

# BUILDING CONNECTIONS: MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY IN SMALL, RURAL UNIVERSITIES

## NORTHERN STATE UNIVERSITY

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

A student-athlete, class of 2022, from Northern State University in Aberdeen, South Dakota took his life on November 17th, 2021, a tragedy that impacted our campus, community, and fellow student-athletes. Mental health is a growing concern at Northern with calls for increased discussion and visibility.

Division II/III athletes engage in fewer formal mental health checks with only 53% implementing screening practices, compared to 89% of Division I institutions (Drew et al., 2021). The lack of mental health check-ins perpetuates a culture of stigma surrounding athlete mental health. In 2015, death by suicide was the third leading cause of fatality among NCAA athletes (Rao et al., 2015).

Furthermore, rural areas of America have higher rates of suicide due to the lack of connections and resources (Kegler et al., 2017; Steelesmith et al., 2019; Stone et al., 2021). There is a stigma in rural communities due to potential ostracization and limited knowledge of mental health and illness (Monteith et al., 2020). The purpose of this study is to improve mental health literacy through weekly surveillance and educational interventions aimed to change the culture, reduce stigma, and improve help-seeking behaviors, targeting athletes, coaches, and administration.

**47%**

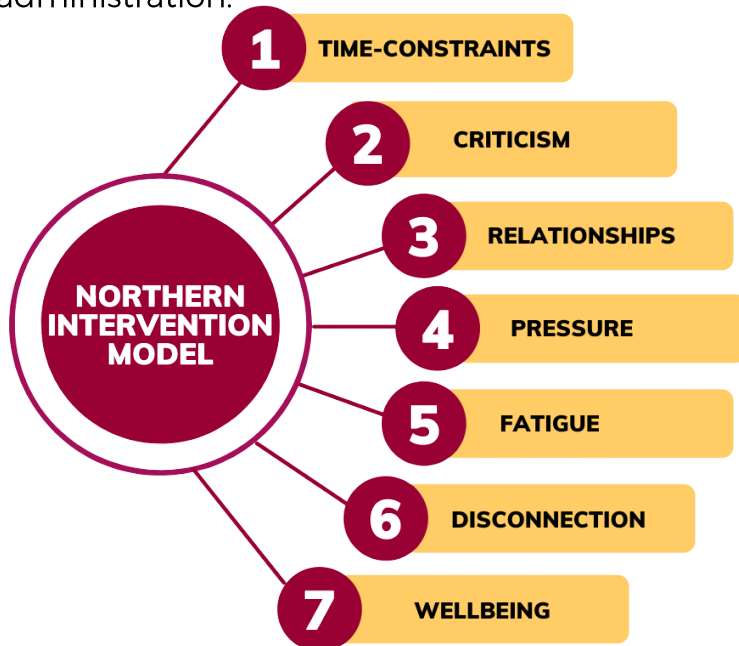
Of Division II/III DO NOT Implement Mental Health Screenings

**1:5**

Suicidal Deaths in South Dakota are Persons Ages 20-29

**10%**

of Athletes with Mental Health Concerns Actually Seek Out Help



### EVALUATION PLAN

- Coaches and student-athletes will complete a pretest/posttest survey assessing their stigma, attitudes, intentions, and mental health literacy
- During the academic year, student-athletes complete a weekly surveillance mobile app, Hone, measuring the 7 areas of mental health literacy
- Based on their responses, players will receive targeted information to assist them in applied areas of mental health literacy
- Coaches and administrators can monitor anonymous data in real-time accompanied by suggestions about ways to best support players and administer interventions

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Research indicates that programs supporting the development of mental health literacy in student-athletes and coaches are an essential component of fostering cultural change in the stigmatization of help-seeking behavior within institutional practices (Purcell et al., 2019). This project aims to enhance mental health awareness in campus culture by creating programs for student-athletes and coaches that targets the seven areas of mental health literacy: time constraints, pressure, disconnection, relationships, fatigue, criticism, and wellbeing. The program includes coach/athlete education interventions using weekly surveillance through a mobile app. The data-driven programming is supported by licensed clinical mental health counselors.

### ESTIMATED TOTAL BUDGET

Hone App: \$500 Onboarding Fee + \$425/team  
Eight teams participating in the pilot = \$3400  
Team Consultations, \$750/team = \$6000  
SPSS Statistical Software. \$250/Person = \$750  
Qualitative Data Software Nvivo = \$1650  
Seminars, \$5000/speaker, approx. \$10,000

**Estimated Total = \$22,300**

### MEMBERSHIP DELIVERABLES

- Mental Health Literacy Improvement Curriculum for Coaches, Athletes, & Administration
- Assessment and Intervention Procedures for Improved Mental Health Literacy for Rural, Small Universities

**PROJECT TEAM - SCAN CODE**

