

# A GUIDE TO SURVIVING AND THRIVING AT CUNY

Third Edition: Fall 2021 - Spring 2022



# WELCOME

Welcome back to CUNY to all returning students. With the return to the campus, the availability of vaccines, and new policies and procedures in place to protect CUNY's students, faculty, and staff, many of us are looking forward to an academic year that makes it easier to survive and thrive in school and life than it has been since the COVID-19 pandemic struck in February 2020.

For those of you enrolling in CUNY for the first time this semester, a special welcome to you. We wish you every success in your new life as a CUNY student.

This third edition of **Surviving and Thriving at CUNY** was written by CUNY students, faculty, and staff for CUNY students. Our goal is to provide you with a go-to source of information, services, resources and support to help you protect your health, succeed in school, find the help you need as CUNY and New York City continue to recover from the pandemic.

Based on feedback from readers of the past two editions, we have shortened and stream lined the Guide to make it easier to use. On page 5 you'll find table of contents that has links to each of the sections. If you want ideas for solving academic challenges, for example, click on the chapter called Succeeding in School. If you want to learn more about coping with stress, anxiety or depression, click on the Chapter called Overcoming Mental Health Challenges. Or you can just browse through the pages, seeing what looks helpful to you. Each section has numerous links to other sources of support.

We also ask you to share this Guide with your friends, class mates, organizations, and social networks. What we have learned from the pandemic is that when we all look out for each other, we are best able to overcome even the most serious threats to our well-being.

*Sincerely,*

*The Healthy CUNY COVID-19 Work Group*

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We invite our readers to submit reactions, suggestions and corrections to [HealthyCUNY@sph.cuny.edu](mailto:HealthyCUNY@sph.cuny.edu).



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We could not have produced this guide without the support, advice and resources contributed by these and other individuals, but we note that the opinions expressed in this Guide are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of CUNY or our advisers. This third version of the guide was prepared from July to November 2021 and reflects information gathered through November 2021.

We invite our readers to submit reactions, suggestions and corrections to [HealthyCUNY@sph.cuny.edu](mailto:HealthyCUNY@sph.cuny.edu).



# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Are we nuts? Preparing a 93 page guide for CUNY students who have trouble finding time to eat, sleep, study, work, take care of kids, much less have fun? Forgive us, please, and let us explain. We really wanted to put in one place all the resources and support that can help CUNY students survive and thrive in the pandemic and beyond. In our experience, if you have to go to 3 different sites for 3 different problems, you may never find what you need. So, we wanted to offer a one stop shop for information and help.

## Here are three ways you can use the guide:

1. Start with a problem you are facing now. Are you feeling stressed out, anxious, or depressed? Click on the words “2. Overcoming Mental Health Challenges” and you will go right to that section to start looking for help. Having trouble getting enough to eat? Click on “4. Meeting Essential Needs” below and go right to the food security section. Skim this table of contents and go the section where you need help.

2. Become a resource for your friends and peers. Read over the whole guide, a section at a time at a pace that works for you. That way if you or a friend faces a specific problem, you will know where to go or refer your friend. You can text, email, message the right page of the guide and the link to the person in need.

3. Faculty can use the Guide as well. Ask your students to read and comment on specific sections, include the link on your syllabi and websites, refer individual students who come to you for help to the needed resources. We hope the Guide helps you get the help you need and we welcome your feedback and suggestions.

*Healthy CUNY COVID-19 Work Group*

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## The guide has three goals:

1. **Provide a one-stop guide of health, academic, financial, and basic needs services** at CUNY and in the community that can help us overcome the problems they we may face at CUNY and beyond
2. **Offer the emotional support and social connections** that can help each of us find the strength and will to solve the problems we face in pursuing our education at CUNY this semester and beyond
3. **Encourage all of us to become advocates for ourselves** within CUNY and beyond and to become a collective force that can help CUNY to better meet our changing needs

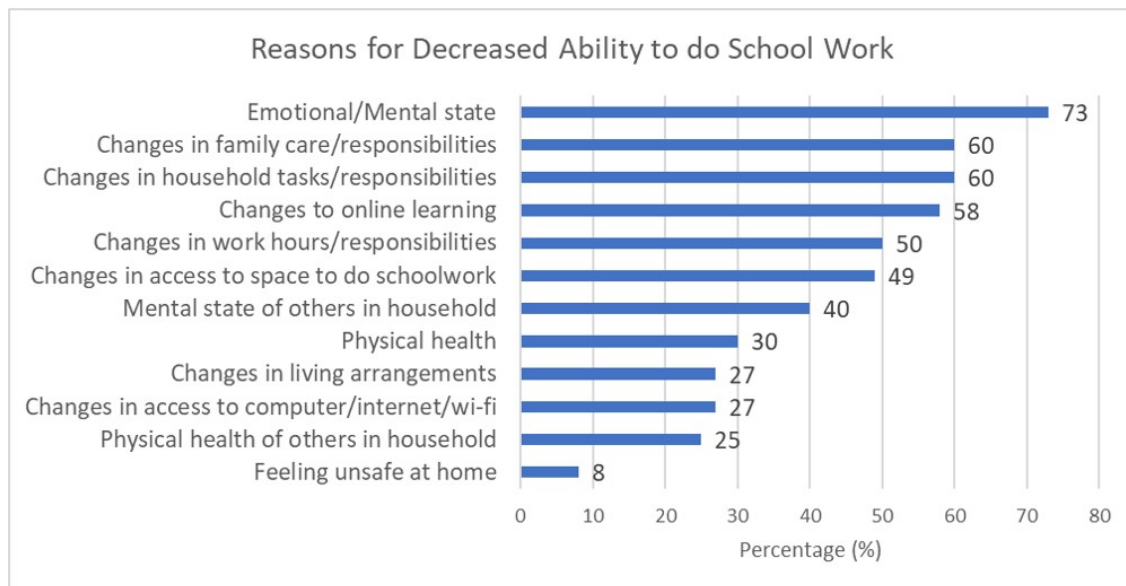
## How did we prepare this guide?

The starting point was a survey we conducted in April 2020 in which more than 2,000 students throughout CUNY told us about their COVID-19-related experiences. You'll find data from the survey in the Guide and also quotes from some of the more than 700 students who told us their personal stories in the survey. All responses are anonymous. We did another survey in April 2021 to see how people were faring a year later and you'll find some of those results too.

Over the summer of 2020, a team of CUNY students, faculty and staff worked together to create this Guide. We also met with student leaders, CUNY staff, and others to get their input. We reviewed more than three dozen other guides and conducted internet searches to find the most helpful resources.

To survive and thrive at CUNY requires information from trusted sources. CUNY students trust and rely on CUNY for information, but we also rely on fellow students who know the unique challenges we face. The students who helped write this guide have faced and continue to face the issues covered here.





*“As a visual and tactile learner, I am having a VERY hard time adjusting to taking online classes.”*

*“Since the epidemic began, unfortunately only my uncle is working and we are trying to make ends meet with the rent and the utility bills. It’s been stressful because some days we eat less just to be cautious of how much money is being spent.”*

The HealthyCUNY COVID-19 Survey asked students to describe how the pandemic was interfering with their schoolwork. More than half said they were having more trouble focusing on school. The chart above, and the student quotes above show some of the reasons. The responses show some of the reasons. In the Guide we provide some strategies for addressing each of these problems. (HealthyCUNY Survey on the Effect of COVID-19 on CUNY Students, Spring 2020).

The Guide has seven sections and readers can click on the title below to go right to the section that will help address the issue(s) we are facing today—or readers can read through the whole guide to learn more and be able to help your friends if they need assistance.

**1. Succeeding in School** describes how students can solve some of the educational challenges that COVID-19 has created including doing well in your courses, solving tech problems, contacting your professors, what to do if you or a friend are thinking of dropping out, and how to overcome financial problems that make it hard to stay in school.

**2. Overcoming Mental Health Challenges** helps readers tell the difference between everyday worries and mental health problems; provides tips and resources for overcoming depression, anxiety, and stress; identifies sources of help for family or partner violence and substance abuse; and explains different types of mental health care and informal support.

**3. Protecting Your Health** explains how to maintain wellness by getting enough sleep and exercise, protecting your vision, getting needed immunizations and finding sexual and reproductive health care. Since the pandemic has unsettled our health care system, this section also helps students find timely information about COVID-19 vaccination and other COVID-related services. Finally, it helps readers find a regular provider of health care and explains how to get and use health insurance that can cover your medical expenses.

**4. Meeting Essential Needs (Food, Housing, Financial and Other)** helps readers to get what everybody needs to survive and thrive: enough food, safe shelter, an income, financial stability, and employment. For each of these basic needs, the guide connects students to both campus- and community-based resources and information.

**5. Meeting Your Unique Needs** describes the particular needs of such groups of CUNY students as parents or caretakers of children, immigrant and international students, students with disabilities, LGBTQI students, and students working in low wage or essential jobs. Each of these groups faces many of the challenges described in previous sections, but this section pays attention to your unique needs if you belong to one of these groups.

**6. Overcoming Racism and Discrimination** connects CUNY students with information and resources that can help overcome some of the old and new ways that CUNY students experience systemic and other forms of racism, discrimination, and prejudice. It considers the special challenges faced by Black, Latinx, Asian-American, female, and LGBTQI students and their families and how each of these groups can cope with, respond to, and ultimately dismantle these negative forces.

**7. Making "Good Trouble for a Better USA, New York, and CUNY** provides readers with with information, resources and support that allows them to act individually and collectively to improve their lives at CUNY and in the larger society. It connects what students can do for themselves to get what they need to stay healthy and succeed in school and life and what students, faculty and CUNY can do together to make CUNY and NYC a better place to study, learn, work and live.



# SUCCEEDING IN SCHOOL

One of our major goals in creating this guide is to help students like us be successful in our educational careers during the pandemic and beyond. With the Spring 2020 shift to distance learning, many students expressed difficulties operating some of the programs used to attend classes (e.g. Zoom, Blackboard, etc. as well as difficulty engaging and communicating remotely. Others found it extremely hard to focus on their home environment, balance competing responsibilities with food, housing and financial insecurity, along with coping with grief, loss, and feelings of uncertainty. The transition to distance learning happened quickly, and for some, with extraordinarily little time to adjust. But CUNY students are resilient. While this academic year brings a new set of challenges for some students, we are determined to continue toward our academic goals.

This portion of the guide is aimed at helping our fellow CUNY students to maximize our ability to study, troubleshoot technological issues, manage difficult communications, and provide readers with tools and resources to help us complete our degree or program.

## Maximizing Studying to Succeed in School

### Learning Styles

Along our educational journey, some of us may have discovered what learning style works best for us. For some, distance learning enhanced the ability to learn and retain information. However, for many others, the transition to distance learning complicated the learning experience. In our April 2020 survey, **about 54% of students reported that changes to online learning had affected their ability to do schoolwork.** As one student wrote, **"I'm a person that thrives in physical educational settings because I benefit from listening to classmates' questions and this is an obstacle I cannot overcome or adapt to with distance learning."** Other students may find they do well with online or hybrid learning. Another student explained in our Spring 2021 COVID follow up survey, **"On my education experience, it has had a good impact, my GPA has risen due to the fact that I have time to do my assignments although I have a lot of family responsibilities."**

Whether we are attending classes remotely or in-person, it may be beneficial to know and understand what learning style works best for each of us. This may make it easier to identify methods and learning hacks to increase our performance and hopefully improve our overall educational experience.

# THE MOST COMMON LEARNING STYLES

**VISUAL:** Individuals learn best through observation and visual presentation often using diagrams, pictures, and figures

**AUDITORY:** Individuals learn best through listening and verbal instructions

**READING/WRITING:** Individuals learn best by taking notes in lectures and reading textbooks

**KINESTHETIC/PHYSICAL:** Individuals learn best through physical manipulation of objects and gaining experience via practice. Click here for more information on learning styles.

If you're unsure what learning style best fits you, [here is an online questionnaire](#) that may help narrow it down. Additional information about learning styles can be found at [Time4Learning](#).

More recently, three additional styles have been included in the discussion around learning:

**LOGICAL INDIVIDUALS:** Learn best when they can apply logic, reasoning, and a scientific way of thinking

**SOCIAL INDIVIDUALS:** Learn best by working in groups

**SOLITARY INDIVIDUALS:** Prefer to self-study and work alone

By identifying how you learn best, you may be able to find strategies to facilitate learning remotely based on your needs. Some potential strategies are discussed in the following sections.

*\*Tip: For example, if you know you are a visual learner, using a service like Khan Academy may be helpful in lieu of in-person classes.\**

## Online Resources and Study Groups

Even though most of our classes will be conducted via distance learning, we can still connect with our classmates online. Setting up regular calls with a group of peers can help you carve out time to do classwork or have the company of people whom you can bounce ideas off of while studying.

**Here are some ways to initiate finding study buddies and creating study groups:**

- Join your college's student page on Facebook and post your schedule early in the semester - asking if anyone shares classes with you and propose exchanging contact information to create a study group.
- Contact your professor to facilitate the exchange of contact information in your class. **Here are some [email templates to help you ask professors for their support.](#)**

- Propose a regularly scheduled Zoom call among your friends and/or students from previous classes. You can work on your own assignments in the company of other people, have regular check-ins during the call and set small goals to hold each other accountable.

**And for those who prefer learning on your own, online resources can help solidify concepts for a variety of courses:**

- [Khan Academy](#) An educational organization that produces short lessons in the form of videos on a wide variety of topic areas
- [Coursera](#) An online learning resource that offers massive open online courses, specializations, degrees, professional and courses
- [EdX](#) A massive open online course provider created by Harvard and MIT

***"I am medicated for severe ADHD. While medication helps, the school environment is an essential component of being able to stay focused. Without the traditional school environment, I face more challenges from my ADHD."***

We recognize that many students with learning disabilities like ADHD may experience different educational challenges. CUNY campuses have robust disability service offices and programs to ensure that students receive the accommodations that they need. Click here for more information about CUNY Disability Services. See here for an email and phone directory of campus disability services centers organized by campus.



## Plan, Organize, and Avoid Distractions

“When my mom is at work, I have to stay home babysitting my autistic brother. Home services have been cancelled and we are not receiving the care services that we received for my brother before the pandemic.”

Of the students that responded to our Spring 2020 survey, about 56% reported dropping or withdrawing from courses due to feeling anxious, distracted, or not being able to focus on schoolwork. Distractions at home are sometimes unavoidable. It's important to accept what we cannot change and focus on the things we can.

Here are some tips for fostering a more productive work environment both physically and mentally:

- **Make a “to do” list of everything you have to get done**, including anything pressing in your personal and professional life. Organize items by course and include due dates.
- **Use a calendar to map out time to study**, as well as personal and professional obligations including time to have fun. Be flexible and open to change. Sometimes seeing everything in a calendar can illuminate an imbalance and need for amendment. It's important to budget time for all of one's priorities.
- **Keep a neat and organized work area (if possible)**. Utilize the space in front of a window as a workspace to increase sunlight exposure. Add plants and colorful pictures to make the scene aesthetically pleasing. Use a white noise machine, fan, or air purifier on high, or noise-canceling headphones to block out any distracting noises.
- **Create a schedule with your housemates**, if possible, to communicate the times you need a certain space, or you need silence and the absence of distractions. Negotiate and communicate your needs.

## Combating Procrastination, Anxiety, and Writer's Block

Our survey showed that many students struggled with procrastination, motivation, and concentration affecting their ability to do their coursework. We recognize that many of us are experiencing changes in our work environment, learning environment, and the responsibilities we must take on.

### A Student Speaks on Combating Procrastination

As a professional procrastinator, I find that the most difficult and time-consuming part of completing a school assignment or any other large project is simply the initial decision to open up the work and start. It will take me three weeks to read the instructions of an assignment I only have a month to complete.

Although it seems counterintuitive, not knowing the amount of work I must do seems less overwhelming than knowing and being concerned about it for weeks.

As they say, "ignorance is bliss."

