

Uniform Mental Health Policy for Higher Education Institutions in Goa

(Issued under the directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in Special Leave to Appeal (Crl.) No(s). 6378/2024)

1. Preamble:

The mental health and well-being of students form an integral part of holistic development and higher education. The National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, emphasises cognitive and affective development, skills, and resilience, ensuring that learners are equipped with 21st-century competencies. The World Health Organisation (WHO, 1948) has defined health as complete physical, mental, and social well-being. With the emerging different concerns of students coming from diverse backgrounds, rising academic pressures, socio-economic challenges, and transitional stresses, students are at heightened risk of stress, anxiety, depression, and self-harm.

Recognising this, the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in *Sukdeb Saha v. State of Andhra Pradesh and others, in Special Leave to Appeal (Crl.) No(s). 6378 of 2024, dated 25th July 2025* underscored the constitutional and moral duty of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to safeguard the *Right to Life and Dignity of students* under Article 21 of the Constitution of India by ensuring safety and welfare of students, including mental health support. Exercising its powers under Articles 32 and 141 of the Constitution of India, the Court has issued binding guidelines requiring all educational institutions to adopt a uniform mental health policy.

This ***Uniform Mental Health Policy for Higher Education Institutions in Goa*** integrates the judicially mandated Guidelines with National frameworks, including MANODARPAN Initiative, 2020; the National Suicide Prevention Strategy, 2022; NCERT UMMEED Guidelines, 2023; and UGC Guidelines for Promotion of Physical Fitness, Sports, Students' Health, Welfare, Psychological



and Emotional Well Being at Higher Educational Institutions of India, 2023 to strengthen protective factors, reduce risks, and create supportive environments for students in Higher Education in the State of Goa.

2. Objectives of the Policy:

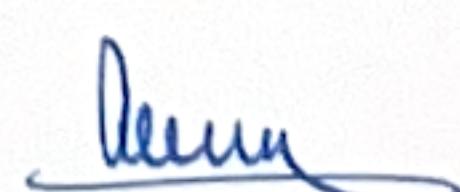
- i. To foster a supportive and inclusive campus culture in HEIs that promotes the resilience and well-being of students.
- ii. To build capacity among faculty, staff, peers, and parents in the HEIs.
- iii. To establish preventive mechanisms in every HEI to ensure timely intervention and become responsive to students in distress.
- iv. To institutionalise periodic appraisal and accountability for the mental health and well-being of students in HEIs.
- v. To operationalise the binding Supreme Court Guidelines in Goa's higher education sector.
- vi. To integrate national strategies with state-level implementation for coherence and accountability.

3. Scope and Applicability of the Policy:

This Policy applies to all HEIs established or operating in the State of Goa, including the Goa University, all Private Universities, all Government colleges, all Government-Aided colleges, and Private Colleges.

4. Establishment of Students Wellness Centre (SWC) by HEIs:

- i. Every HEI shall have a Students Wellness Centre (SWC) responsible for dealing with and managing the problems of the students related to stress and emotional adjustment.
- ii. Any faculty member with a position equivalent to or above the Associate Professor's rank in a discipline like Psychology, Physical



Education and Sports, Psychiatry, Social Work, or Sociology, to be the Director of SWC. If the HEI does not have these disciplines, collaboration with other institutes/ university departments may be explored.

- iii. The SWC shall have at least one dedicated, professionally trained College Counsellor / Psychologist working under its Director. (HEIs to establish referral linkages where in-house staff are unavailable).
- iv. The SWC shall conduct counselling, guidance, and physical and mental health services online, in person, through a telephone helpline, or in group counselling sessions, depending upon the circumstances for the students in distress or at risk, and maintain confidentiality in its work.
- v. The SWC shall work in close collaboration with psychiatrists and other mental health professionals of the medical institutions located in the vicinity.
- vi. The SWC to have a minimum of two consultative meetings in each academic year with representatives of the Student Council, Parents and Teachers Association, NGOs working on Mental Health and Wellness and Medical or Mental Health Experts to foster a supportive and inclusive campus culture in HEIs that promotes the resilience and well-being of students.
- vii. The SWC in collaboration with various other Cells in the HEIs, such as Equal Opportunity Cell, SC/ST Cell, Gender Equity Cell and Students Welfare/Grievance Committee work for Zero Tolerance to Harassment and ensure that there is an established, robust, confidential, and accessible mechanism in the HEI for reporting, immediate redressal, and prevention of incidents involving sexual assault, harassment, ragging, and bullying on the basis of caste, class, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, or ethnicity by providing psycho-social support to victims.



- viii. The SWC, in collaboration with the Career Counselling Cell, shall provide regular, structured career counselling services for students and their parents or guardians to reduce unrealistic academic pressure, promote awareness of diverse academic and professional pathways, and assist students in making informed and interest-based career decisions.
- ix. The SWC shall conduct anonymous surveys and take feedback about the steps taken or any improvements to be made in the HEI for supporting the students' mental health and well-being.

