



Youth, Families, Community

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Land-grant Universities Help Communities Cope with Mental Health, Substance Abuse Challenges

Across the country, many communities — especially those in rural areas — are facing growing challenges related to mental health and substance abuse. Extension personnel with land-grant universities are in a unique position to help educate and encourage those they serve and have developed a variety of efforts to tackle these problems, which have economic, social and other consequences.

Here are a few examples of that work:

- In **Montana**, an Extension program is teaching young people skills to cope with common stressors and learn the importance of asking for help if they experience depression. This program expanded amid COVID-19 closures and even has been adapted by Extension personnel in neighboring Idaho.
- A **Wisconsin** Extension program teaches adults how to recognize signs of mental health struggles in youth and guide them toward solutions.
- In **Kentucky**, young people put on a Farmers Dinner Theater production in which they share information about mental health issues. The goal is to normalize conversations about these topics in communities with elevated suicide mortality and where stress from factors like farm work, rural life and substance abuse is high.
- A **Delaware** Extension effort to alleviate stress and other mental health concerns among agricultural workers — including those in the Latinx community — has resulted in a podcast, workshops and other resources. There is a focus on using humor to communicate about serious topics.
- In **Mississippi**, Extension is partnering with a recovery center to help those struggling with addiction through equine-assisted therapy.

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