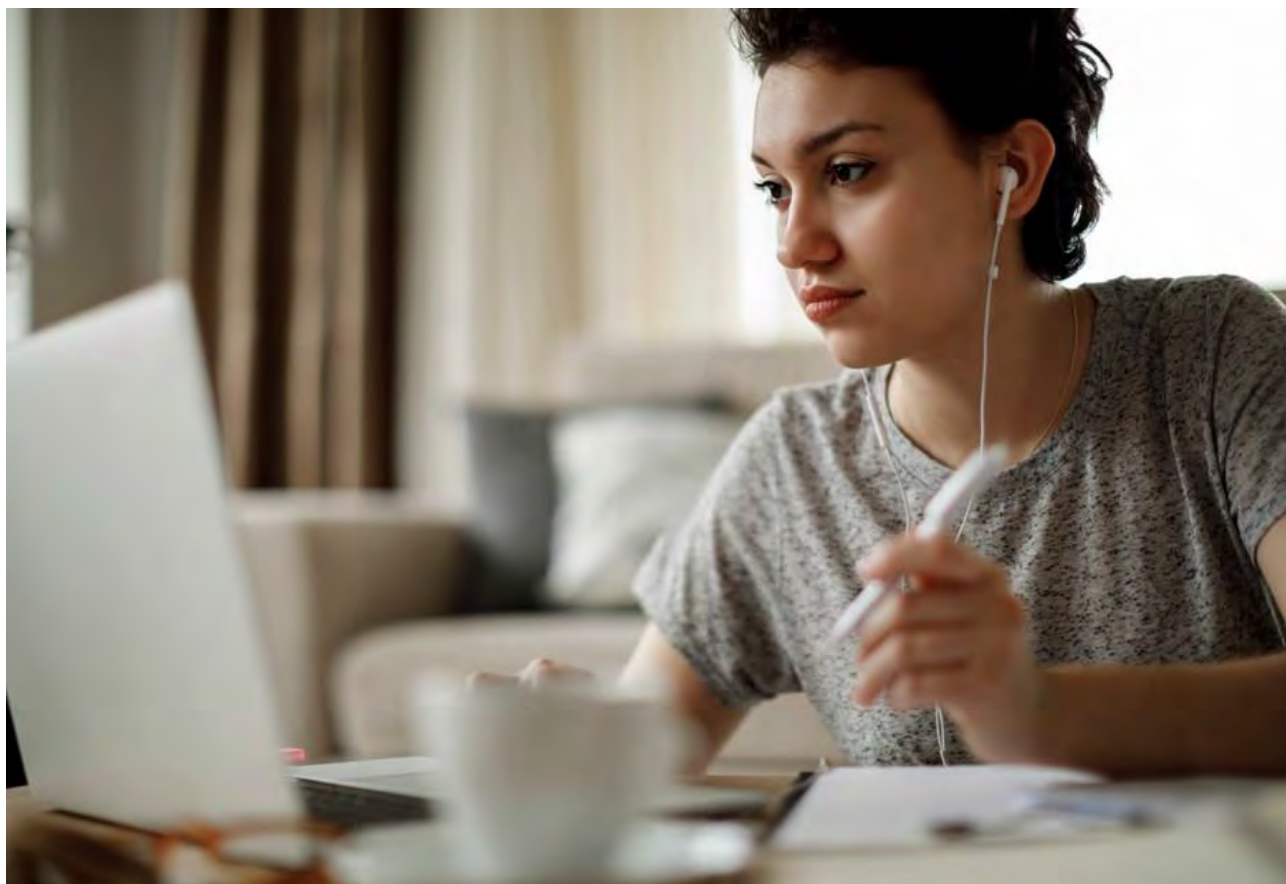
Here are some tips for combating procrastination, anxiety, and writer's block:

- **Just start writing even** if it's gibberish at first, just start writing. Starting is often the hardest part and once you're on a roll, the words will flow, and the block will dissipate.
- **Study with others** even if they are not working on the same type of assignment, you are their studious energy will rub off on you and should help generate productivity. Surround yourself with trusted friends and peers.
- **Take a break and dance, sing, act silly**, clean your work/living space, take a walk, do an activity that distracts you from your schoolwork and momentarily helps release your anxiety. Sometimes the anxiety of not being able to do work paralyzes us and makes it harder to do work. Getting your mind off of the source of anxiety can help you move past the negative feelings

and self-doubts that were hindering you. Do an activity that increases your self-confidence and promotes self-love to overcome obstacles that originally feel insurmountable.

## Engaging with Content, Students, and Professors

The survey responses have made it clear that it can be really difficult to meaningfully engage with your coursework and class over a screen. Many of us have found ourselves shuffled into a different home environment, with new spaces, distractions and responsibilities that affect our focus and ability to engage in class. Below are some resources for navigating these issues. Because even as we return to campus, online and hybrid communications are likely to be part of our learning experience.



# Tech Resources

## Zoom and Blackboard Tips

With a shift to distance learning, we found ourselves having to spend more time on online platforms such as Zoom and Blackboard. Below are some resources from CUNY and the platform sites themselves to assist you in using them for your classes (and potentially study groups!).



- **The City College of New York's Instructional Guide (CCNY) Office of Information Technology** wrote an instructional guide for campus staff and students on basic Zoom features. While some sections are pertinent to CCNY students (e.g., setting up an individual CCNY Zoom account), other sections can be applicable to any CUNY student. For example, the guide provides easy to read sections on features available during a Zoom meeting and how to pass off host responsibilities. [The Instructional Guide can be accessed here.](#)
- **The CUNY School of Law Zoom Tips:** [Click here](#) for student tips for participating in online learning, including Zoom tips and links for commonly-used features and functions such as screen-sharing.
- **Virtual Backgrounds:** If you are signing onto a meeting with your webcam turned on, Zoom allows you to change your background with a Virtual Background feature. You might opt for a virtual background, for instance, if you feel that your surroundings could be distracting. You can enable this feature before you're on a call or during one. [For more on backgrounds, click here.](#)

- **Blackboard Tips** While many professors had already coupled their coursework with Blackboard, we want to acknowledge that some of us have had to use the platform a lot more with the transition to distance learning, and that some may not be familiar with all aspects of the platform. We have compiled some helpful resources below:
  - **Blackboard Accessibility** For a section created by Blackboard on its accessibility features [click here](#). For information regarding visual impairments, [see here](#). [Click here](#) if you are using Blackboard with a hearing impairment; [here](#) if you have a mobility impairment; and [here](#) if you have a learning disability.
  - **CUNY Assistive Technology Services** You can reach out to a team of assistive technology specialists by emailing [CATS@cuny.edu](mailto:CATS@cuny.edu). For more information about their support services offered, [click here](#).
  - **Blackboard Collaborate** Some professors may use Blackboard Collaborate, a web conferencing system built into Blackboard. CUNY has compiled some links on using the platform [here](#). [Click here](#) for information on best practices; [here](#) for a guide on how to join sessions; and [here](#) for a guide on participating in breakout groups.
  - **Blackboard Mobile Application** You can download a Blackboard mobile application to interact with your courses. [Click here](#) for a CUNY resource that provides links to help you navigate the app. For example, information on how to participate in discussions can be [found here](#), while information on how to view course content on the app can be [accessed here](#).
  - **Additional Blackboard Guides** You can also find more guides on using Blackboard as a student [here](#). For tips on how to prevent losing your work, [click here](#). For information on how to check if an assignment was submitted, [click here](#).
  - **Give yourself time before a deadline** to submit your assignment. If your submission on Blackboard did not go through and it caused you to miss your deadline, email your professor immediately with your document.



# Communicating with CUNY Professors and Administration

## Email Templates

There is only so much that professors can glean about a student's life from their class. As CUNY students, our responsibilities often stretch beyond our academics, and our lives can be a lot more complicated than what our professors see on the screen. Outside of the classroom, we might be juggling a second job, taking care of our family members, or struggling to find a safe place to sleep.

**It can be hard to reach out to our professors to let them know where we are at, but early and proactive communication—to the extent that it's possible—could make a class more manageable in the long run.**

[Here you can find some email templates](#) to foster conversations with professors about any concerns you might have either at the start of the semester or as they come up later.

**Tip for Students with Learning Disabilities:** Campuses have robust disability service offices and programs to ensure that students receive the accommodations that they need. [Click here](#) for more information about CUNY Disability Services. [See here](#) for an email and phone directory of campus disability services centers organized by campus.

## Who Else Can Students Contact with Problems?

If you are not getting the support you need from a professor, you can forward communications to your campus' Dean of Students with an explanation of the issue. CC the Dean of Students on any continuing communication with said professor. The Dean of Students' contact information can be found in each school's campus directory.

- **CUNY Central:** If the issue persists you can bring up the matter to CUNY Central. Forward correspondence with professor along with an explanation to CUNY Central Student Affairs at [studentaffairs@cuny.edu](mailto:studentaffairs@cuny.edu) detailing the issue. (This includes not only unresponsive professors, but also those going against CUNY Central guidance such as denying an academic recess or requiring in-person classes to pursue a degree in a selected major.)

## What if I'm Thinking of Dropping Out?

“I find it extremely difficult to concentrate because I am in constant fear my child or my elderly parents are going to die. I cry constantly. I try to do my reading but am distracted by the news playing in the tv in the other room. I don't know how I'm going to complete the work for this semester.”

As the quote above illustrates, in Spring 2020, many students reported delayed academics, delayed anticipated graduation date, or having to drop or anticipated dropping one or more classes. The extra stressors still weighing on students, threatening their health and safety as well as their job, housing and food security can leave little energy and decreased prioritization of academics. It is important to be compassionate with one's self and refrain from making any rash decisions in response to stress, depression, and anxiety.



## STEPS TO TAKE BEFORE DROPPING OUT:

- **Contact your advisor and your school's student affairs and student resources** offices to assist you in managing your workload and accessing supports; you can discuss with an advisor reducing your class-load, reconfiguring plans for graduation and being open to taking it slow and steady. Just taking one class continues to propel you closer to your degree.
- **Talk to the financial aid office;** [see financial resources here in the guide](#)
- **Try to find a way to take a break without dropping out by:**
  - » Reducing your class-load.
  - » Taking time off by requesting a leave of absence with the commitment of returning the following semester or year.
  - » Don't let the work you've done thus far go to waste. It's okay to need a break and take some time off to focus on other priorities, but leave the possibility open of coming back and completing your degree.
- **Seek emergency grants** as some are offered on CUNY campuses and/or federal emergency grants.
  - » Seek out other resources to help ease the burden of existing stressors that affect one's ability to do well in school. In our survey, these stressors ranged from housing insecurity, food insecurity, and situations with space and study environment. [Please see here for other resources](#) in our guide to help with food insecurity, financial insecurity, and housing insecurity.
- **Take advantage of tutoring available on each CUNY campus.** For a spreadsheet with the hours of operation, contact information and website for each campus' services, [click here](#).

“My mother got corona virus and she was the only source of income that I had, she’s still in the hospital now and I’m just trying to deal with this all. I dropped an important class that would’ve made me finish this spring but instead I’ll be finishing my semester this summer.”

Being CUNY students ourselves, we understand how important financial stressors are to our overall wellbeing. In our survey, about 54% of students reported a decrease in income, and many students and their families are still struggling financially. While this section of the guide features information to combat some of the technical challenges to succeeding in our educational career, we realize that many students will also need access to information addressing financial challenges. [Please see our Essential Needs section of the guide located here](#) for more on this.



# OVERCOMING MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

As CUNY students, we as authors of this guide, understand how recent world and national events have tested our mental health. And from our own experiences, we also know these stresses affect our ability to effectively study, work, and even navigate daily tasks. This section of the guide aims to help readers understand some of the common mental health issues that CUNY students experience, provide tools to help combat the negative effects, and offer resources to find mental health professionals when self-management is not enough.

*"I couldn't even hear myself think at times due to my two sons taking fully remote classes. I could have done much better if we weren't all stuck at home. Having to redirect both of my sons was very challenging while taking classes myself. However, being able to be part of their education is rewarding."*

Almost half (49%) of the Healthy CUNY Spring 2020 Survey respondents reported an increased need for mental health services to help cope with stress, anxiety or depression due to the pandemic. A year later in our 2021 follow up survey, 24% of responding students said they had received counseling from a mental health professional since the start of the pandemic.

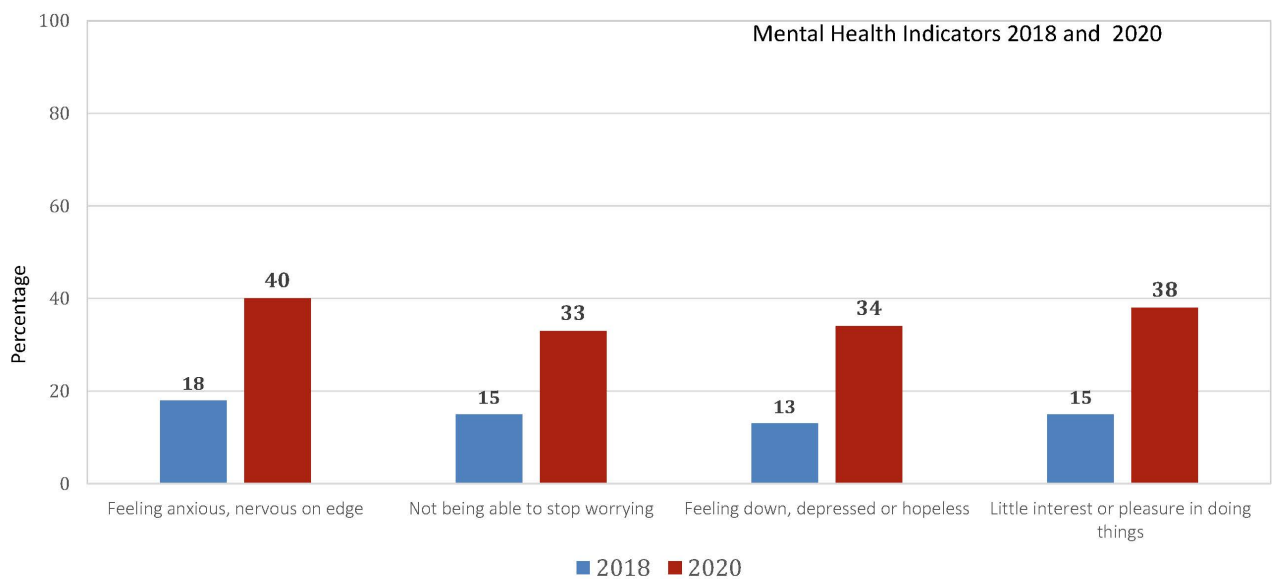


# Anxiety, Stress, and Depression

## Stress

Given the uncertain state of the pandemic, and problems facing our families, our nation and the world, feeling stressed is understandable, maybe even to be expected. In our April 2020 survey, about 37% of CUNY students reported feeling nervous, anxious or on edge more than half the days in the past two weeks. Most commonly, students experienced stress, anxiety, general uncertainty about the future, losing a job or income, living in a state of fear, and grief associated with the loss of a loved one. By Spring 2021, the rate of feeling anxious on more than half the days in the last two weeks in our follow-up sample had dropped to 31%, an important decline but still much higher than in 2018, when it was 18%. Moreover, both at the height of the pandemic and a year later, almost half (47%) of the surveyed students reported that their need for support or assistance around stress, anxiety and depression had increased compared to before the pandemic. As fellow students trying to stay afloat, balancing school, work, family, health, and a slew of other responsibilities, we know how difficult it can be to maintain a healthy mind. So, how do you know when it's just "normal" life stress and when it's more serious? Below are some signs and symptoms of every day, manageable, stress. One student shared, "I feel less motivated due to the increasing distance with my classmates and professors. I am struggling with depression which makes it hard to excel at school."

## Effect on Mental Health



In our survey, about 54% of students reported difficulties with anxiety or depression. A Year later, after the pandemic had subsided (but not ended) a re-survey of a sample showed the rate for this group had decreased.

## Signs and Symptoms of Everyday Stress

- Dizziness or general signs of “being out of it”
- Headaches
- Grinding teeth, clenched jaw
- Increase in or loss of appetite
- Problems sleeping
- Racing heart
- Tiredness/exhaustion
- Lack of motivation or focus
- Upset stomach/ indigestion
- Low mood or withdrawal
- Increased worrying

*“I suffer from depression, and the isolation has been extremely difficult for me - it has brought back feelings of loneliness and exclusion that even with mental health care make it difficult to finish writing my dissertation. I'm mostly focused on making it through each day right now.”*

Without adequate management, stress can prevent you from taking care of things you need to do. If it is persistent, it may reach a level of clinical depression or anxiety. It may also exacerbate other mental health problems such as eating disorders, bipolar disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. To combat stress, it's important to take care of yourself and engage in healthy behaviors such as having balanced meals, exercising, and getting enough sleep. **Even a simple 10-minute walk or getting some sunlight outside can make you feel so much better. It's also helpful to reach out to friends and family and stay connected so that you can get emotional support from people in your life.** For more information and resources related to physical health, check out the Protecting Your Health section of this guide [here](#).

On the other hand, as we will explore later, getting help can make all the difference. After visiting her campus mental health counselor one student told us: *“My counselor is very nice and approachable. It's a resource that has helped my mental health a lot. And I feel myself just getting better and not getting as anxious all the time. And even if I do, I find I have more ways to manage it now. And I'm grateful to have the space to reflect on my thoughts.”*

## Anxiety and Depression

Our 2020 survey results that many CUNY students are facing issues with stress, anxiety, and depression. About 54% of CUNY students indicated that they were experiencing anxiety and/or depression.

One student described how COVID-19 stressed her: “Not being able to see friends, make condolence calls for friends and family that have passed away. Dealing with mental health issues of family members that is heightened because of the virus. Not having space to just be, because there are so many people around all the time.”

### What Exactly is Anxiety?

There are several kinds of anxiety disorders. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness ([NAMI](#)), anxiety disorders each have unique symptoms, but all anxiety disorders have one thing in common: persistent, excessive fear or worry in situations that are not threatening.

Often when people talk about experiencing anxiety, they’re referring to what mental health professionals call Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) which produces chronic, exaggerated worrying about everyday life. This worrying can consume hours each day and make it difficult to concentrate or finish tasks.

Some of the physical and emotional symptoms associated with anxiety disorders include:

#### Emotional Symptoms

- Feelings of apprehension or dread
- Feeling tense or jumpy
- Restlessness or irritability
- Anticipating the worst and being for signs of danger

#### Physical Symptoms

- Pounding or racing heart and shortness of breath
- Sweating, tremors, and twitches
- Headaches, fatigue, and insomnia
- Upset stomach, frequent urination, or diarrhea
- Difficulty focusing
- Excess amounts of migraines caused by stress

## What Exactly is Depression?

It's important to know that most people feel sad at times or go through a rough patch. However, depressive disorder, commonly referred to as depression, is when a person experiences a depressive episode lasting longer than two weeks.

