tier 3 support is available when you begin providing tier 1 & 2 services.



## 1 LISTEN TO YOUR STUDENT-ATHLETES

The very first action item for Athletes Connected was to listen to the student-athletes via focus groups (See appendix, page 15). The NCAA had just awarded the grant, and Athletes Connected did not yet have its name.

Since the goal was to improve student-athlete mental health through targeted, effective programming, Athletes Connected needed to learn about student-athletes' mental health, and what they might consider effective. While it is not necessary that you use Athletes Connected's measures or exact questions in your own focus groups, it is critical that you hear from your student-athletes.

It is encouraged to ask them about their wants, needs, apprehensions, existing knowledge, stigma, and campus climate regarding student-athlete mental health care, support, and programming on your campus.

## 4 UTILIZE SAAC

Talking with your Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) is another way to involve the target population. SAAC can provide valuable insight and direction regarding mental health programming on campus.

## 5 KEEP OUTREACH GOING

Even though ACX has been around for several years, it's important to keep re-educating and raising the awareness of student-athletes and athletics staff. Your program will evolve based on student needs and there will be natural turnover of students and staff, so it's important to keep promoting your program's purpose and current initiatives.

## MAINTAIN GOOD COACH RELATIONSHIPS

Having the coaches on the same page as you is critical. Just as they can reinforce what you're working on with the student-athletes, they can also undo progress that's been made. Some tips for maintaining good relationships with coaches:

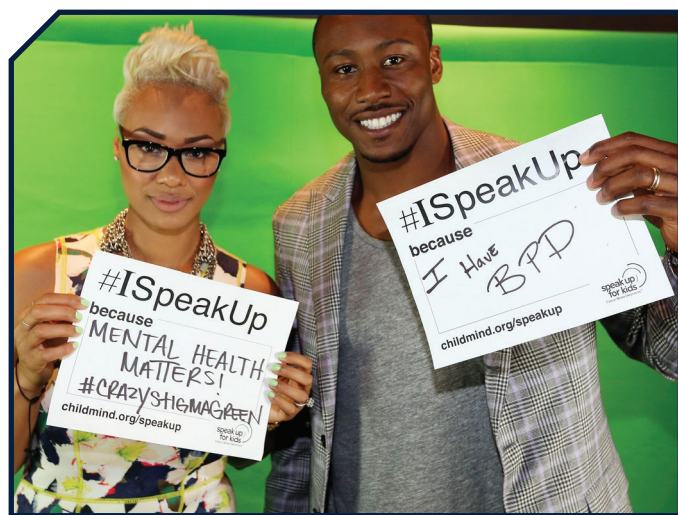
- **Coach education:** educating coaches about mental health, the signs and indicators of

common mental illnesses like depression and anxiety, and how the unique stressors student-athletes face can put their players at risk, are all ways of making coaches more familiar with mental health, and why it matters.

- **Clearly defining their role:** Just as the coach wouldn't perform the surgery a player needed, they should not take the role of therapist, either. However, if a player is struggling to function, whether from a physical or mental standpoint, the coaches are often the first to notice. Clearly defining protocols, what their role is, and educating coaches about resources, empowers them to be decisive and proactive about their student-athletes' well-being.
- **Open communication channels:** Keep in touch with coaches, and make sure they know who to go to in case they want to discuss mental health. Educate them regularly, and provide forums for them to ask questions in open, candid formats.

## PROGRAMMING MUST BE RELEVANT AND ENGAGING

Content should be relevant to the student-athletes' experiences. U-M student-athletes reported liking the interactive nature of team presentations, as well as hearing from former student-athletes about their experiences with mental health while in school. Be intentional about making the content specifically relevant to student-athletes.



*U-M Athletics hosted NFL wide receiver Brandon Marshall and his wife, Michi, on campus to speak with athletes about his mental health journey during a lunch and learn session in 2018.*



## FAQs

### **What is your target population/do you only work with student-athletes?**

Our primary target population is student-athletes. Because the program is at the University of Michigan, many of our programs and events are available exclusively to U-M student-athletes.