5. Capacity Building by the HEIs:

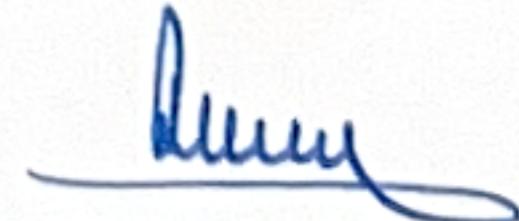
- i. All HEIs shall conduct mandatory training at least twice a year to the teaching and non-teaching staff through certified mental health professionals on psychological first-aid, identification of warning signs, response to self-harm, and referral mechanisms. The enclosed *Annexure A – Practical Tips for Staff* is to be shared with the Staff.
- ii. All HEIs shall ensure that all teaching and non-teaching staff are adequately trained to engage with students from vulnerable and marginalised backgrounds, especially SC/ST/OBC/EWS, LGBTQ+ and PwDs, in a sensitive, inclusive, and non-discriminatory manner.
- iii. All HEIs shall annually organise sensitisation programmes (physical and/or online) for parents and guardians on student mental health to avoid placing students under undue academic pressure, to recognise signs in students of psychological distress, and to respond empathetically and supportively in such situations. The enclosed *Annexure B – Practical Tips to Families* is to be shared with parents and guardians.
- iv. All HEIs shall integrate mental health literacy, emotional regulation, life skills education, and awareness of institutional support services into student orientation programmes and co-curricular activities. The

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enclosed *Annexure C – Practical Tips to Students* is to be shared with Students.

6. Institutional Responsibilities:

- i. All HEIs shall adopt and implement this Uniform Mental Health Policy and publish the same on the institutional websites and official WhatsApp groups.
- ii. All HEIs with 100 or more students must engage at least one qualified counsellor/psychologist/social worker trained in student mental health. (HEIs to have with referral linkages where in-house staff are unavailable).
- iii. All HEIs shall ensure optimal student-to-counsellor ratios, especially during examination periods and academic transitions (dedicated mentors) to provide consistent, informal, personalised and confidential support.
- iv. All HEIs shall refrain from engaging in batch segregation based on academic performance or public shaming.
- v. All HEIs shall establish written protocols for immediate referral to mental health services, local hospitals, and suicide prevention helplines. Suicide helpline numbers, including Tele-MANAS and other national services, shall be prominently displayed on the institutional websites and official WhatsApp groups.
- vi. All HEIs shall prioritise extracurricular activities, including sports, arts, and personality development initiatives.
- vii. All HEIs, in consultation with their affiliating University, as the case may be, shall review the Examination pattern periodically to reduce academic burden and to cultivate a broader sense of identity among students beyond test scores and ranks.



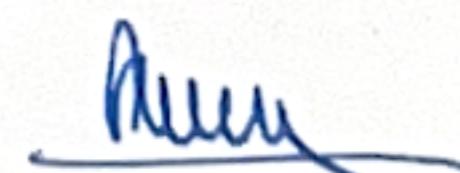
- viii. All HEIs, including hostel owners, wardens and caretakers, shall take proactive steps to ensure that campuses remain free from harassment, bullying, drugs, and other harmful substances, thereby ensuring a safe and healthy living and learning environment for all students.
- ix. All HEIs shall install tamper-proof ceiling fans or equivalent safety devices, and shall restrict access to rooftops, balconies, and other high-risk areas, in order to deter impulsive acts of self-harm.
- x. All HEIs shall submit an annual report indicating the number of wellness interventions, student referrals, training sessions, and mental health-related activities to the Goa State Nodal Officer for the National Task Force, with an email intimation to its regulatory body.

7. Accountability:

- i. The Policy shall be strictly adhered to by all HEIs established or operating in the State of Goa,
- ii. Failure to implement this policy shall be treated as Institutional culpability and shall invite legal and regulatory consequences, as per the Supreme Court's directions.
- iii. The Head of HEI, along with its Management, shall bear direct responsibility for compliance.

8. Review of the Policy:

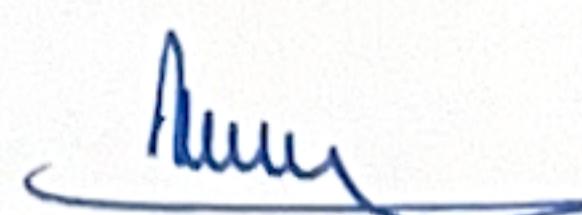
This policy shall be reviewed every five years, or earlier if mandated by any regulatory authority by the Directorate of Higher Education, Government of Goa, Porvorim.