### Symptoms and signs of a depressive disorder include:

- Sadness or low mood
- Loss of interest or loss of pleasure in all activities
- Change in appetite or weight
- Sleep disturbances
- Feeling agitated or feeling slowed down
- Fatigue
- Feelings of low self-worth, guilt, or shortcomings
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Suicidal thoughts or intentions

We know it can be difficult to determine when the symptoms you're feeling are severe enough to seek help. This varies from person to person, making it important for each of us to pay attention to how we react to and handle everyday stress. However, if these or other stress symptoms persist for more than two weeks or begin to affect your ability to function daily, please contact a mental health professional. [Find help here.](#)

## How to Convince Someone You Care About to Seek Mental Health Support

It can be tough to decide whether you need to seek help for depression, anxiety, or high levels of stress. But it can be even tougher to convince someone else, someone you care about or love, that they need help. Mental health professionals suggest these tips for discussing the issue with a friend or family member:

- Be honest –and gentle.
- Choose the right time and place to talk.
- Ask permission first.
- Don't give up too easily.
- Show you care.
- Stick to facts.

If you need more advice, see [this article](#) on how to convince someone you love to go to therapy.

If you are worried that someone close to you is going to hurt themselves or others, call **NYC Well** for help. This city service provides free, confidential mental health support. Speak to a counselor via phone, text or chat and access mental health and substance abuse services available in over 200 languages, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year. **Call 1-888-692-9355, text "WELL" to 65173 or go to their [website](#) to chat live with a mental health professional.** They also provide a free digital mental health resource guide for the duration of COVID-19.

## Finding a Mental Health Care Provider

Mental health care can be a tricky field to navigate as there are many types of mental health issues as well as many different types of mental health professionals. However, **it is important to understand and recognize what type of mental health care you are seeking** so that you can find the professional that would be most helpful for you. All mental health professionals can listen to your needs and evaluate your mental health issues using a variety of techniques. **Mental health professionals differ in their training and approach methods.** In addition, some ministers, rabbis, and imams provide therapy.

Psychotherapists, counselors, therapists, and clinicians are generic terms that can refer to different types of mental health professionals. The three most common mental health providers are psychologists, social workers, and psychiatrists. These providers are licensed by their states as mental health professionals. The table provides a few distinguishing characteristics for each.

Psychologists	Social Workers	Psychiatrists	Other Licensed Clinicians
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doctorate degree in psychology</li> <li>• The Types of psychologists that provide therapy are counseling and clinical psychologists</li> <li>• Psychologists are trained to provide formal psychological and cognitive assessments, mental health diagnosis, as well as a range of mental health conditions and life problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Masters of Social Work</li> <li>• Those that have clinical training and are licensed (CSW, LCSW) can also provide assessment, diagnosis and therapy for a variety of mental health conditions and life problems</li> <li>• They also tend to have a stronger emphasis on connecting people with community and community support systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Licensed medical doctor</li> <li>• Can provide medication assessment and management in cases where psychotropic medications are required or preferred</li> <li>• Some also can provide talk therapy combined with medication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT); Licensed Creative Arts Therapist (LCAT); Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC)</li> <li>• Psychiatric Nurse Clinician or Nurse Practitioner</li> </ul>

If you are unsure which type of mental health professional you should consult, it may be best to talk to your primary care provider—your regular doctor or health provider. First, discuss how you’ve been feeling, what your worries and concerns are, and ask him/her how you should proceed with mental health treatment/counseling. If you don’t have a primary care provider, CUNY has mental health services that can help you get started; for a list of campus mental health and personal counseling offices [click here](#).

Since there are many different forms of mental health care and types of therapy, it is important to speak with your mental health professional first. **Ask them any questions you may have about different types of therapies** and what they think would be most beneficial for you and your personal needs.



# Types of Mental Health Therapies

## Evidence Based Practices

There are several evidence-based practices that are often used in therapy.

### COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY(CBT)

One of the most popular evidence-based practices helps you become aware of your thinking and how it affects your emotions and behaviors. This approach is skills oriented and can use exercises and practice assignments to help you develop more useful behaviors and ways of thinking.

### DIALECTICAL BEHAVIORAL THERAPY

A type of CBT that teaches skills to increase awareness, acceptance, and management of painful emotions and decrease conflict in relationships. It is often used to treat suicidal and self-destructive behaviors.

### MINDFULNESS-BASED THERAPY

Connects cognitive behavioral techniques with meditation practices.

### INTERPERSONAL THERAPY

Focuses on you as an individual person and your relationship with others and supports the development of healthier communications and relationships.

## Alternative Therapies

*Alternative therapies such as art therapy, music therapy and pet/animal therapy can be very helpful for some people.* These practices can help to reduce stress, increase self-esteem and allow for engagement with difficult emotions. In addition, some students may feel most comfortable confiding in a trusted clergy member, such as a priest, rabbi, minister or imam.

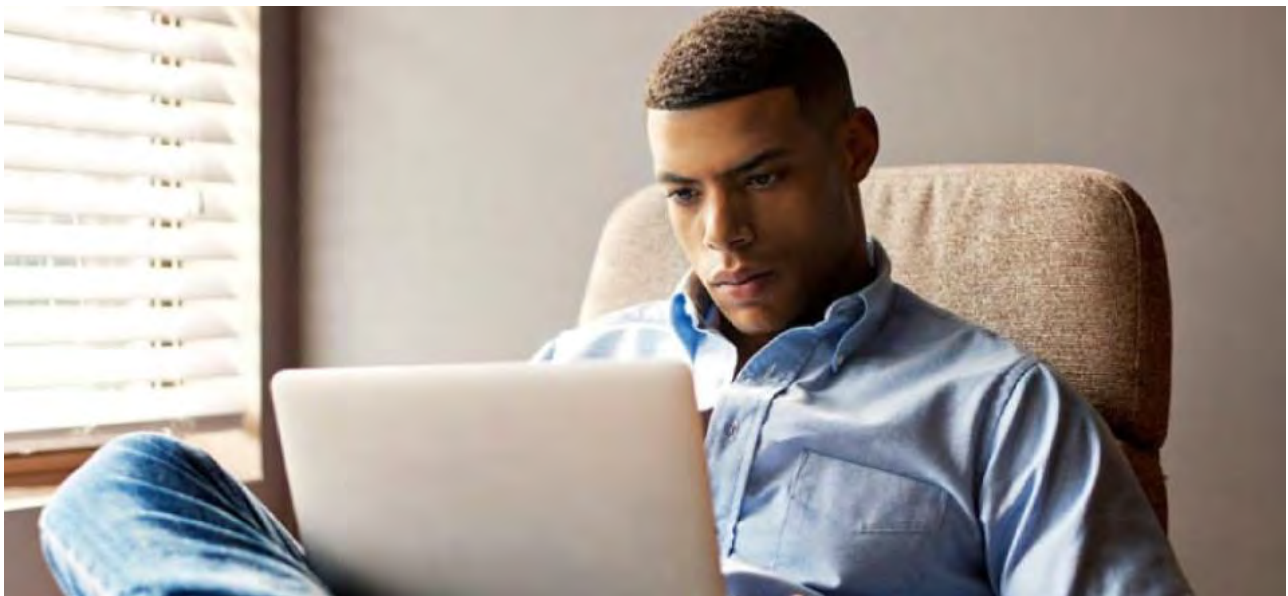
Therapists provide their services in different formats including:

**INDIVIDUAL THERAPY:** One-on-one sessions with your therapist.

**COUPLES THERAPY:** Involves both partners and focuses on the relationship goals.

**GROUP THERAPY:** Small group therapy is usually provided to 5-10 people. Some groups are therapy process groups where several people are working through their issues together. Some groups are more skills or education groups, which tend to be more structured and focused on skill development, which can feel similar to a small class. Can be particularly beneficial because they provide an opportunity to practice social skills, get social support from others who are experiencing something similar, and can learn from peers.

**FAMILY THERAPY:** Involves family members to work together on issues that relate to family dynamics and supports improvements in family functioning.



# Online Therapy

## A Student Speaks on Online Therapy (Telehealth)

I had never felt more alone than the two weeks I had COVID-19. My eyes still fill with tears over a month later just thinking about being completely alone. I had come down with COVID-19 like symptoms and to keep my roommates, neighbors, and the greater NYC community safe, I arranged to stay in a friend's empty studio apartment while she was in California waiting out the pandemic with her family.

It was the first time in my entire 28 years of living that I didn't see another person, touch another person, talk to another person in person, hug another person, sit next to another person, exist in the same physical space as another person. There was no way I could have prepared and nothing I could have brought that would have prevented the emotional turmoil I would experience while isolating. I remember feeling unloved, unimportant, neglected, jealous, angry, annoyed, afraid, frustrated, distraught, useless, sad, lonely. I spent my days commuting/circulating from the bed to the couch, to the kitchen, back to the couch and back to bed. As someone who depends on physical affection as her main source of producing and releasing neurochemicals that cause positive emotions, each day that passed sent me deeper into agony and despair.

My therapist, who at the time I had been having tele-appointments with once a week, heard how much I was suffering and offered to increase my session frequency to twice a week. I was hesitant to accept the additional sessions; I didn't think I deserved them. Being without physical contact and human connection fed my insecurities. I was convinced that my mental health wasn't worth anyone's extra time or energy. Luckily, my therapist disagreed. I just wanted to crawl into a hole and wake up when it was all over. She didn't let me. We worked on my relationship with my mom, my lack of boundaries with my sister, my frustrations with my significant other. We went over my allotted time in a number of these sessions when we weren't done working through a topic; she didn't even seem to care. In contrast to our typical sessions where five minutes before the hour she concludes the conversation regardless of its completion and asks if I want to schedule our next appointment, her willingness to disregard the time limit while I was struggling with my mental health and self-worth, made me feel valued and important again.

The therapist referred to above is actually the mental health counselor at my CUNY school and although my mental health has drastically improved since my time in isolation, I continue to fill up my telecounseling sessions with whatever is pressing on my mind that day. Looking back at those two weeks I see resilience in myself, but more importantly I see the support, guidance, patience, compassion, willingness, and flexibility of someone I never met dedicating her time and energy to my wellbeing. At a time when my suffering felt inescapable, and my mental health seemed unsalvageable, having someone repeatedly call me and express care about me was invaluable and essential to my healing process.

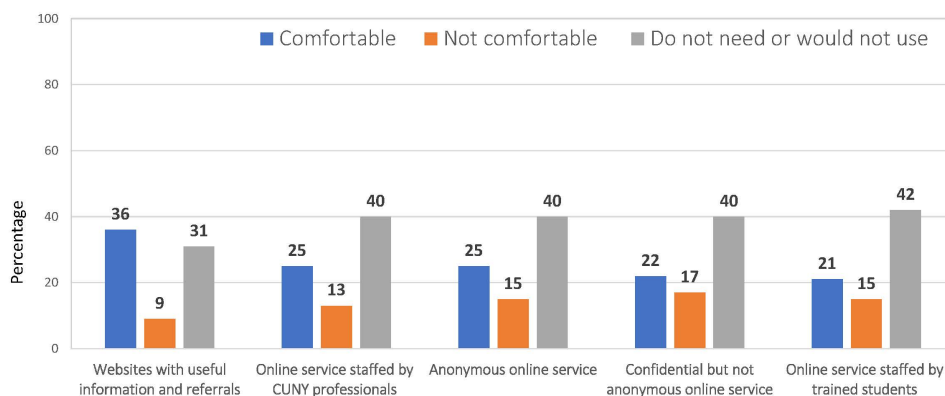
## What is Telehealth?

Although all CUNY schools have student counseling centers, their availability varies between campuses. **While Fall 2021 brings a shift to more in-person services, some CUNY campuses will continue to offer telecounseling.** Visit your school's mental health center web page for more information and guidance on making an appointment. Find your campus counseling center and more, here.

In the age of COVID-19, **telehealth has become an even more important sector of the health care system.** Telehealth is a term used to describe the wide range of remote services and technologies used in patient care increasing access and advancing the delivery system. **Telemedicine is the subset of telehealth that specifically involves the use of technology and software to communicate with patients and provide clinical services without an in-person visit.** Not only does telemedicine avoid the increased possibility of exposure and risk of spreading of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases, but it also reduces the number of patients in hospitals, clinics, and other healthcare settings which increases hospital bed availability for those in need of hands-on care. It also eliminates the need for patient and provider to travel to meet each other.

**Within telemedicine is telecounseling, a field that continues to expand with a growing market of newly emerging mental health focused apps, mental health professionals who only make phone or zoom appointments, and a continuously expanding database of organizations providing counseling over the phone and via text.** Other online software and mental health services and programs, i.e. apps, can assist with checking in and practicing awareness of one's mental health, they can be limited to their programming using a predictable pattern limiting the outcomes, benefits, and potential to learn and grow, unlike talking to an actual human being.

### During the pandemic, how comfortable are you with getting help for stress, anxiety or depression from following sources?



These findings from the Healthy CUNY 2020 COVID Survey shows that between one in five and one in three students are comfortable getting help for mental health concerns from various sources, with websites being comfortable for the largest proportion. Note that comfort levels and willingness to use various providers do not vary much by source.

## Is Telehealth for Me?

It is difficult to admit to ourselves we need help, let alone ask for it. For many people, and in numerous cultures, prioritizing mental health, attending therapy and consulting with a professionally trained counselor is stigmatized, seen as weak and looked down upon. Yet these negative associations about mental health and seeking care may hinder us from exploring that which could truly benefit us. While not everyone benefits from therapy, many of those who overcame their resistance to visiting a therapist say it has changed their lives for the better. For some, telehealth may be a good way to get these benefits.

## Limitations to Telecounseling

- **No in-person communication**, which can limit being able to see facial expressions, aesthetic expressions, or visual mannerisms. However, some providers offer videoconferencing to increase engagement in therapy.
- **Must be in a space where one is comfortable to share freely**, preferably alone behind a closed door, this may not be an easy option for some who live with family or roommates.
- **Some therapists are only reachable during the set appointment** calling you

from a hidden number, depending on the therapist/organization. Changing the appointment last minute can be difficult and may cause unwanted charges that insurance may not cover.

- **It's important to seek out a therapist through a reputable organization** to ensure your safety and confidentiality.

## Benefits to Telecounseling

- **Some therapists, depending on the organization, are available 24/7**, e.g. Talkspace advertises round the clock texting, messaging, and communication with one's primary therapist.
- **Hotlines like NYC Well and the LGBTQI Hotline allow you to completely maintain your anonymity**, which can be comforting to those that are not yet comfortable sharing about their mental health distress. Staying anonymous can help reduce discomfort related to stigma and embarrassment. However, it is important to remember that all therapy, regardless of whether it is in person or on the phone, are private and confidential. Your therapist cannot share your information with others, except when they are concerned about your safety or the safety of others and need to notify appropriate authorities.



- Many resources exist online and in the telehealth community for whatever niche-need one might have, e.g. connecting with those struggling with similar issues through a meet-up group or finding a therapist who shares key facets of your identity or is educated in your culture.

## Using Telehealth Resources

- Educate yourself on the different options available: services provided, cost, insurance (the following are just a couple of examples, more in resources/links above)
  - » CUNY Counseling Platform: varies from campus to campus, no cost to students
  - » NYC Well: over phone or via text, may not get same person every time, no cost
  - » Talkspace: Multiple communication methods, consistent primary, weekly cost that may be covered by insurance. International and out-of-state students can sign up for free, [here](#).
- Schedule your initial meeting.
  - » Don't be shy; meeting someone for the first time is always a little awkward.
  - » Although it may feel uncomfortable/awkward to share your struggles, deepest thoughts, and feelings with someone you've just met, try to truly talk about the things that are weighing on you.

» Gauge and evaluate their responses. Are they giving you what you need? Are they being receptive to what you're saying? Are you being receptive to their knowledge and suggestions? Does their counseling style work for you? It's okay if the answer is no.

» If the answer is no, try again. Find someone who matches your needs.

Don't give up. Be honest if they try to schedule another meeting saying, "I don't think this is the right match." or, "I need someone who understands what it's like to be a [identity trait]."

- Once you've found the right fit, keep going!
- Weekly appointments are usually standard.
- Respect their time. If you show up early be patient and wait for them to finish with their last patient. If you're running late, try to contact them and let them know. If you have to cancel, let them know as soon as possible.

Your campus counseling center is there to help you and guide you with whatever mental health needs you may have. [You can locate your specific CUNY campus counseling center here](#). The best way to get started with the on-campus resources would be to locate your specific campus' mental health service and call them up to see what your options are for providing help right now. If you would rather get mental health help from somewhere in the community, the best place to start would be to ask your primary care provider for a

referral. Your primary care doctor has a list of mental health providers that they recommend to their patients, therefore you can be assured that these are reliable mental health professionals. You could also start by checking with your health insurance provider for a list of mental health practitioners.

**Mental health is a particularly important issue. If you do not feel comfortable talking to a mental health professional, you should consider talking to your regular health care provider, a trusted family member or friend, or someone you can confide in.**

## Getting Started with Mental Health Care

### Talking to a Provider for the First Time

Getting started with mental health care for the first time can be scary and difficult to navigate. However, just know that you are not in this alone and there are plenty of resources and people to help you. If you are unsure where to start the best place may be starting by talking to your primary care provider about any mental health issues that you are experiencing and asking him/her if they have any advice or people you can go to talk to. If you do not have a primary care provider, ask the CUNY counseling center on your campus to help you find someone.