Nevertheless, all of the resources that are available online ([athletesconnected.umich.edu](https://athletesconnected.umich.edu)), such as the videos and articles, are accessible to nearly anyone with an internet connection. Thus, we have tried to make that content general and relatable for student-athletes outside the U-M community. Any presentations we facilitate outside of the U-M community still focus on the student-athlete experience.

Additionally, administrators, staff and coaches must be knowledgeable about mental health. Thus, in later years of the program, we have expanded videos to include the secondary target audience of administrators and coaches; those key players are often present for educational sessions so they can learn how to best support their student-athletes.

### **What do you do when a student-athlete has a clinical need?**

Athletes Connected does not provide clinical services to student-athletes. We frequently promote and refer student-athletes to counseling if they are seeking or would benefit from individual counseling.

Athletes Connected falls under the Athletics Counseling Team (ACT), so there is a direct relationship between the embedded mental health providers within U-M Athletics and Athletes Connected, but again, Athletes Connected is not providing clinical services. The program aims to open up conversations and bring awareness to mental health and wellness, which can then funnel into seeking individual services, a phenomenon we have witnessed firsthand. There are well-developed procedures and protocols within ACT to address clinical concerns.

### **What if we don't have counselors specifically for student-athletes?**

That is OK, as many universities and colleges operate in similar fashion. It is important, however, that student-athletes feel comfortable with whichever providers are available to them. Connect with your counseling center to better understand existing options. Include salient stakeholders from Athletics if needed.

### **Are Athletes Connected surveys and data available for use to further student-athlete mental health research or help bring programming to my institution?**

Yes. The data from the pilot year of ACX are published. The report can be found in the [Research section](#) of our website, or our staff is happy to send the manuscript. If you're interested in utilizing measures or surveys, you can find those in the Appendix of this document. We simply ask that you attribute the University of Michigan's Athletes Connected Program as the original creator when replicating these measures and instruments.

### **Can Athletes Connected videos be shown to any student-athlete?**

Absolutely! Though the videos do clearly feature University of Michigan student-athletes and facilities, we hope that the stories that our student-athletes choose to share are relevant and applicable to many other student-athletes and universities. The accessibility of these videos on public websites is very intentional.

### **Can someone from Athletes Connected connect with me over the phone to provide further guidance?**

Yes. Our staff has done consultations over the phone for many years; this manual was created to provide an overview of our program and address the most commonly asked questions, so people who are interested in starting a program would not need to call us directly and could continue to refer to this document throughout the process.

Moreover, if you have any additional questions or would like to discuss your program or ideas, we are more than happy to connect with you directly. Send us an email at [athletesconnected@umich.edu](mailto:athletesconnected@umich.edu).

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**Do you provide presentations to parents or high schools?**

We do, but on a case-by-case basis. Our target population is student-athletes (specifically, those at U-M) and our efforts must primarily be placed there.

Additionally, as employees of U-M Athletics, we are held to certain compliance standards set by the NCAA, Big Ten Conference, and University of Michigan. If you would like to request a presentation, please reach out, and we will discuss the specifics. If for any reason we are not able to present, we will happily refer you to other organizations or resources that may be able to better fit your needs.

**I really like what you're doing. How do I become involved with Athletes Connected?**

We're so glad you're excited about what we're doing! Getting involved depends on a number of factors, including your affiliation and your credentials/qualifications. For example, we have not previously employed any staff members or hired interns who were not already affiliated with the University of Michigan.

We sometimes host guest speakers or mental health awareness events for our student-athletes. It is particularly helpful if these guests are/were athletes themselves. If you believe you have expertise or experience that could provide valuable insight or information, being a guest speaker is a possible way to get involved, but keep in mind that these types of events are not primary to our program.

After the first year of the program, we have been funded by donors who have graciously chosen to support ACX financially. Donor funds allow us to continue to build our programs and services. If you are interested and able to get involved financially, please contact the Michigan Athletics Development team at [athleticdevelopment@umich.edu](mailto:athleticdevelopment@umich.edu) or see how you can support our program on our website.

**CITATIONS**

Etzel, E. F., Watson, J., & Gardner, F. L. (2007). Ethical challenges for psychological consultations in intercollegiate athletics. *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology*, 1(3), 304-317. Retrieved from [humankinetics.com](http://humankinetics.com).

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Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (2012). *Motivational interviewing: Helping people change*. Guilford press.

