



## Youth, Families, Community

PHOTO: ISTOCK

# Land-grant universities design programs for mental health

*Mental stress can manifest into physical symptoms that lead to an increase in accidents, chronic illness and substance abuse. Land-grant universities across the country are addressing this issue through a variety of programs designed to reduce stress and help people find resources.*

### Successful examples include:

- Professionals at the University of **Arkansas** at Pine Bluff, a historically Black land-grant institution, took a close look at ways to improve the mental health of racial minority populations, many of whom have more fear, anxiety and stress than their Caucasian counterparts. They are exploring ways in which self-care activities, complemented with creative sewing and craft, and mentoring can improve health concerns among seniors.
- Recognizing that deployed soldiers are often homesick, especially during the holidays, 4-H professionals with the **Oregon** State University Extension Service found a way to marry this mental health concern with civic engagement training for youth. For the last 12 years, Oregon 4-H'ers have made, stuffed and sent Christmas stockings and sent personalized holiday cards to over 6,000 deployed soldiers to cheer them up while the youth learned the importance of being involved in their communities.
- A 2020 report from National 4-H showed that 82% of youths want a more open dialogue about mental health issues in the United States. Extension professionals at the University of **California** and the University of **New Hampshire** partnered to develop Mindful Mechanics, a program that teaches youth to check in with their body, manage their thoughts and emotions, focus on the present moment, find reasons to be grateful and use positive self-talk to improve their outlook and visualize joy. Teens who learn these skills report being able to better manage their own mental health and are more prepared to help others.

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- Tobacco use among youths is a challenge across the country. In **Alabama**, more than 25% of teens report using tobacco products, and nearly 20% use e-cigarettes. Extension professionals at Alabama A&M University, a historically black institution, created Alabama Health Rocks!, a 4-H program designed to empower young people with the tools they need to reduce or eliminate tobacco, alcohol and drug use. After 10 hours of training, 76% of youths felt confident enough to say no to vaping and drug use, and 84% understood the dangers of vaping.