## Introducing a Specific Issue

The **hardest part of getting mental health help may be talking about your struggles and personal history with another person, which is very intimate and can be hard to do with a stranger.** When you first meet with a mental health professional, they usually have an intake session where they ask about your needs, family and social background, school and work life, medical history, and your preferences. They will also provide you with information about how they work and together you'll probably develop therapy goals. It's important that during this early phase, you're able to share honestly and openly about what's going on with you so they can have a clear picture of your life and stressors. **Although it can be difficult to open up to someone completely new and a stranger to you, it is important to keep in mind that these people are here to help you therefore the more you share, the more you'll get out of your sessions.**

**"I've been going to a hospital for monthly psychiatric appointments for over 10 years; even with the switch over to telehealth it is one of the best things that help me with my mental health I fully encourage counseling from a qualified medical professional, as it has helped me with depression, anxiety, and OCD"**  
– CUNY Student Spring 2021

## How to Make an Appointment

Each specific campus has a different mental health counseling center and mental health representative. [You can click here to see a list of all the CUNY campus counseling centers.](#) If you click on each individual campus name it will take you to the mental health service site for that specific campus. It will tell you the hours and how best to reach out to someone if you would like to make an appointment, whether it be email or phone call. This would be the best place to start if you are completely unsure how to move forward. **We suggest clicking the link above and locating your specific campus and reaching out to the representative listed whether it be by phone call or email at first and then proceeding from there with them.**



# Mental Health Resources

CUNY is now offering students free crisis counseling access, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The “Crisis Text Line” is a service that provides students access to a trained crisis counselor, not employed by CUNY, to assist in problem-solving and safety planning during moments of crisis, using SMS messaging. [Students can use Crisis Text Line by texting CUNY to 741741 any time and they will be connected to a counselor who offers support.](#) For additional information on the process please see this [info sheet](#).

## Meditation

[Meditation is the practice of reflecting upon the patterns of one's own thoughts, fostering mindfulness and self-awareness.](#) According to the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, numerous studies reviewed in 2014 cite evidence of meditation reducing symptoms of anxiety including pain and depression.

- [The 10 Minute Mind Mindfulness course](#) FREE for CUNY students, staff, and faculty. Sign up and receive daily guided mindfulness practices to assist in stress management and focus on breath.
- [Calm App](#) for meditation and help with sleep and stress.
- [Destress Monday](#) Deep breathing exercises called square breathing using counting with focusing
- [Ten Percent Happier App](#) for guided meditations, videos, talks, and sleep content to help you build (or boost) your meditation practice, and stick with it.
- [Headspace](#) Available as an app or online. It provides guided meditations, animations, articles, and videos to help more people access and experience the benefits of meditation.

## Peer Support

One of the strongest protectors of mental health is support from peers.

One student wrote, “I feel like communication online is different than person to person. I feel that if I was physically there with my peers and professor, I would have questions and maybe my peers would have different questions and I would learn differently.”

During remote learning, many students noted that the loss of face-to-face interactions with other students had a negative impact on their school work, while other students found online learning more conducive to their learning styles. In either case, we have found that peer support, when integrated into our learning environment can help us to focus, concentrate, and understand the material. The quotes below illustrate some of the ways students coped during the pandemic.

*Student leaders and CUNY student organizations have helped me more than anyone and have supported me in ways I am so grateful for.*

*I belonged to a women's group before the pandemic. That helped me throughout the pandemic.*

*My family supported me which helped me to balance my mental state along with all this pressure.*

*The emergency grants from CUNY helped very much. I also received help from a free crisis text line; a counselor helped me overcome a moment during which I felt suicidal.*

To seek out student life events on your campus and connect with peers socially, explore the campus student government programs and events on your school's website.

- Join or start a club with other students who share your passions and beliefs (your student government can help with connecting you to campus clubs or starting a new club).
- Connect with your campus student government on social media to keep up with student life and stay connected with other students.

## Partner Violence and Child Abuse

If you or anyone you know is experiencing any type of domestic violence or child abuse, please reach out to a professional. There are plenty of resources out there to help you in abusive situations:

- [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) Provides support for those experiencing domestic violence, questioning unhealthy relationships, etc.
- [Childhelp National Abuse Hotline](#) Provides support and help for the prevention of child abuse.

## Substance Use

Have you or someone you know been relying more on wine, or a joint, or some other substance to get you through the day? Many people have increased use or started using one of these substances during the pandemic and for some it can turn into a problem that interferes with school, relationships, and health. If you or someone you know is having this kind of problem, it may help to seek professional assistance. Once again, there are many resources to help you:

- [SAMSHA \(Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services\) Hotline](#): Provides treatment referral and information services for people facing mental health and/or substance use disorders. Call 1-800-662-HELP (4357) for the SAMSHA national helpline.
- [NYS Department of Health Office of Addiction Services and Supports Dashboard](#): allows you to search for the type of help you would like to receive.
- [eCHECKUP TO GO](#) is a confidential online self-assessment program for alcohol and marijuana. Visit your [campus counseling center](#) to enroll in the course.



## Suicide Prevention

If you or someone you know is feeling extremely down and contemplating suicide, please seek help from professionals.

### WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE IN YOURSELF, FRIENDS, OR FAMILY

- Talking about wanting to die
- Talking about or feeling hopeless, or feeling like a burden to others
- Increase use of drugs and/or alcohol
- Change in sleeping habits
- Withdrawing oneself
- Showing extreme mood swings

## Suicide Prevention Help

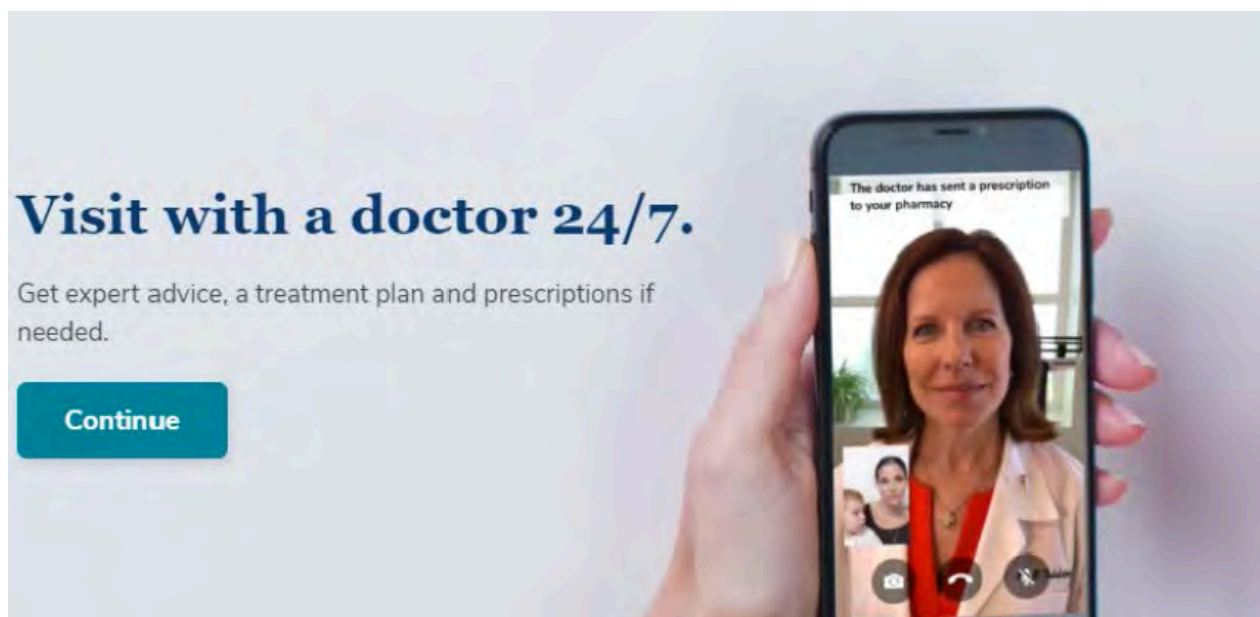
- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#): 24/7. Call 1-800-273-8255.
- [Vibrant Space Brought by Vibrant Emotional Health](#): provides extra support, resources, and coping materials. It offers the option to call someone on the hotline or start a live chat online.
- [Crisis Text Line](#): Provides crisis support via text. Text “CUNY” to 741741 to connect with a Crisis Counselor, free and available 24/7.

The global pandemic, economic instability, and other current events going on in the world and in our lives can be extremely unsettling and stress-inducing. However, many resources and medical professionals are out there to help you properly cope. Once again, if you or someone that you know are contemplating ending your life, please seek out help from medical professionals at the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#).

## Resources for Serious Mental Illness

Sometimes MH problems can escalate to a crisis or a more severe MH condition where you might need more specialized care or even hospitalization. Here are some resources to learn about more severe mental illnesses such as psychotic disorders and eating disorders.

- [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\) COVID-19 Resource and Information Guide:](#) Provides credible information and resources to help navigate through times of crisis. Includes information on managing stress and anxiety, how to access medication and how to cope with the loss of a loved one. NAMI is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to bettering the lives of those impacted by mental illness.
- [International OCD Foundation Resources for the OCD and Related Disorders Community:](#) Provides resources related to teletherapy, self-care, coping strategies, etc. for people with OCD and related disorders.
- [National Eating Disorders Association Helpline:](#) Provides support, resources and/or treatment options for people affected by eating disorders. Call 800-931-2237 Monday-Thursday 11am-9pm and Friday 11am-5pm. Text 800-931-2237 Monday-Thursday 3pm-6pm. Or chat with a counselor through their website linked above, Monday-Thursday 9am-9pm and Friday 9am-5pm. All communication is confidential, and if you call/text when they are closed, you will receive a response promptly.



## Additional Resources for Mental Health

- [Campus Counseling Centers](#) - CUNY campus counseling centers exist to support the academic success of students and the university by providing high quality counseling and mental health services to students along with consultative services for campus faculty and staff.
- [For the Frontlines](#): Free crisis counseling text line for health care professionals and essential workers. Text “FRONTLINE” to 741741.
- [LGBTQ National Hotline](#)- Anonymous and confidential hotline where callers can feel safe voicing issues and concerns that predominantly impact LGBTQ populations without fear of stigmatization. Call 888-843-4564 open Monday-Friday 4pm-midnight, Saturday noon-5pm or email: [help@LGBThotline.org](mailto:help@LGBThotline.org).
- [The Steve Fund](#)-Helping students of color who are feeling depressed/stressed/overwhelmed. Text “STEVE” to 741741 to connect with a live crisis counselor 24/7 and email [info@stevefund.org](mailto:info@stevefund.org) with any questions.
- [NYC Well](#) - Provides free, confidential mental health support. Speak to a counselor via phone, text or chat and access mental health and substance abuse services available in over 200 languages, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year. Call 1-888-692-9355, text “WELL” to 65173 or go to their website to chat live with a mental health professional. They also provide a free [digital mental health resource guide](#)for the duration of COVID-19.
- [Mental Health Clinic Guide](#) - Provides list of Mental Health clinics in 4 boroughs along with a map.
- [NYC COVID Care Network](#) - For essential workers and their families without health insurance, NYC based network of 3000+ mental health professionals, life coaches, spiritual care providers, organizers, and crisis line operators free to offer support in this time of need. Submit a request form on their website.
- [Mayor’s Office of Community Mental Health](#) - Mental Health, counseling and online resources.
- [Talkspace](#) - Find the right therapist for you in this network of thousands of licensed therapists. Start with an assessment where a matching therapist will identify your needs. Next choose a payment plan, minimum \$65/wk, but covered by insurance and currently offered FREE to CUNY international and out-of-state students who sign up [here](#). Third, find the right therapist for you. And finally, begin talking to your therapist of choice. You can message them at any time via text, audio message, send pictures, videos, etc.

# PROTECTING YOUR HEALTH

“The increased anxiety regarding the pandemic as well as my academic future has me suffocated. My entire family had gotten sick with no way of knowing if they had contracted COVID-19, leaving me to do most of the house work, then I later became ill. The limbo that we’re stuck in made me incapable of keeping up with school work.”

As the student quoted above shows, physical health, mental health and academic success are inseparably linked. This section provides information and resources that help CUNY students protect and promote your physical health in order to help you feel better, stay healthy, and succeed in school and life. For information and resources on mental health, [please visit the Mental Health Challenges section of this guide](#). If you are currently depressed or anxious, counselors are available 24/7 at NYC Well to talk, text, or chat (text “Well” to 65173).

In this section, [we provide information on the health challenges posed by the pandemic as well as the everyday health problems that can aggravate existing problems, distract you from school, or put you at higher risk of new ones, including being infected by COVID-19](#). Our goal is to help all CUNY students stay well. We include links to helpful resources on the relevant topics, with a focus on community and online resources for remote learning.

In a spring 2020 Healthy CUNY Survey, [29% of students reported having symptoms that could have been COVID-19 in the last month](#). Of those students who reported being tested, 28% had tested positive. A year later, [21% of our follow-up sample said they had tested positive for covid-19 at some point in the last year and 31 % reported they had lost a family or household member or a close friend to COVID](#).

The COVID-19 pandemic serves as an opportunity for students to strive for the best possible physical health. It is important to pay attention to [potential COVID-19 symptoms](#) including fever, dry cough, shortness of breath. If you feel like you are developing symptoms, call your doctor. If you don't have a regular doctor, check the health care resources section of this guide. Many CUNY Health Services offices now offer tele-medical consultations and are a great resource for health-related questions and referrals.

- To contact your CUNY campus health services office, [visit here](#).
- For information about how to stay safe from coronavirus infection, [please follow the CDC Guidelines on How to Protect Yourself and Others](#).
- Visit the NYC Department of Health webpage to learn about [COVID-19: Symptoms and What to Do When Sick](#).



## The COVID-19 Vaccine

### Benefits of Getting a COVID-19 Vaccination

Vaccines save millions of lives each year. They work by prompting the body's natural immune system to recognize and fight off the bacteria or virus (in this case the coronavirus) if it enters the body at any point. Experts recommend that you get the COVID-19 vaccine even if you've already had the disease, since it is not yet known how long one's natural immunity will last. Even if you are young and healthy, it is important to get vaccinated to protect those around us who are more vulnerable to illness, such as older people, newborns, or people with health conditions like diabetes or some lung diseases.

For information about the COVID-19 Vaccine benefits, visit the Centers for Disease Control website [here](#).

Click [here](#) for comprehensive information about the COVID-19 vaccine from the New York City Department of Health.

At CUNY, as of October 7, 2021, all students are required to be vaccinated for COVID-19. Failure to do so will subject students to potential academic withdrawal from their classes, a move that could reduce their financial aid and make them ineligible for refunds on their courses. The only exception are students who have been granted a medical or religious exception. For up-to-date information and the results of recent testing programs by campus, check CUNY Coronavirus Updates [here](#). Let's [#VaxUPCUNY](#).



Northwell Health



## Vaccine Safety and Side Effects

Extensive research, development and testing goes into production of vaccines. Even when production is sped up, such as with the COVID-19 vaccine, there is minimal risk to patients compared to the benefits of avoiding potential infection, illness and death. By getting vaccinated, you are helping protect yourself while helping to make your family, friends and community safer. The COVID-19 vaccines do not contain the live virus and cannot give you COVID-19. In clinical trials a small percentage of patients experienced mild to moderate side effects, such as soreness in the arm where the vaccine is given, mild fever and fatigue.

- More information about side effects can be found [here](#).

While there is a lot written about vaccine safety on the internet, we found that much of it is not backed by science. We recommend checking out the vaccine information you find on the internet to make it comes from a credible source and that it is updated regularly. A few such resources are listed below.

- [Frequently asked questions](#) about COVID-19 Vaccines
- [COVID-19 vaccine myths debunked](#) (Mayo Clinic)

## When and Where Can I Get a COVID-19 Vaccine?

- Visit NYC Health Department [COVID-19 Vaccine Hubs](#) to schedule an appointment, or call 877-VAX-4NYC or 877-829-4692 .
- For NYC Health + Hospitals COVID-19 Vaccine Scheduler click [here](#) or call 1-844-NYC-4NYC.
- If you live outside of New York State, you can check your local or state health department for information about COVID-19 vaccine distribution. For a list of US State and Territorial health departments click [here](#).

Some New Yorkers have questions about the vaccine and its efficacy and safety. It's right to ask questions but not to fail to take action when protection is available. We the public health students and faculty who wrote this guide strongly believe that all the available evidence suggests that COVID-19 infection is a far greater threat to our health and the health of the people we care about and interact with than the vaccine.

*“Personally, I was sick for longer than expected with the COVID-19. It has been 6 weeks and counting. I was unable to do my course work due to the symptoms of the disease”*

## Who is Most at Risk for Severe Illness Due to COVID-19?

**Everyone, including healthy young adults, is at risk for getting or spreading the coronavirus.** Being young does not guarantee protection. But older adults and people who have serious underlying medical conditions (such as heart disease, cancer, obesity, kidney disease, and diabetes) have an increased risk of severe illness, hospitalization, and even death due to COVID-19. **Some chronic conditions that put everyone at risk for developing COVID-19 include diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, asthma, and other upper respiratory diseases. If you have an autoimmune condition (such as lupus, gout, rheumatoid arthritis) or take medications that suppress the immune system, you also may be at a higher risk for getting serious illness.**

In addition, new research shows that young adults who smoke are [twice as likely to develop complications](#) from COVID-19, and that vaping is linked to a substantially increased risk of COVID-19 among teenagers and young adults. If you smoke or vape, now is a great time to quit. **Call the New York State Smokers' Quitline at 1-866-NY-QUITS (1-866-697-8487)** or click [here](#). The Quitline also provides free starter kits of nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) to eligible New Yorkers.