**STUDENT STORIES: KEY CONSIDERATIONS****FINDING THE STORIES**

The use of media (both print and film) have been instrumental for sharing the stories of student-athletes, and in later years the administrators and coaches who were mental health advocates. The video series in particular has been widely used both at Michigan and at other institutions. Sharing personal stories is incredibly impactful, especially when shared by peers.

The student-athletes featured in the videos are selected by Athletic Counseling and/or Athletes Connected staff, often based on the student-athlete's known experiences, possible leadership roles they hold, and/or topics that have been requested. A few things to consider when identifying students who may want to share their story:

- Is the student currently healthy, or successfully managing symptoms, and have they been doing so for a length of time?
- Is their story aligned with major concerns of the general student-athlete population?
- Are you representing a diverse student-athlete experience?
- Who are your stories relevant to? Are your featured student-athletes representative of your student-athlete population, considering factors such as gender identity, sport/team, presenting concerns, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and international vs. domestic student-athletes?
- Does the student-athlete clearly understand the lasting consequences of sharing their story publicly?
- Are you depicting a positive example of help-seeking?

Kern, A., Heining, W., Klueh, E., Salazar, S., Hansen, B., Meyer, T., & Eisenberg, D. (2017). Athletes connected: results from a pilot project to address knowledge and attitudes about mental health among college student-athletes. *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology*, 11(4), 324-336.

Network, H. M. (2019). The healthy minds study. Retrieved from Healthy Minds Network: Research on Adolescent and Young Adult Mental Health: [healthymindsnetwork.org/data](http://healthymindsnetwork.org/data).

Prochaska, J. O., Johnson, S., & Lee, P. (2009). *The transtheoretical model of behavior change*.

## VIDEO CREATION PROCESS

Below are the steps that our team has used to create videos:

1. Identify student-athlete(s) to share story
2. Student-athlete writes draft of the script, with input from Athletes Connected staff, if needed. It's important that it's in their own words
3. Athletes Connected staff will review and edit the script to ensure proper grammar and that it aligns with safe and effective messaging
4. Contract with videographer, if external
5. Finalize script and identify locations
6. Filming
7. Editing
8. Review by ACX staff and student-athlete
9. Final edits
10. Upload and asset creation (photos, social graphics, etc.)
11. Dissemination & promotion
  - a) ACX is fortunate to have a media relations member on its main team. Regardless of that contact, a collaborative release between all partners (Depression Center, Athletics and now School of Social Work) is created.
  - b) The videos are posted in multiple places including YouTube, Twitter and Facebook with all related parties (for example, the U-M women's lacrosse program posted the Mira Shane/Transition to College video) on all their social pages in addition to the U-M Athletics channels and Athletes Connected Twitter.
  - c) Use of the Athletes Connected quarterly newsletter is another outlet for those who don't follow social media.
  - d) The videos continue to be used during in-person presentations, and with student-athletes.

*Note: The "forever home" of the videos are on the Michigan Medicine YouTube page. The Depression Center is part of the Michigan Medicine system.*

*The Messages of Hope board was installed in 2017, to stop student suicide and help destigmatize mental health struggles. It is in memory of Garrick Roemer, a track athlete who lost his life in 2014. Every tile is inscribed with a quote by Roemer, "Talk to everyone. No matter how unlike you they appear. Just talk to everyone. Everyone has something to say." The Athletes Connected website is also listed on the tiles.*

## SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

*These survey instruments may be used with proper attribution to the University of Michigan Athletes Connected program as the original creator.*

### Focus Group Protocols

- [NCAA Focus Group Protocol \(AC Groups\)](#)
- [NCAA Focus Group Protocol \(Student Needs\)](#)
- [NCAA Trainer Focus Group Protocol](#)

### Presentations

- [Team Presentations \(Pre-Survey\)](#)
- [Team Presentations \(Post-Survey\)](#)

### Wellness Groups

- [Wellness Group Evaluation](#)

### Coping Skills Randomized Control Trial (RCT)

- [NCAA RCT Survey \(baseline\)](#)
- [NCAA RCT Survey \(follow-up\)](#)

### Mental Health & Performance

- [Baseline Survey for Student-Athletes](#)
- [Weekly Questionnaire](#)