ANNEXURE A - Practical Tips for Staff – Help Students Feel Safe to Talk

(The role of staff is not to be therapists, but to be first-line supporters.)

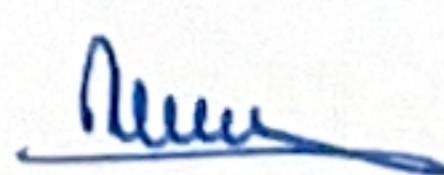
- 1. Model Healthy Behaviours Yourself:** Make sure you take care of your own physical and emotional well-being. Show balance, take breaks, and talk about positive coping strategies.
- 2. Be Visible and Approachable:** Keep office doors open during drop-in hours, walk around informally, and share small personal stories to appear relatable.
- 3. Be an Active Listener and Use Empathetic Language:** Listen without rushing to fix the difficulty. Use supportive language and impactful words that reduce stigma.
- 4. Notice Warning Signs:** Look for changes in attendance, mood, or behaviour. Check in gently and privately.
- 5. Learn and Share Referral Pathways:** Know the counsellors, helplines, and referral systems and share with them the sources from which they can get help.
- 6. Protect Confidentiality, but know your duty of care:** Reassure students about privacy, but involve professionals if safety is at risk.
- 7. Create Inclusive and Affirming Spaces:** Respect names/pronouns, celebrate diversity, and call out bullying or discrimination.
- 8. Check in during High-Risk Periods:** Provide extra support during exams, results, or big transitions like first-year entry.
- 9. Show Small, Consistent care:** Greet students by name, acknowledge effort, and send encouraging notes or messages.
- 10. Encourage and Empower:** Empower your students and others to seek help for distress and mental health support.



ANNEXURE B - Practical Tips for Families – Support your Child

(A home that is understanding, non-judgmental, and supportive is the strongest protective factor against stress and self-harm.)

1. **Maintain Dignity and Respect Privacy:** Allow privacy and space as your ward is a grown-up now and needs his/her own space. Communicate with respect to create a healthy environment at home.
2. **Avoid Excessive Academic Pressure:** Encourage effort, learning, and resilience and not just marks, ranks, or placements. Appreciate small progress.
3. **Respect Independence and Boundaries:** Allow students to make choices about career, friends, and routine. Balance guidance with autonomy.
4. **Normalise Conversations about Feelings:** Talk openly about stress, failure, and coping strategies, which is the best way to build trust. Share your own healthy ways of dealing with challenges.
5. **Recognise Warning Signs:** Watch for withdrawal, irritability, extreme mood swings, restrained eating, sleep issues, or loss of interest.
6. **Support Healthy Lifestyle Habits:** Encourage regular sleep, balanced meals, physical exercises, yoga, mindfulness meditation, and digital detox among family members.
7. **Celebrate Diversity of Strengths:** Value creativity, teamwork, kindness, and resilience and not only academic achievement.
8. **Stay Connected without Being Controlling:** Check in regularly with short calls or messages. Show care, not surveillance.
9. **Promote Safe Social and Peer Networks:** Encourage friendships, extracurricular activities, and community involvement.
10. **Have a Healthy Home Environment:** While it is difficult for all to deal with their respective challenges, it is vital for everyone's emotional and physical health to have a peaceful atmosphere at home.



ANNEXURE C – Practical Tips for Students

(Taking care of your body, mind, and soul is just as important as studying.)

1. **Eat Balanced Diet and Stay Hydrated:** Eat a healthy, balanced diet and keep yourself well hydrated. Limit excess caffeine and energy drinks.
2. **Set Everyday Me-Time:** Work on strength-based skills for a living. Even 20 minutes of walking, stretching, or sports boosts mood, reduces stress hormones, and sharpens memory.
3. **Identify, Label and Accept Your Feeling:** It's important to know and observe yourself to understand how your thoughts and emotions are impacting you.
4. **Practice Digital Balance:** Limit doom-scrolling, especially at night. Use technology for learning, hobbies, and connecting and not for comparison.
5. **Manage Academic Stress Smartly:** Break work into smaller tasks, use planners, and avoid last-minute cramming. Seek help if required.
6. **Identify Your Strengths:** Think back to high and low points in your life with a compassionate and open heart, and reflect on what you learned about your unique strengths.
7. **Stay away from harmful coping methods:** Avoid alcohol, drugs, or self-harm as stress relievers. They worsen mental health and create long-term problems.
8. **Work on Family and Social Support:** Build rewarding connections with individuals and groups. Discuss your thoughts and share your concerns with anyone freely.
9. **Be kind to yourself:** Celebrate small wins, forgive mistakes, and remind yourself you are more than grades. Practice self-compassion.
10. **Ask for Professional Help:** Connecting with a counsellor does not mean that you have a mental health issue. All problems cannot be solved by one individual. Seeking help is a strength.