In addition to underlying medical conditions, there are economic and social conditions such as poverty, racism, and overcrowded housing which put individuals and communities at a higher risk for developing COVID-19. These higher levels of social risk are not the consequences of individual choices but of a social and economic system that in recent decades has worsened inequality and leaves many New Yorkers lacking what they need to maintain health. To read more about the economic and social conditions associated with COVID-19 risk, click [here](#).

To add to that, front-line health workers and other essential workers who interact with the public regularly have a higher risk of infection due to their close contact with people who have the coronavirus infection ([read more here](#)), or visit the [CDC website](#). More information is in the [Essential Needs](#) and [Meeting Your Unique Needs](#) sections of this guide.

**If you have an underlying condition, such as diabetes, high blood pressure or lung disease, it is especially important to follow CDC recommendations about physical distancing, hand-washing, wearing proper face coverings, and other practices that can prevent COVID-19's spread. For more, [visit here](#).**

If you have concerns about your health or feel sick, call, or visit a health care provider. If you do not have a health care provider, go to the Health Care Resources section of this guide, below. In an emergency, call 911. Remember, it's better to be safe than sorry, so if in doubt ask for professional help.

## Health Care Resources

Health care resources include medications, facilities, and the health care workers needed to provide health services. Access to health care resources is important to maintain good health, prevent disease, and manage chronic conditions. **Students should have access to these resources to reach their full potential academically.**

Fortunately, the Affordable Care Act of 2010 made it easier for many Americans and especially young adults to get health insurance. **However, our surveys show that 8% of CUNY students - about 22,000 individuals - still lack health insurance, and many of them are immigrants.** Additionally, the economic crisis triggered by COVID-19 led many New Yorkers to lose their jobs and their health insurance. Struggling to pay for health care or find a doctor can be incredibly stressful and makes it harder for students to focus on schoolwork. Consulting the resources listed below can help to solve health care access problems before they become overwhelming.

Our Healthy CUNY COVID-19 survey that was conducted in April 2020 showed how dramatically the pandemic contributed to students rating their health more negatively. **At the beginning of the Spring 2020 semester, only 10% of students reported their general health was fair or poor, but by April, 58% said their health was fair or poor** —a shocking decline.

For up-to-date health-related information and resources from CUNY, visit CUNY Continuity for Students [here](#). CUNY offers general health resources on each campus for students including wellness centers and health clinics, health information and tips, and immunizations. To find your campus health center, click [here](#). Be sure to call or email first for open days/hours. Some campus wellness centers offer telephone consultation to students.

- **You can find COVID-19 testing sites** by visiting the NYC Health and Hospitals website [linked here](#). For information about contact tracing (what to expect), [click here](#).
- **COVID-19: Symptoms and What to Do When Sick** Guidance from the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. [Link here](#).
- **If you need public health services** (other than COVID-19 testing) such as immunizations, sexual health testing and services, and tuberculosis testing, you can visit a NYC Department of Health Clinic. For information about services, locations, and hours, [click here](#).
- **Gotham Health, NYC Health and Hospitals** primary care centers. [Find locations and phone numbers here](#).
- **You can find a list of the names, addresses,** zip codes and telephone numbers of all community health centers in New York City [here](#). Most provide free, subsidized or low-cost services to residents of their neighborhoods.

# Health Insurance and Health Care:

Finding what you need, when you need it, at a price you can afford

In these days when so many of us face trouble affording housing, food, tuition, and other daily expenses, it is understandable that some CUNY students might consider having health insurance and a regular provider of care as an unaffordable luxury. But going without health insurance has its own risks — not being able to get care when you need it, facing costs that can drive you into debt or bankruptcy, or being forced to go to a provider you don't know or trust. And not having a regular doctor or other provider means delays in getting help when you need it and avoiding more serious illness. This guide will help you learn how to choose the best insurance for you, find a doctor or health care provider, use your insurance wisely, and advocate for your rights. No one should have to choose between medical bills and their health.

**“I need a doctor that can relate to my risks and needs. Shopping (for) a doctor is not the same as shopping groceries. I am not looking for a bargain. I am looking to ensure my health and safety is in the best hands.”** CUNY student, April 2020 Healthy CUNY Survey.

## Health insurance and academic success

Having health insurance can be a deciding factor in your academic success. Some uninsured individuals end up dropping out of school because they need to spend their tuition money on unexpected medical bills or end up being food or housing insecure as a result of high medical bills. In addition, delaying or not getting care could worsen illnesses that could be prevented with routine care. Having health insurance enables CUNY students to get help for depression, anxiety and other psychological conditions; birth control, prenatal care or abortion services; and ongoing treatment for asthma and diabetes, common health problems that can undermine academic success. Having health insurance for your family - coverage that some plans provide while others do not - can save you from worrying about paying for health care for your children, siblings, or parents. Having good health insurance can also reduce the need for work, as one CUNY student explained in the April 2020 Healthy CUNY Survey. **“The only reason I have my job while I'm in grad school,” said this student, “is for the health insurance. I'd love nothing more than to have good coverage through CUNY so I can work a job I want to work, and get off my current healthcare! Plus, it's expensive for me. Another student said, “CUNY should provide health insurance to students. It is outrageous that there is not a student health plan available.”**

# How to Get Health Insurance

Understanding how to get insurance can be a challenge. With all of the different options, terms, charges and eligibility rules, there is no shortage of ways to get confused. But if you follow these three steps, you can get enrolled in the insurance you need.

<b>Premium</b>	Your monthly cost for health insurance
<b>Deductible</b>	The amount you pay for covered health care services before your insurance plan starts to pay. With a \$2,000 deductible, for example, you pay the first \$2,000 of covered services yourself.
<b>Co-payment</b>	A fixed amount you pay for a covered health care service
<b>Co-insurance</b>	After you have paid your deductible, your insurance will pay a certain percentage of costs for covered services.
<b>Covered services</b>	All of the health care services and supplies that your plan will pay for.
<b>Network</b>	Your plan contracts with certain facilities, doctors and other providers to provide members with services. Those providers are called in-network and it usually costs less to see them. All other providers are out-of-network and it usually costs more to see them.

## Step One: Figure Out What You Need

### How much can you afford per month?

The monthly cost that you pay up front is called the **premium**. This is a set fee that you will have to pay regardless of how much insurance you use. Some plans for low-income students including Medicaid and the Essential plan may have no premium, thus helping you with costs.

### How much care do you think you will use?

Out-of-pocket costs you pay when you use services include **deductibles**, **co-payments** and **co-insurance**. These costs vary based on your plan and the service you are using. If you think you will need a lot of healthcare, a plan with higher monthly payments but a lower deductible may save you money.

### What services do you want access to?

All plans have standard **covered services** including preventative care, mental health and emergency care. Some plans cover additional services such as dental, vision and birth control. Take a look at the list of covered services to find the plan that covers what you need.

### Are there specific doctors you want to see?

Each plan has its own **network** of providers to perform services. If it is important for you to see a specific doctor, make sure they are within your network. You can also ask your doctors which insurance plans they accept.

## Step Two: Choose a Plan and Provider

Now that you know what you need, you can choose the right plan to deliver those services. Some important factors include the premium, the deductible, the network and the maximum out-of-pocket cost. Below are useful tips when comparing plans. For a more complete list of plan options please visit the Healthy CUNY Guide to Health Insurance and Healthcare.

## Step Three: Enroll

Once you have decided what kind of plan you need and which provider you wish to use, your last step is to actually enroll. There are many resources available to help you get signed up.

The first place to go is the [New York State Marketplace](#). The Marketplace has easy tools for comparing plans, finding estimates, and getting signed up. You can fill out one simple application and it will let you know which plan you qualify for.

Learn more at the New York State of Health Marketplace and Medicaid Enrollment site, [here](#) or call 1- 855-355-5777.

BlueCross BlueShield	
Member Name	
Member Name	
Member ID	
XYZ123456789	
Group No.	023457
BIN	987654
Benefit Plan	HIOPT
Effective Date	00/00/00
	<span style="border: 1px solid red; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;">TDI</span>
Dependents	
Dependent One	
Dependent Two	
Dependent Three	
Plan	PPO
Office Visit	\$15
Specialist Copay	\$15
Emergency	\$75
Deductible	\$50



*“CUNY should provide health insurance to students. It is outrageous that there is not a student health plan available.”*  
CUNY student, April 2020 Healthy CUNY Survey



## Where Can I Go For Help?

There are many organizations out there that can help walk you through the enrollment process. **Insurance Navigators** provide enrollment assistance to individuals, families, small businesses and their employees who would like help applying for health insurance through the Marketplace.

- **Certified Application Counselors and Brokers** are licensed individuals and companies that can get you signed up for the plan that is right for you. Find someone in your area by searching [here](#).
- Many CUNY campuses partner with the **Office of Citywide Health Insurance Access (OCHIA)** to bring enrollment assistance to their campuses and students. You can go to your campus [health services office](#) or visit the [OCHIA](#) website for more information.
- **Community Based Organizations** in your area can help connect you to services. Click [here](#) for a list of organizations in New York City.
- **Access NYC** has a collection of resources to help New Yorkers find free and low-cost coverage in the city. Visit their website [here](#).
- **NYC Care is a healthcare access program that provides comprehensive and low or no-cost health care services through NYC Health + Hospitals for New Yorkers who are unable to afford or ineligible for health insurance.** NYC Care provides a membership card, 24/7 customer service, access to comprehensive and affordable health care services, like primary care, mental health services, and sexual and reproductive health care, low cost medications 24/7, and member materials in multiple languages – regardless of your immigration status or ability to pay. Call **646-NYC-CARE (646-692-2273)** or visit [NYCcare.nyc](#) to learn more and sign up today – privacy and confidentiality guaranteed.

## Utilizing Health Insurance

Choosing the right health insurance plan is hard but figuring out how to use it can also be a challenge. Each plan is unique, so it is important to find out how your specific plan works. The best way to do this is by calling your plan's customer service line and asking the right questions. You can also usually access the information by checking your health plan's website or manual.

## Finding a Provider

Providers are categorized as either a primary care provider (PCP) or a specialist. Your PCP is usually the doctor you go to for all of your general health concerns. They will determine whether it is necessary to seek more specialized care from a specialist. In fact, some plans require you to see your PCP first to get a referral for the specialist.

A specialist is a doctor that has advanced training in a specific branch of medicine. Specialists such as Dermatologists, Cardiologists and Endocrinologists provide care for specific conditions, injuries or illnesses. It is generally a best practice to find a primary care provider prior to choosing a specialist.

A **primary care provider (PCP)** can be a doctor, nurse practitioner or physician's assistant that is the first point of contact for your vaccinations are up to date, run needed blood tests, check blood pressure, provide routine sexual and reproductive health care, and first level treatment for psychological problems. Having a regular PCP that you know and trust saves you from

having to repeat your medical history at every visit and ensures that your care will be coordinated and meet your specific needs.

Having a PCP can also save you money. Most insurance companies require you to select a PCP and are more likely to fully cover these visits, unlike hospital, emergency room, urgent care, or specialist care, which often require you to make some level of out-of-pocket payment.

## Filling Prescriptions

After your appointment you may be prescribed medication. It will either be written on paper, which you take to your local pharmacy, or sent electronically to the pharmacy of your choosing. Choose a pharmacy that is convenient and accepts your health insurance. To do this you can check your health plan's website, call your plan's customer service line, or ask your local pharmacy if they accept your plan.

When you go to pick up your prescription, your pharmacy will also ask for your Rx insurance card, which is separate from your health insurance card. The most noticeable difference is that the letters 'Rx' is usually found somewhere on the card.

## Need Assistance?



If your insurance claim is denied or you cannot resolve a billing issue, there are ways to get help.

The following organizations may be able to assist you:

**Patient Advocate Foundation** - Call (800) 532-5274 or [click here](#).

**Community Health Advocates** - Call (888) 614-5400 or [click here](#).

**Legal Aid Society** - Call (888) 663-6880 or [click here](#).

**New York State of Health** - Call (855) 355-5777 or [click here](#).

## Staying Healthy

In our survey, **almost 60% of CUNY students said that as a result of the pandemic, their ability to do schoolwork had decreased, and over half of these students said the decreased ability was due to their own physical health or the health of others in the household.** Staying healthy is an end in itself, a benefit for the people you care about and who care about you, and also the best way to achieve the academic goals that brought you to CUNY.

As a start, to avoid getting COVID-19, it is important to [follow CDC recommendations](#) about physical distancing, hand-washing, [wearing proper face coverings](#), and other practices that can prevent COVID-19's spread. And remember, now is a great time to [quit smoking or vaping](#) to further protect your health now and in the future.

## Physical Activity

**The increase in the remote online classes and working from home means students like us are sitting more than usual and getting less exercise.** Physical activity such as walking, jogging, yoga, and strength training can help you stay healthy by lowering your risk of heart disease, weight gain, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, high glucose, and now COVID-19. Exercise is also a great way to reduce stress as well as protect your health.

According to the [World Health Organization](#), all adults should do at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity throughout the week, or at least 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity throughout the week. But even just taking a short break from sitting, by doing 3-4 minutes of light intensity physical movement, such as walking or stretching, will help ease your muscles, improve blood circulation, and muscle activity, and reduce stress.

Here are a few ideas for free ways to exercise at home:

- [22 Free Workouts You Can Do at Home Right Now](#): New York Times Wirecutter article lists free apps and programs [including exercise videos for kids!](#)
- [YMCA 360](#) offers free online on-demand health and fitness videos for all levels of fitness.



## Healthy Sleep Habits

One of the most important things you can do to stay healthy and do well in school during COVID and beyond, is to maintain - or establish - good sleep habits. Getting enough sleep supports the immune system which will help you to avoid and fight off infection. Sleep also helps you maintain a healthy metabolism so you can burn energy. In addition, healthy sleep patterns make it easier to manage emotions and to focus and think more clearly. **Lack of a normal routine and daytime structure while working and studying can throw off healthy sleep patterns.** Too much screen time, too little physical activity, as well as stress, anxiety and depression can make it hard to fall asleep and to sleep well.

“I feel emotionally exhausted by the time I get around to do my work. I do homework after 10pm till 4am just so I can get peace and quiet; then sleep from around 4am to 9am.”

Some tips for healthy sleep include managing stress, limiting screen time at night, avoiding naps and over the counter sleep aids, and creating a sleep schedule. For more information on managing stress, check out the [Mental Health Section of this guide](#).

## Eye Health

Excessive electronic screen time (PCs, laptops, smartphones, tablets, LCD TVs) not only disrupts sleep, but can also damage your eyesight! Blue light exposure may increase the risk for macular degeneration (damaging light sensitive cells in the retina) and cause headaches or migraines. If you have diabetes, it is particularly important to protect your eyes and see an eye doctor regularly. To protect your eyes and your overall health during COVID and beyond, wash your hands frequently. **Also try to avoid touching or rubbing your eyes—one trick is to wear glasses or sunglasses to add a layer of protection.**

- [Click here for tips for eye care](#) during COVID 19 from the American Academy of Ophthalmology, including how to protect your eyes and when to see an eye care professional.

## Wellness Visits

Don't put your health on hold. **Make sure you are up to date with your regular health care visits (including mental health), screenings, and vaccines to reduce risks of preventable disease and infections and to stay healthy while COVID is still a risk.** This year, it is especially important to prepare for the upcoming flu season by continuing to practice steps for avoiding infection, such as frequent hand washing and social distancing and by getting a flu shot. If you have a chronic disease or condition or take prescribed medication,

be sure to maintain regular checkups. Many health care providers are offering telehealth, or virtual office visit options to meet patient needs. Check out the [Healthcare Resources section](#) of this guide for free and low-cost health services options.

## Reproductive and Sexual Health

As young adults, it is natural and healthy, pandemic or not, to seek to establish and hold on to healthy relationships and to protect and promote our sexual and reproductive health.

### Comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health Services Include:

- Sex education and counseling for women and men including appropriate information and support for people of all sexual and gender identities
- Contraceptive education, counseling, and services
- Pregnancy testing
- Prenatal care
- Abortion services and referrals
- Testing, counseling, education, and services for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases

Many primary care providers offer sexual and reproductive health services and the agencies listed below can help you find the services you need. Even though we now need to worry less about COVID-19, we still need to protect ourselves against HIV and other sexually transmitted infections as well as unwanted pregnancy.

Check out the links below for more information about free and low-cost health clinics and more resources and tips!

- **American Sexual Health Association**  
COVID-19: Understand the risks of sex and intimate contact in the time of COVID-19.
- **Planned Parenthood of Greater NY:** Find a Clinic, learn about telehealth services and more. Read about Planned Parenthood's guidance on COVID-19 and Your Sexual Health [here](#).
- **NYC Sexual Health Clinics** offer sexual and reproductive health care services including STI testing and birth control. If you need sexual health services and are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, call the NYC Sexual Health Clinic Hotline at 347-396-7959.
- **Healthy CUNY** Learn about our work on Healthy Relationships and check out our Sexual and Reproductive Health Resources page [here](#).
- **CUNY Campus Health Centers** offer sexual health services for free. To find your campus center, [click here](#).
- **CUNY Women's Centers** are a great resource for women's health and wellness information. To find your campus Women's Center, [click here](#).





