

Why Extension is Uniquely Positioned

Extension is uniquely positioned to advance mental health and well-being for many reasons:



New Mental Well-being Research

Cooperative Extension's purpose is to translate research into practical, accessible education that improves lives. The growth of new mental well-being research holds promise for supporting the health and well-being of Extension constituents.



Prevention and Promotion

Extension's core mission prioritizes prevention and promotion so that communities and individuals have the resources they need for healthy living.



Foundational to Extension

Mental well-being intersects with Extension's existing work in nutrition, youth development, agriculture, family life, and community resilience. Whether supporting stress management in farmers, building social-emotional skills in youth, or promoting healthy aging, mental well-being is already embedded across Extension's programs.



A Trusted Community Presence

With educators embedded in counties nationwide, Extension maintains longstanding relationships, with schools, farms, and families, for example. This trust creates an ideal platform for integrating mental well-being into existing programs without requiring new infrastructure, and also enables culturally relevant, locally tailored approaches.

Key Distinctions

Clinical Services VS. Extension

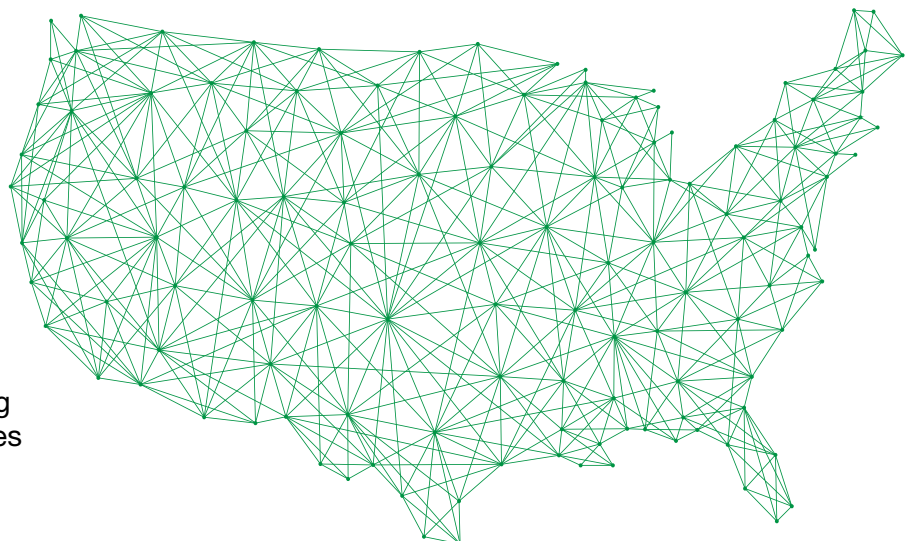
Clinical mental health services focus on diagnosis and treatment, typically delivered by licensed professionals in healthcare settings. Extension operates upstream through prevention, education, and community capacity-building. Extension professionals are not therapists; they equip individuals and communities with tools to manage stress, build resilience, strengthen relationships, and access resources. This population-level approach reduces stigma and increases early support.

CLINICAL SERVICES	VS	EXTENSION
Scope Diagnosis & Treatment		Scope Prevention & Education
Delivered By Licensed Professionals		Delivered By Extension Professionals (Not Therapists)
Approach Healthcare Settings		Approach Community-Level, Capacity Building



Population-Level Approach

Reaches people who may not engage with formal systems, reduces stigma.



Recommended Action Steps

The following steps provide a practical roadmap for institutions seeking to engage in mental health and well-being work:

Assess Community Needs and Strengths

Conduct assessments and engage stakeholders to identify gaps and resources, prioritize populations, and align efforts with local needs.



Strengthen and Build Partnerships

Collaborate with local health departments, behavioral health providers, healthcare systems, and community organizations to build relationships, change systems, create referral pathways and strengthen community impact.



Start with Existing Resources

Find and use mental well-being curricula, teaching resources, and activities that promote mental wellbeing. Learn what others are doing:

► <https://connect.extension.org/g/mental-health-and-well-being>



Integrate into Existing Programs

Embed mental health concepts into current initiatives such as nutrition education, 4-H youth development, agriculture, family life, and community programming.



Leverage Research-based Curricula

Utilize research-backed programs focused on mindfulness, resilience, mental well-being, and trauma-informed approaches.



Train Staff and Volunteers

Provide professional development opportunities that promote mental wellbeing, including:

- developing community partnerships with mental health agencies
- collaborating to change service systems and promote prevention
- facilitating community conversations about mental health and wellness
- delivering mental wellbeing curricula, resources and public health messages



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