# SUPPORTING STUDENT ESSENTIAL NEEDS



*Staff and students distribute food at Medgar Evers College Community Pantry*

**It's pretty hard for us to concentrate on school, if we're worried about how to pay for our next meal, make rent, or find a job to support ourselves and our family.** This section describes how CUNY students can meet some of our essential needs. The focus is on helping students to overcome food, housing and economic challenges that can interfere with academic success, well-being, and a comfortable life.

A college education and degree provide opportunity for economic security and greater lifetime earning potential. While CUNY has done more than most colleges to help students and their families to escape poverty, the global pandemic brought some new threats to keeping college enrollment affordable. Cuts in State and Federal funds brought about by the economic crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic threatened many of the safety net programs that have supported CUNY students and other low-income New Yorkers. Moreover, more than a decade of tax cuts for the wealthy have made it harder for the city, state, and federal governments to generate the tax revenues to support existing programs, much less fund new ones. In addition, even before COVID, the high cost of housing and the low wages for many jobs made it hard for many CUNY students and their families to make ends meet. Now, with the price of food rising, and many students or their parents struggling financially, paying for food and housing has become even harder.

*“...there are students that I was in class with who could not afford or did not know where their next meal is coming from. So, I am proud to be a part of a university [that] went and offered that to students.”*

About sixty percent of CUNY undergraduate students come from households that earn less than \$30,000 per year and surveys before and after the pandemic have shown that too many CUNY students are hungry or food insecure, unstably housed or homeless, or struggle to meet other basic needs. As Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs suggests, humans need to fulfill basic needs like food, water shelter, financial security, in order to survive and succeed in life. Having these basic needs met makes it easier to make school success our focus. The COVID-19 pandemic and uncertain economic climate may force even more students to make the difficult choice between basic survival and attending school. In our survey, one student described how the pandemic changed her family’s life: **“An unsustainable way of living. No water or heat due to closure of business sustaining us. Had to relocate to another state for living and giving birth to my first child.”**

In the past several years CUNY has been working to help meet its students' essential needs, primarily through food pantries, emergency funding and special programs. These programs offer an important lifeline to many students but with limited funding and staff, by themselves, these programs cannot meet the growing need that CUNY students face. Helping students survive and thrive at CUNY means helping students to meet their needs in order to stay in school and graduate. Some campuses have created model programs that deserve to be expanded to more CUNY sites. **The Transition Academy at Medgar Evers College, for example, acts as a “basic needs hub”, helping students find food, housing, financial and emotional support and much more.**

In other ways, however, the pandemic demonstrated that our safety net programs were no longer adequate to meet 21st century threats, leading many city, state and federal elected officials to extend and expand programs like Medicaid, SNAP (food stamps), college loan forgiveness, and subsidized child care. This section describes some of these changes and explains how CUNY students can use them.

## CUNY Resource Centers

In addition, designed as a successor to what had been called Single Stop, some CUNY campuses have established one-stop shops or Resource Centers to meet the evolving needs of students by providing a variety of remote and in-person services that include access to pantries and help applying for SNAP and housing assistance; financial and tax preparation assistance, and other services newly incorporated to address issues created by the pandemic. By Fall 2021, all seven community colleges and John Jay College had established these Resource Centers. Expanding them to all CUNY campuses could help other CUNY students to benefit from their essential services.

“CUNY is working hard to ease the burden on its resilient community with a newly expanded, all-encompassing network of services that will make it easier for students to pursue their academic goals,” said CUNY Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodríguez. “Students who are facing food and housing insecurity, and those who have lost their jobs and lack income, can now access these one-stop shops at their colleges and get help. I encourage anyone who isn’t already taking advantage of these resources to contact their campuses and avail themselves of these inclusive resources and services.”

To determine eligibility for benefits, students and their families participate in a short question-and-answer session. College program counselors then direct students and their families to federal, state or local benefits that they are eligible to receive. More information can be found by visiting college program pages below:

- [Borough of Manhattan Community College](#)
- [Bronx Community College](#)
- [Guttman Community College](#)
- [Hostos Community College](#)
- [John Jay College of Criminal Justice](#)
- [Kingsborough Community College](#)
- [LaGuardia Community College](#)
- [Queensborough Community College](#)
- [Medgar Evers College](#)

A Kingsborough Community College student was elated to receive a \$100 supermarket gift card from the One Stop Shop at a time when her local food bank was low on supplies and she was unsure where her next meal would come from.

**“I didn’t know what I was going to eat,” she said. “I didn’t have any food and it literally saved me.”**

**Getting the food we need to stay healthy and avoid hunger should be a basic right for everyone.** As students, we need food to help us do well academically. It is hard to concentrate when we are hungry. There are many resources, whether through CUNY or the greater community as well that can help students with food resources. In addition, as Healthy CUNY director Distinguished Professor of Public Health Nicholas Freudenberg has said, “ students, student organizations, CUNY leaders, and elected officials need to redouble their efforts to make hunger history at CUNY. Surely, the wealthiest city in the wealthiest country in the world can afford to ensure that its students don’t need to choose between getting their degree and filling their stomach.”

In this guide, we provide students with resources for direct food assistance, SNAP/WIC, monetary support, and nutrition. With the world constantly changing around us, we want to inform our fellow students of any changes in access to programs such as SNAP/WIC or other direct food assistance programs. Food is such an essential part of our lives and really helps us to succeed.

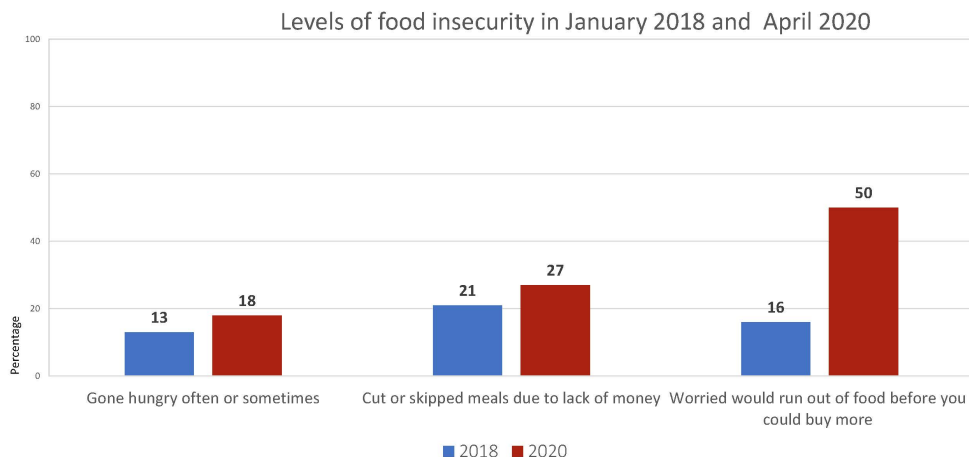
The rest of this section lists some of the resources and information that is available to help CUNY students meet a few common basic needs: food, housing and financial security. We hope readers can use this information to find what you need to meet your needs but also so that you can share these resources with your friends and class mates, so they too can find the assistance they require.



*CUNY Chancellor Felix Matos Rodriguez visits the food pantry at Queensborough Community College. [Source.](#)*

# Food Security

Food Insecurity among CUNY Student in 2018 and 2020, 2 months into COVID-19 Pandemic



Our 2020 COVID-19 survey data showed that CUNY students experienced loss of income and reported increased spending on food and other household expenses during the pandemic. As shown in the chart below, between 2018 and April 2020, Healthy CUNY surveys showed that the proportion of CUNY students who reported that they were worried would run out of food before they could buy more tripled, from about 16% to 50%. The proportion of students who reported they were often or sometime hungry increased by almost 40%, from 13% in 2018 to 18% in 2020.

**“Due to decreased income, I have been rationing the amount of money I spend on a weekly basis so that I can continue to afford to live off of what I currently have.”**

Some students were assisted by New York City’s new pandemic emergency food programs.

**“During the first few months of the pandemic, it was very challenging to get basic grocery items at our local supermarket... We ended up participating in NYC’s free grab and go meals, where we were able to pick up some meals from a local high school.”**

For many students, worries about housing stability increased their fears of food insecurity. By April 2021, a follow up survey of 528 CUNY students surveyed in April 2020 found that 11% said they had often or sometimes gone hungry due to lack of access to food, a drop from the 17% who reported this at the height of the pandemic. The good news: the proportion of students saying yes to recent hunger declined by 32% over the year. The bad news: In Spring 2021, an estimated 27,360 CUNY students had experienced hunger due to lack of money in last 2 weeks.

Half of the students reported being very or somewhat worried about losing their housing as a result of the pandemic and about half reported experiencing some forms of food insecurity in the two weeks preceding the survey in 2021.



## Direct Food Assistance

In response to COVID-19, **New York City launched a Grab-and-Go program that provides free meals for all New Yorkers.** We can pick up these meals at various meal hubs without need for registration, ID or documentation. Using the NYC Department of Education database, enter your borough, school district, address, and mile radius to find the nearest meal hubs.

Food pantries, soup kitchens, and community programs located around NYC provide food to people who need it. [The Get Food NYC Map](#) locates the nearest food pantry or community kitchen. Enter your address in the top left and filter by borough and by facility type (e.g., applying for SNAP/food benefits, community kitchen, food pantry); the map can also filter by kosher providers.

The [Coalition for the Homeless Grand Central Program](#) lists detailed routes of their food drop off service. Their mobile vans offer hot meals every night in Manhattan and the Bronx. They have three routes: uptown, downtown and through the Bronx, that stop at various places every night.

*"At the start of the pandemic, the prices of food shot up and it made access to it very difficult. Coupled with both my brother and mother losing their job, the food budget became very tight. Since summer 2021, my mom has regularly visited a food pantry. Although our financial situation has greatly improved, food insecurity is a great source of anxiety for my mom."*

## SNAP/WIC and Government Assistance

### SNAP (The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program)

**SNAP is a government benefit program that is issued electronically and can be used to purchase food. You can purchase bread, cereal, fruits, vegetables, meats, fish, poultry, and dairy products.** You cannot purchase beer, wine, liquor, cigarettes or tobacco and you cannot purchase pet food, soap, medicine, and household supplies.

- Use your SNAP benefits to shop online for fresh produce and groceries. Use your EBT card to shop at these participating stores in NYC: [Amazon](#), [Shoptite](#) and [Walmart](#)





## Basics of SNAP Benefits

SNAP distributes a monthly benefit amount to low income households in order to purchase food items at participating supermarkets and grocery stores.

## Qualifying for SNAP

Students can qualify for SNAP if they:

- Meet the income guidelines. Visit the [New York State SNAP website](#) for an overview of income eligibility levels for households of different types
- Household has an elderly member (age 60 or over) or disabled member. The information you [input here](#) will estimate whether your household meets the SNAP eligibility requirements

**In addition, temporary federal expansion of SNAP benefit eligibility during the pandemic includes students who:**

- Have an Expected Family Contribution (EFC) of \$0 based on their FAFSA for the academic year
- Are *eligible* to participate in a federal or state work-study program. This is a change from requiring *receipt* of work-study.

For updates about student eligibility for SNAP, [go here](#).

## SNAP Work Requirements for Students

**In order to qualify for SNAP, students enrolled in part-time/full-time education are generally required to engage in work activities for an average of 20 hours weekly** and the pay must be at least the minimum wage. However, SNAP work requirements have changed for students due to COVID-19 and under a new NY State policy expanding SNAP eligibility to low-income college students engaged at least half-time in career and technical education courses. Some of these changes are temporary so be sure to check for updated information about eligibility. Students not enrolled in these programs (such as students enrolled in 4 year academic programs) must request “good cause” (defined by USDA as illness, family emergency, lack of transportation etc.) to be exempt from work requirements.

If you are receiving unemployment insurance, or if you *are eligible to receive* work-study, you are considered to be compliant with work requirements. For more information about work requirements for SNAP, [go here](#).

**In 2020, New York State Policy expanded SNAP eligibility to almost 45,000 CUNY students who were not eligible before.**

The expanded eligibility will help students avoid food insecurity while advancing their education. **Income-eligible students enrolled at least half-time in a career or technical education program offered at a CUNY comprehensive, technical, or community college will now be eligible for SNAP.**

Additionally, income-eligible individuals attending any of the 10 Educational Opportunity Centers in New York State and enrolled at least half-time in a career and technical education program, remedial courses, basic adult education, literacy, or English as a second language are included in this new policy. Previously, these students did not qualify for SNAP assistance, unless they met certain criteria such as working at least 20 hours per week, or caring for a child, or were unable to work, among others.

If you are enrolled in a CUNY community college or career or technical program, you can now download a verification form on CUNY First to include with your SNAP application. **For more information check out** [www.cuny.edu/SNAP](http://www.cuny.edu/SNAP).

## Emergency Allotments (EA) for SNAP Recipients

There are no changes in maximum SNAP allotment, the total dollar amount provided. However, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act provides a supplement called the EA (the Emergency Allotment) to SNAP households who did not receive the maximum benefit amount per household. If a household is already receiving the maximum of \$355 for a household of two people, they will not be eligible for benefits via the EA supplements. Further expansions are expected. For more information, go [here](#).

## Pandemic EBT (P-EBT)

The program issues supplements to households with children who receive free or reduced-price meals in their schools. Before households in a state can receive P-EBT benefits, the USDA must approve the state's plan, as has happened in New York State. For more information, go [here](#).

## SNAP Application Process

New York City applicants are encouraged to use the [ACCESS HRA](#) website to apply for SNAP. Application forms in many different languages can be found [here](#).

For a list of SNAP Centers click [here](#). Students with disabilities can request a home visit by calling constituent services at 212-331-4640 or 311.

## CUNY SNAP Enrollment Campaign

### Need assistance with your SNAP application?

In Fall 2020, Healthy CUNY, in partnership with two national youth organizations, Swipe Out Hunger and Young Invincibles (link each launched the CUNY SNAP Enrollment Campaign, designed to assist CUNY students eligible for SNAP to enroll. Food Security Advocates and navigators assist their peers to apply for and enroll in SNAP and other food security resources. For more information or to get involved, visit Healthy CUNY [here](#).

CUNY students can connect with a Swipe Out Hunger **CUNY Food Navigator** [here](#), or **text FOOD to 855-230-6746** and a fellow CUNY student will reach out to help connect you with SNAP if you are eligible, as well as other local food resources. This is a free program for all CUNY students. To invite a CUNY Health Advocate to give a presentation in your class or to your student club, contact [healthycuny@sph.cuny.edu](mailto:healthycuny@sph.cuny.edu).

Staff at some CUNY benefits resource centers and food pantries are also available to assist with benefits eligibility and enrollment. You can also **contact the Hunger Free America Benefits Access Team** [here](#), or call 646-355-1475.

## WIC

WIC is a special supplemental foods program for women, infants, and children. It offers nutrition education, breastfeeding support, referrals, and nutritious foods. For more information about how this program works, please go here. Among the groups who are eligible for WIC are mothers of children age 5 or younger, pregnant and breastfeeding women, fathers, grandparents, foster parents, step- parents and guardians. For those eligible, WIC can provide additional food security for young children and their parents.

You can receive WIC even if:

- You are not a legal resident, a green card is not needed
- You or other household members work
- You get food stamps, public assistance or Medicaid
- You are a foreign student (F-1 Visa)
- You do not have a social security number

[For more information about WIC, click here.](#)

For help determining your eligibility for SNAP or WIC benefits, or assistance with your application or recertification, contact the [Hunger Free America Benefits Access Team](#) at 646-355-1475.



## Monetary Supports

CUNY campuses can provide monetary grants that can be used to assist in paying for food or free up money for it. At least 22 campuses offer the Carroll and Milton Petrie Student Emergency Grant Fund, which provides financial support for qualifying students experiencing a short-term financial crisis that may make it difficult for them to stay in school. Check the specific page for the Petrie grant on your campus site, as the details of the grant- amount, application, and eligibility may differ for each school.

Where this page is housed can vary from campus, so we recommend that you type the grant name and your campus on Google for ease of access. Other non-campus financial resources can make it easier to get food.

## Nutrition Resources

Food is more than just something to eat. Consider eating and diet as resources for well-being, pleasure, and cultural identity. Many different nutrition resources are available online and in the community to help you find affordable healthy food, tasty recipes that you can make at home, and tips for learning to cook healthy food on a budget.



One such resource is Fresh Food Box from GROW NYC. Fresh Food Box delivers a box of food for \$14 to \$20 that would normally cost up to \$30 in a grocery store. You are able to use EBT/SNAP to purchase these food boxes filled with 10 to 15 pounds of fresh produce.

You can use EBT/SNAP to buy these food boxes filled with 10 to 15 pounds of fresh produce. Half-priced Fresh Food Boxes are now available for customers shopping with SNAP! Get the same great bag of produce for just \$7 when you pay with your EBT card at every GrowNYC Fresh Food Box site. The program is available in Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx and Queens.

For a map of locations, [visit here for location sites.](#)

Another source for nutrition resources is City Harvest. City Harvest, a non-profit group, also provides nutritional resources and education on how to eat healthy, affordable food.

City Harvest provides free nutrition education classes with topics including:

- 1) Healthy recipes
- 2) Buying healthy groceries on a budget
- 3) How to properly read nutrition labels
- 4) How to safely store food so that you are making it last longer

More information on City Harvest and the nutritional resources and education that they provide can be [found here](#).

## Additional Campus Food Security Resources

Each campus has its own plan and resources for helping students facing food security, through vouchers, referrals, pre-packed and grab & go food. Many pantries have online registration, but this is inconsistent across the campuses. **Before heading to campus, we advise you to first call or email your campus pantry.**

- You can [find a directory of CUNY Food Pantries](#) with their campus location and contact information; you can visit any campus food pantry during distance learning.
- You may also find support using the services provided by your [Student Affairs office](#); you can find the office contact on your campus website.



# Homelessness and Housing Instability

Housing insecurity poses a threat to the academic success of CUNY students. How can one expect a student to succeed when they have to constantly worry about where they are going to sleep at night? **In the spring 2020 survey on the Effects of COVID-19 on CUNY students, about 50% of students reported that they have some worries about losing current housing due to coronavirus. Additionally, about 54% of students who had to withdraw from classes last semester said it was because they need to focus on basic needs like housing and food.**

In our Spring 2021 COVID-19 follow up survey, some students described their housing instability over the past year.

**“I was forced to move into a foster home due to the pandemic and my college dorm closing down.”**

**“There have been multiple layoffs at one of my jobs. This job is my main source of income so if I were to be laid off, it would hugely impact my ability to pay rent.”**

Housing insecurity puts students at a disadvantage and creates an environment that makes it difficult to succeed. CUNY students who are homeless or forced to live in shelters report that they often feel invisible, struggling to get through each day but not easily finding the help they need at CUNY or elsewhere. Some resources to help students address these concerns are linked below.

- **Coalition for the Homeless** has a crisis intervention program where you can walk in and get help, and provide support with eviction, shelter access, disability issues, and more. [Click here](#) for a searchable database of emergency services in NYC.
- **GenerationNYC** Guide for Youth Experiencing Homelessness provides a list of resources to find a place to stay as well as youth drop-in centers and resources for special populations such as LGBTQ youth.
- **The U.S. Department of Education** created this guide for college students who have experienced homelessness or housing insecurity.
- **Center for Urban Community Services (CUCS)** provides housing resources for families and individuals with mental health and other special needs.
- **Neighborhood Coalition for Shelter** provides resources for New Yorkers who are experiencing homelessness and housing instability
- **Catholic Charities** Find Help with avoiding eviction, emergency shelter and affordable housing.
- **Temporary Housing for Families** Apply [here](#) for temporary housing for families with children.

In addition, most CUNY campuses offer emergency grants that can be applied for housing emergencies, to find out about resources on your campus contact your campus Student Affairs Office.



## Financial Security

For many of us, our struggle to meet essential needs such as food and housing, comes down to not having enough money. In the 2020 Healthy CUNY COVID survey, students reported that after the pandemic hit, they were worried about finances because either they or someone in their household had lost a job or their household expenses had increased – sometimes both. These worries can make it harder to focus on school.

### These students described the stress of their financial insecurity:

“I need money for gas, Con Edison, rent of \$2,100. I’m extremely worried and overwhelmed. The rent is getting harder to pay, the money that we owe to the bank is getting harder to pay.

Price for daily basis things are going up & I lost my work because of the (pandemic). So it’s hard for me to manage all the expense in a little amount of money.

Fortunately, some resources listed here can help students tackle their financial concerns. **We hope they will provide some relief and some ideas for where to look for help if you or a friend are experiencing a financial emergency or struggling to make ends meet.**



## CUNY Financial Resources

- **Emergency grants and loans:** For emergency grant and loan information, students should check with their individual campus **Student Affairs office**.
- **Financial Aid:** For information on financial aid services at CUNY, [click here](#). To find your campus financial aid office, [click here](#). For CUNY financial aid updates related to COVID-19, [click here](#) and scroll down to Financial Aid Updates.
- **Financial Literacy:** For CUNY Financial Literacy information and videos, [click here](#).
- Student jobs and internship opportunities For information about Federal Work Study, and links to more information about employment for CUNY students, [click here](#) or visit your campus career services office.
- over 30 economic opportunity programs and benefits. It also includes a regularly updated list of COVID-19 response resources. For more information, [click here](#).
- **HRA Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP):** For more information and to apply for the HEAP grant, [click here](#).
- **Support for renters and tenants:** To find information and frequently asked questions for renters and tenants, [click here](#).
- **Temporary Aid to Needy Families Program (TANF):** offers cash assistance to NYC parents (living and caring for at least 1 child). More information on TANF [here](#).
- **Hebrew Free Loan Society** is offering interest-free Coronavirus Financial Impact Loans up to \$5,000 for low and moderate-income families throughout New York City, Long Island, and Westchester County. More info [here](#).

## City and Community Financial Resources

- **ACCESS HRA Client Portal:** New Yorkers can apply and recertify online for SNAP and Cash Assistance, view benefits, and much more. [Click here](#) for more information.
- **ACCESS NYC** is a portal for NYC residents to determine their eligibility for

## Unemployment Benefits

Federal Unemployment Benefits are changing. For up to date benefits information visit the New York State Department of Labor website [here](#).

## Financial Education, Training and Skill Building

Other programs help New Yorkers learn about financial planning, employment and tax preparation.

- **NYPL Money Matters:** New York Public Library Financial Literacy Financial education programs and resources. [Click here](#) for more information.
- **NYC Department of Consumer Affairs** offers Free financial counseling, tax prep, and financial Education. [Click here](#) for more information.
- **Workforce Opportunity Services:** For Employment and Training Opportunities- Resume and interviewing workshops; skills-based training; connections to employment opportunities, [click here](#).



# MEETING YOUR UNIQUE NEEDS

This section examines the distinct needs of key CUNY student populations. These include students who are also parents or caregivers of children under 18, immigrant students, international students (those who live in another country but came here to study), students with disabilities, LGBTQI students, and students who are also working, especially those working at low wage jobs or as essential workers. In each section we present resources to meet their distinct needs and their rights.

## Student Parents

It's pretty hard for us to concentrate on school, if we're worried about how to pay for our next meal, make rent, or find a job to support ourselves and our family. This section describes how CUNY students can meet some of our unique needs. The focus is on helping students to overcome food, housing and economic challenges that can interfere with academic success, well-being, and a comfortable life.

“My daughter was home exclusively during the pandemic and I was the primary caregiver. This made work and school more challenging. Both also became remote and it was a lot to handle.”

A college education and degree provide opportunity for economic security and greater lifetime earning potential. While CUNY has done more than most colleges to help students and their families to escape poverty, the COVID-19 pandemic brought some new threats to keeping college enrollment affordable. **Cuts in State and Federal funds brought about by the economic crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic threaten many of the safety net programs that have supported CUNY students and other low-income New Yorkers.** Moreover, more than a decade of tax cuts for the wealthy have made it harder for the city, state, and federal governments to generate the tax revenues to support existing programs, much less fund new ones.

“We have one computer and a little study place. So it is very difficult to study together. During the school times, my sons stayed at school to do all their homework before coming home, so that we will use our limited space for family time.” - CUNY student, Spring 2020.

Many community resources are available for student-parents and include resources for children with disabilities and other family members.

Here are some free and low-cost childcare services. Call to determine the appropriate child care program for your child.

- ☞ [NYC Child Care Resource & Referral Consortium](#)
- ☞ [Child Care Aware of America statewide child care resource links](#)
- ☞ [Child Care Access Means Parents in School Program](#)
- ☞ [NYC Child Development Support Corporation](#)

For information on child care services on CUNY campuses, visit:

- ☞ [CUNY Campus Child Care Centers – The City University of New York](#)
- ☞ [Find a Center – The City University of New York \(cuny.edu\)](#)

“Coronavirus affected me as a caretaker because my parents had to work, I have to study and take care of my brothers when my parents are out. Luckily everything is getting better.” -CUNY Student Spring 2021

# Immigrant and International Students

CUNY values the many contributions that our diverse immigrant and international students bring to our university. We also recognize the unique challenges facing each of these groups.

The more than 85,000 CUNY students who were born outside the mainland United States but now live here face an array of practical, bureaucratic, and legal challenges. While immigrant students who lack documentation or have DACA status face the most formidable challenges, current federal policies as well as anti-immigrant prejudices that have been stoked by nationalist groups and some politicians can affect all foreign borne students and even those perceived to be immigrants.

## International Students

The United States makes multiple and frequent changes to the policies that directly affect the more than 9,000 international students that come to CUNY from more than 100 countries. Life is stressful for everyone these days but it has been especially unpredictable for international students who were faced with changing rules for student visas and in-classroom instruction that have had implications for enrollment eligibility, travel, healthcare, work, and life in the U.S. One student explained, *“I went back to my country. Now I have 12 hours difference with NY, that I have to stay awake from 1:00am to 4:00am for my courses.”*

Despite these obstacles, the mission of CUNY remains the same: to provide a high quality, accessible education to all New Yorkers, regardless of our background.

## Resources for Immigrant and Undocumented Students at CUNY

- **The CUNY Financial Aid Office** offers insight on what it means to be an undocumented student and how to support undocumented students at CUNY. [Link to it here.](#)
- **[CUNY Citizenship Now!](#)** provides free, high quality, and confidential immigration law services to help individuals and families on their path to U.S. citizenship. Students can get a free consultation with an attorney or paralegal. Call or text for remote help with your citizenship, green card renewal, work authorization, and fee waiver applications. Call: 646-664-9400, or Text: 929-334-3784. [@CUNYCitizenship](#) on Twitter, [Citizenship Now!](#) on Facebook
- **The CUNY Clear Project at the CUNY School of Law** offers free legal representation and support to Muslim and all other communities in the New York City area and beyond that are targeted by the government under the guise of national security and counterterrorism. [@CUNY\\_CLEAR](#)



- **The New York State Youth Leadership Council** is compiling this live document of resources in NYC around COVID-19 support efforts. They are prioritizing undocumented students.
- **DREAM ACT:** Review your [DREAM ACT eligibility here](#), and more.
- **American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)** Advocates for equality in education and much more. [Learn more on their website linked here.](#)
- **US White House:** [Click here for a list of presidential actions from the White House.](#)

## More Resources

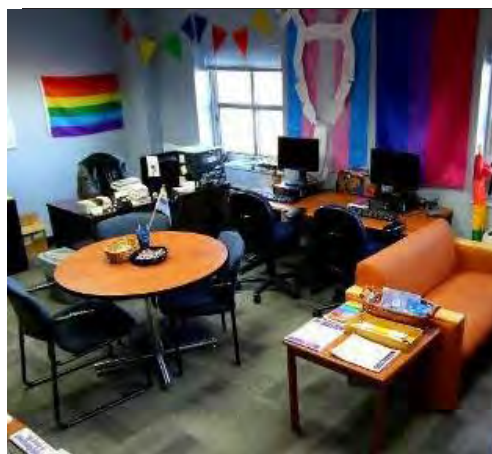
- Refer to your campus International Student Advisor, or visit the CUNY Office of Academic Affairs International Student and Scholar Services webpage to obtain the most up to date guidance on matters related to visas, travel, insurance coverage, work permits, and important COVID-19 updates that effect international students.
- Study in the States is a US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) webpage that has numerous resources for international and Student Exchange and Visitor Program (SEVP) students, including important updates related to COVID-19

## LGBTQI+ Students

COVID-19 has increased all kinds of insecurities--housing, financial, food, for instance—for many students. But we also need to recognize the particular challenges that the pandemic has posed for LGBTQI+ students. For example, the sudden loss of a job, an inability to afford a doctor's visit, and other barriers to care pose risks given the health disparities that disproportionately affect LGBTQI+ people.

## CUNY and Community Resources for LGBTQI+ Students

Whether you are a new or returning LGBTQ CUNY student, we encourage you to check out the resources available both online and in-person to help us feel connected, supported and ready to succeed at CUNY.



*LGBTQ Resource Center at College of Staten Island*

**The NYC Unity Project** conducted a survey of NYC LGBTQ program and service providers to create an up-to-date, comprehensive resource guide on LGBTQ resources. This guide is organized by sections including mental health, physical health and wellness, peer and community support, food assistance, legal help,

housing and shelter and financial help. Each section provides a brief explanation of the services offered, as well as contact and website information.

- **CUNY campuses can also provide various degrees of support for LGBTQI+ students.** Some campuses have LGBTQI+ student groups, and research and resource centers including at [Brooklyn College](#), [Hunter College](#) and [City College](#). Check out your campus website to see what services your campus offers.
- CUNY Central has organized a **CUNY LGBTQI+ Resource HUB** with information on special events, programs, and CUNY policies and procedures, such as policies on student requests for name and/or gender changes.
- **LGBTQ National Hotline:** Anonymous and confidential hotline where callers can feel safe voicing issues and concerns that predominantly impact LGBTQ populations without fear of stigmatization. Call 888-843-4564 open Monday-Friday 4pm-midnight, Saturday noon-5pm or email: [help@LGBThotline.org](mailto:help@LGBThotline.org)

CUNY students who are homeless or forced to live in shelters report that they often feel invisible, struggling to get through each day but not easily finding the help they need at CUNY or elsewhere.



## Those Working While in School

Students who work while going to school --more than half of us who study at CUNY-- have to pay extra attention to balancing responsibilities and choosing priorities. Even before the pandemic, mixing work and school required extra time management, focus and sacrifice. Now, the many CUNY students who are essential workers at the front lines of this crisis, experience even more stress – and the anxiety and depression that this stress can trigger. In part this stress comes from having to put their own health and that of their families at risk because of their job. In part, as many health care and other essential workers report, taking care of or serving people who are sick, stressed out, or fearful every day puts its own burden on our emotional well-being. In our Spring 2020 and Spring 2021 surveys, other working students reported difficulty keeping up with classwork and balancing all of their responsibilities and others reported having new opportunities because of the pandemic. Schedules changing at work, difficult professors and uncertainty of the future created overlapping obligations and new stressors.

### **SOME OF THEIR COMMENTS ON OUR SURVEYS EXPLAIN THESE EXPERIENCES:**

“Professors not being understanding, it really bothered me that my professor didn’t care that I am an essential worker, he also won’t give me extended time to complete missing assignments”

“(I was) going from part-time work to full time being an essential worker and co-workers calling out.”

"There are very little job opportunities & due to higher unemployment, there are more qualified and experienced people who are getting back to work. Rather than wasting time, I am deciding to continue my education."

“(I was) an essential worker so I was never home, and my professors didn’t understand why I couldn’t complete assignments.”

"Since the start of the pandemic I was able to get my first full time job as a COVID-19 Contact Tracer thereby greatly impacting my income in positive way."

## Resources for Students who are Working

- For helpful tips, visit [The Busy Student's Guide to Balancing Work and College](#).
- **For the Frontlines:** Free crisis counseling text line for health care professionals and essential workers. Text "FRONTLINE" to 741741.





# Students with Disabilities

CUNY strives to ensure equal access and opportunity for students with disabilities through programs which support the academic success and personal development of students with disabilities. Each CUNY campus features an Office of Disability Services, managed by a director who coordinates the provision of reasonable accommodations and support services for students with disabilities. **Students' needs for reasonable accommodations and support services are verified by these offices. They also provide counseling and referrals, and arrange crucial auxiliary aids and services, including assistive technology services, note takers, readers, sign language interpreter services, distance learning networks, priority registration, and alternative testing arrangements.**

The ongoing changes imposed by the pandemic have challenged students with disabilities in some distinct ways. Some may have trouble using online learning systems; others may have trouble getting around, or back to campus or work; and still others may be looking for ways to reconnect with peers, or faculty and staff on campus.

CUNY Campus Disability Services Centers will be there for you whether you need remote or in-person support. Campus contact information is listed at the Directory to Campus Disability Services Centers [here](#).

Here are a few practical things people with disabilities can do to cope:

- Plan what you will do if you or your direct support provider gets sick. Create a contact list of family, friends, neighbors, and local service agencies that can provide support in case you or your direct support provider becomes ill or unavailable.
- Plan at least two ways of communicating from home and work that can be used rapidly in an emergency (e.g., landline phone, cell phone, text-messaging, email). Write down this information and keep it with you.
- Have enough household items and groceries so that you will be comfortable staying home for a few weeks if needed, at least a 30-day supply of over the counter and prescription medicines and any medical equipment or supplies that you might need. Make a photocopy of prescriptions, as this may help in obtaining medications in an emergency situation.

## More resources for students with disabilities:

- **CUNY Disability Services:** For information and resources for all CUNY students with disabilities, including CUNY programs and a reasonable accommodations guide, [visit here](#).
- **Economic and employment resources** for CUNY students with disabilities can be [found here](#).
- More tips from the CDC Find more information and tips for people with [disabilities here](#).

# OVERCOMING RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

Like others in this country, CUNY students experience old and new forms of systemic and other forms of racism, discrimination, and prejudice. The police murders of George Floyd and other African-Americans and the upswelling of protest against these acts intersect with COVID-19 and other recent events to further challenge well-being, mental health, and academic success.

**This section of the Guide provides support and guidance for coping with these forces but also reinforce the courage and determination of many CUNY students who have joined or supported these mobilizations. It also seeks to understand the similarities and differences among the experiences of Black, Latinx, Asian American, female, transgender, recent immigrants and other groups that experience institutional and interpersonal discrimination and prejudice.** In particular, it seeks to help CUNY students find the support, resources and they need to cope with, respond to and ultimately dismantle these negative forces that threaten our well-being and the nation's future.

Racism and discrimination have long been an ugly part of our society. We've seen it in action in everyday life and many of us may have been victims of racist and discriminatory rhetoric both on and off campus. In recent years, perhaps attributable to the beliefs and rhetoric of political leaders, many have experienced increased discrimination – racism and xenophobia, anti-Semitism, discrimination against immigrants and LGBTQIA+ populations, and sexism.

And the pandemic has exacerbated these issues. We've seen a rise in discrimination against Asian Americans who many, including our government leaders, wrongfully blame for COVID-19. And we've also now seen how disproportionately COVID-19 affects Black and Latinx populations – much of which can be attributed to the effects of systemic racism pre-COVID, like inadequate access to health care.

**Similarly, individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+ have experienced increased discrimination in recent years, including violent acts that have often resulted in death. In 2020, advocates reported 26 deaths of transgender or gender non-conforming people in the country, (up from 26 in 2019) many of whom were Black transgender women.** And in 2021, we've already seen at least 31 transgender or gender non-conforming people killed, and this is likely an underestimate as many of these crimes go unreported or misreported. If you or someone you know is struggling and needs help, please consider using the hotline listed below.





**LGBTQ National Hotline:** Anonymous and confidential hotline where callers can feel safe voicing issues and concerns that predominantly impact LGBTQ populations without fear of stigmatization. Call 888-843-4564 open Monday-Friday 4pm-midnight, Saturday noon-5pm or email: [help@LGBThotline.org](mailto:help@LGBThotline.org)

Those who identify as women have also experienced increased stress due to sexism. From policies regulating women's bodies to unfounded judgements of women's capabilities, women have an uphill battle ahead. **A 2020 UN report found that 91% of men and 86% of women had at least one bias against gender equality across areas including, politics, economics, education, women's reproductive rights, and intimate partner violence.**

On top of all of this, the May 25, 2020 murder of George Floyd brought about a resurgence of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and with it, racist opposition. We know that the health and social issues discussed in this guide-- mental health, educational success, parenting, health care -- are intimately connected. And we know how taxing these issues can be in addition to the pressures of excelling in school, work, and home life. **It is our hope that the Guide to Surviving and Thriving at CUNY will provide you with resources and methods for combating some of the detrimental effects of living in this time.**

## More discrimination resources

Visit [NYC's Office for Prevention of Hate Crimes](#) site for resources and phone number to report hate crimes, harassment or discrimination.

To report discrimination online, please visit [NYC's Commission on Human Rights website](#).

For more information on NYC's Commission on Human Rights resources on COVID-19-related discrimination, [please visit here](#).

For information about legal rights for immigrant and religious communities and communities of color in NYC, [please visit here](#).

**Increased public attention on racism and police violence in our society may trigger stress, anxiety and anger, feelings that can be difficult to cope with.** We urge you to review the [mental health resources in this Guide](#) and to contact a mental health professional should you experience symptoms that bother you for more than a week or two. At the same time, for some people these experiences provide a motivation to take action for change, a topic discussed in the [section on advocacy](#).

Another useful resource is:

- **The Steve Fund:** Helping students of color who are feeling depressed/stressed/overwhelmed. Text "STEVE" to 741741 to connect with a live crisis counselor 24/7 and email [info@stevefund.org](mailto:info@stevefund.org) with any questions.

Healthy CUNY supports BLM and advocacy for social justice. However, we also understand that participation, whether physical or remote, may come with its own risks. To help we've provided some tips on issues related to the BLM movement and police violence below. While we know that the need to provide these kinds of tips should not exist, we also understand the need to be informed given the realities surrounding policing in today's society.

# Be Aware of Your Rights

We all need to know and use the rights previous generations fought for:

- **You have the right to remain silent** – If you wish to exercise this right, say so out loud
- **You do not have to consent to a search of yourself or your belongings**, but police may pat down your clothing if they suspect a weapon
- **If you are arrested, you have the right to a government-appointed lawyer** if you cannot afford one
- **You do not have to answer questions about where you were born**, whether you are a U.S. citizen, or how you entered the country

What do I do if I'm stopped by police?

- **Stay calm** and be polite
- **If they ask you to back up, comply**
- **Do not run, resist**, or obstruct the officers
- **Always make sure your hands are visible** and do not reach for anything without asking or notifying the officer(s)

For more information on what to do if you are stopped by police, arrested, or witness police brutality, please visit [ACLU.org](https://www.aclu.org).

## Students with Former Criminal Justice Involvement

Prior or current involvement with the criminal justice system can make navigating the educational system and completing a degree or program more difficult. There are several initiatives and programs aimed at helping individuals affected by the criminal justice system, including many at CUNY.

### New York Based Reentry Programs

- **The Fortune Society** – A “one-stop-shop” of services including assistance with housing, education, health, mental health, employment, substance use, and food and nutrition.  
Contact info: Phone: (212) 691-7554 Email: [info@fortunesociety.org](mailto:info@fortunesociety.org)
- **College & Community Fellowship**  
A program that enables women with criminal justice involvement to earn their college degrees and attain employment.  
Contact info: Phone: (646) 380-7777 Email: [info@collegeandcommunity.org](mailto:info@collegeandcommunity.org)
- **Exodus Transitional Community**  
A program that offers a broad spectrum of services for adults and youth affected by the criminal justice system.  
Contact Info: Complete intake form located [here](#).
- **The Osborne Association**  
A program that offers a multitude of services assisting in, employment, substance use, court advocacy, young adult services, and wellness and prevention.  
Bronx Phone: 718-707-2600  
Brooklyn Phone: 718-637-6560  
Manhattan Phone: 212-324-5577

### CUNY Specific Initiatives

- **Freedom Prep** – A college transition program for court-involved youth age 16-24, providing a supported, structured on-ramp to college for formerly incarcerated and court-involved young people.  
Contact Info: Phone: 917-202-3856 Email: [stephanie.gilman@cuny.edu](mailto:stephanie.gilman@cuny.edu)
- **John Jay Institute for Justice and Opportunity** (formerly known as the Prisoner Reentry Institute) - The Institute opens doors and eliminates barriers to success for people who have been involved in the criminal legal system by creating access to higher education and pathways to satisfying careers.  
For general information, email: [mbond@jjay.cuny.edu](mailto:mbond@jjay.cuny.edu)

# ADVOCACY: Making “Good Trouble” for a Better USA, New York, and CUNY



*Supporters of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program*

The late civil rights activist and Congressman from Georgia John Lewis encouraged people in this country, especially young people, to make some “good trouble” that leads our country and world to a better place. This section of the Guide provides some information on making “good trouble” at CUNY that will make our university a better, healthier, more equitable institution.

CUNY leaders want to help students meet their needs during the pandemic and to overcome all the other challenges facing CUNY, New York City, the nation, and the world. Most faculty and staff on your campus, from the professors teaching your class to the academic advisers to the mental health professionals in the Counseling Center, are also committed to helping you get the information, services and support you need to survive and thrive. **But one person knows best what you need to survive and thrive, one person knows best exactly how to help you, and one person has the lifetime commitment to helping you succeed. That person is you.**

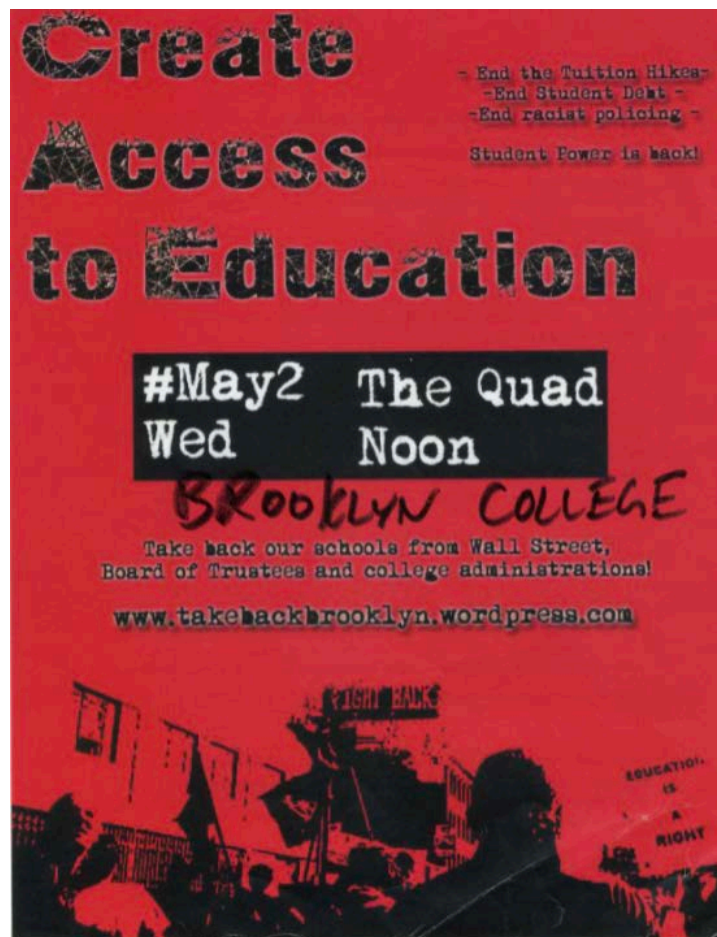
This section provides information and resources that will help you to become your own advocate and an advocate for making CUNY a place where you and students like you can survive and succeed. An advocate speaks on behalf of those who feel they are not being heard or taken seriously. Advocates make the case for services, support, and respect for those who may lack some vital resource. By becoming an effective advocate for yourself and your peers, you achieve self-sufficiency and dignity, you increase your chances of getting what you, your peers, your family and your community need to succeed.



and you acquire skills that will serve you well throughout your life. [Watch a two minute video](#) in which a few students from around the country explain why they became advocates.

## A CUNY History of Advocacy

CUNY students have played a key role in advocating for programs and policies that better meet the needs of students, make CUNY and New York City a fairer and more equitable place, and improve conditions on campuses. **From the 1960s to today, CUNY students have organized, demonstrated, and demanded free tuition, open admissions, and more child care on campus; they have fought against tuition hikes and budget cuts. CUNY students have been leaders in movements to protect the rights of LGBTQI, immigrant, Black and Latinx students, students with disabilities, those on public assistance, and others.** In many cases, students who had themselves experienced problems in pursuing their education organized to demand their own rights and the services they needed and also to respect the rights and meet the needs of other students facing similar problems. Today's CUNY students



*A poster for a 2011 demonstration at Brooklyn College. [Credit](#)*



## A CUNY Student Advocate Describes Her Experience

“As part of a Fellowship at my campus, I worked with 3 undergraduates and staff from the Student Affairs office during Spring 2020 to present a proposal on reducing food insecurity on our campus. Our goals, informed by our survey of the current state of food security efforts on my campus, were three-fold: to increase the visibility of existing food security initiatives; to combat food waste on and off-campus; and to lay the groundwork for more sustainable, long-term initiatives.

To identify strategies to improve campus food security, we coupled our campus scan with research on what other large, urban universities were doing to address student food insecurity. We met regularly with Student Affairs staff, relying on their campus-specific expertise to help us flesh out and refine our ideas. With their support, we were able to propose free and low-cost initiatives for each of our goals and presented our work to the Vice President of Student Affairs.



*City University students at Federal Hall in 1989 protesting a proposed tuition increase. [Credit](#)*

## What can student advocates at CUNY do to better their own and others' lives?

No single job description fits the role of every student advocate. But these are some common actions advocates engage in:

1. **Learn about the systems**, those at CUNY and in other institutions, that make it hard to meet needs and identify strategies to fix these problems.
2. **Find someone**—a staff person in your campus's Office of Student Affairs responsible for responding to student complaints—and explain your problem and ask for help in finding a solution.
3. **Identify others who share your problem** and bring them together to find common solutions and consider forming an ongoing group. You can also find individuals who can help plan—a faculty member, an experienced activist, an older sibling, or some of your classmates.
4. **Learn all you can about a specific issue** such as reducing food insecurity, getting treatment for depression or anxiety, finding Covid-related health services, and then educate others on your campus about what you have learned.
5. **Develop an educational campaign** on your campus that will help students find needed services such as emergency food, how to enroll in SNAP, where to get contraceptive, abortion, and other sexual health services.
6. **Create safe spaces—virtual or physical**—where students can meet, share concerns, and develop solutions for the problems they face.
7. **Run for student office** through the University Student Senate (see below for more).
8. **Vote in city, state and national elections** and encourage friends, family and co-workers to vote as well.

## How Can I Become an Effective Advocate?

Successful advocates have learned that you make the road to advocacy by walking the advocacy path. Start by trying out some of the activities listed above. Some departments – including human services, community health, social work, and sociology--offer courses in advocacy. Check with your academic adviser to find options. In addition, the organizations listed below can provide training or support for students who want to be advocates.

## Why is Voting an Important Tool for Advocates?

Whether you believe that voting, activism, or some other political strategy is more or less important, your vote can make the difference about who decides the future of our lives. To honor all those who have fought and died to win the right to vote, CUNY students can:

- Vote in local and general elections, on Election Day or before.
- Sign up to be a poll worker. The NYC Board of Elections needs both volunteer and paid workers in the period leading up to an election. [For more information visit here.](#)

- Urge your family, friends, classmates, and co-workers to vote.
- Familiarize yourselves with the key issues in this election and help to educate others about these issues.
- Volunteer for one of the many organizations involved in voter registration, voter education and get out the vote campaigns.

For more information, visit:

- [CUNY VOTES](#) is a comprehensive, non-partisan initiative whose mission is to promote student voter registration, voter participation and voter awareness through campus-based activities, external partnerships and University- wide campaigns. Get help in registering to vote, filing an absentee ballot, and finding your voting place.
- [VOTE411](#), a project of the nonpartisan League of Women Voters, supported 10 million people in the United States through Election Day on November 3, 2021, with English and Spanish language hotlines. Having the resources in Spanish makes the information even more accessible. With so many changes to election information this cycle, VOTE411 is a useful tool to keep voters updated on the changes and to counter misinformation about elections. VOTE411 has alerts in both [English](#) and [Spanish](#) with any late changes that impact voters.



*CUNY Student Government leadership encouraged their classmates to vote in the 2020 presidential election*



## Some Organizations That Support Advocacy for CUNY Students

**CUNY University Student Senate** is the official student government at CUNY. It seeks to preserve the accessibility and affordability of higher education within CUNY. USS was created based on the notion that students must be linked school by school to have an effective voice in shaping university, city, state, and federal policy. USS includes student-delegates elected from each campus to represent the needs of their individual school. [For more information visit here.](#)



*CUNYUSS and Public Advocate Jumaane Williams, a CUNY graduate, and Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer rally in 2019 to demand proper funding for CUNY. [Credit](#)*

**Young Invincibles** was founded in 2009 to give young people a voice in the national debate about health care reform. YI is now a national organization that takes on issues related to health care, higher education, and economic security. It aims to expand economic opportunity for young people ages 18 to 34 and make sure that their perspective is heard wherever decisions about their collective future are being made. At CUNY, Young Invincibles has worked on improving access to mental health care, trained students to be advocates, and worked to prevent cuts in the CUNY budget. To find out more, [visit here.](#)

**The CUNY Rising Alliance** is a broad coalition of student, labor and community groups advocating for a free and high-quality higher education. On May 8, 2020, CUNY students organized by the Alliance were joined by New York State Senator Andrew Gounardes and Assemblymember Harvey Epstein to oppose new cuts to CUNY, demand a tuition freeze and call for increased taxes on the rich. Despite years of underfunding, CUNY is facing new cuts of up to \$110 million from the State and City.

As New York City and State consider budgets for fiscal year 2022-2023, CUNY students will again have the opportunity to speak for our needs. To read about the CUNY Rising Alliance's New Deal for CUNY agenda, [visit here.](#)



*A CUNY Rising Alliance demonstration in 2016 to urge against cuts in CUNY's state budget. [Credit](#)*

**New York Public Interest Research Group** is a statewide student-directed, non-partisan, not for profit political organization founded in 1973. NYPIRG is directed by a student-run and student-elected Board of Directors that approves any issue that NYPIRG works on. NYPIRG is active in CUNY and SUNY and is addressing such issues as food insecurity, high prices of textbooks, and the COVID-19 pandemic. NYPIRG has contacts on nine CUNY campuses. To find the telephone number and website of the NYPIRG on your campus, [visit here](#).

## How Do I Decide What To Advocate On?

Only your imagination is your limit. In the last few years CUNY students have joined Black Lives Matter, the Sunrise Movement fighting climate change, the Dreamers fighting for immigration reform, and student groups opposing tuition hikes and added student fees. They have registered voters; combatted food insecurity; fought against discrimination against LGBTQI students and students with disabilities; and organized to support people coming out of incarceration or foster care. You can find a list and contacts for other recent national student advocacy campaigns [here](#).

Not all advocacy gets its supporters in trouble, as John Lewis would no doubt tell us. But it may be true if we look at the history of advocacy in the United States –and at CUNY—advocacy that leads to “good trouble” puts pressure on elected officials and university leaders. It encourages them to listen to voices they might not have heard, make changes which may be opposed by powerful special interests, and make CUNY a more equitable institution. Those changes are most likely to come from the “good trouble” John Lewis described. Together we can make CUNY the institution New York City needs and deserves.