



BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Next Generation Leading Brain Health Revolution

*The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is working to develop brain healthy communities, creating a culture that promotes brain health protective factors and decreases risk factors, thereby improving brain health, optimizing brain performance, and preventing and fighting brain illness across the lifespan for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. **Today we share some of the findings from the [Project Healthy Minds' 2021 State of Mental Health Survey with input from our own Brain Health Scholars.](#)***

Brain illnesses, including depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia, and many more, have reached epidemic proportions in this country. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, many sources report that at least 20 percent of us experienced these issues, and it is anticipated that this percentage is higher and undocumented. Since March of 2020 almost half of us report that COVID-19 has affected our brain health and decreased our resilience to risk factors of brain illness.

Brain illness is an equal opportunity issue. It affects young and old, male and female, and individuals of every race, ethnic background, education level, and income level. The Brain Health Initiative (BHI), the BHI Brain Health Scholar program, as well as many other efforts (including Project Healthy Minds), are tackling the growing mental health crisis. The non-profit [Project Healthy Minds](#) recently announced the findings from its second State of Mental Health Survey. The survey of more than 1,300 Americans between the ages of 18 and 34, when combined with discussions with and data from BHI's Brain Health Scholars, suggests there is hope when it comes to fighting the risk factors and stigma related to these illnesses — and it's coming from young people.

Here are six key takeaways from our conversations with the Brain Health Scholars and a 2021 [release](#) from Project Healthy Minds.

1. BHI Brain Health Scholars perceive that anxiety remains a universal concern among youth. Further, more than 95 percent of the Project Healthy Minds survey respondents

reported experiencing anxiety with almost half saying they experience it frequently or all the time. The pandemic continues to impact these numbers, which are nearly identical to the 2020 Project Healthy Minds survey despite progress on vaccinations and the easing of some pandemic restrictions.

2. Coping with the life balance of school-extracurricular-family-friends and the strenuous college admission process are reported as high sources of stress among BHI's adolescent Brain Health Scholars. Decreased sleep, too much sitting, concerns surrounding COVID-19 and disruptions to living and health, underlying cultural issues such as social injustice and concerns for the environment, and social media use are all reported by the high school thought leaders as being the primary drivers of anxiety for young people.

Our college age Brain Health Scholars add to this list of sources of anxiety indicating that finding work, establishing careers, financial insecurity, and decisions regarding the often-necessary pursuit and expense of post college education are anxiety provokers present in those just finishing school.

3. BHI Brain Health Scholars observe that the pandemic has left young people feeling emotionally exhausted and burned out. The Project Healthy Minds Survey affirms these perceptions, finding that nearly two-thirds of the respondents said they are emotionally exhausted or burned out, with young women and the LGBTQ+ community reporting the greatest impact in their lives. In fact, young women report poorer mental health than young men across virtually every issue. In the LGBTQ+ community, violence, the pandemic, and racial injustices have had devastating results with members of the community three-times more likely to report their mental health as being poor and two-times more likely to say they experience anxiety all the time.
4. ***Now the good news.*** A mental health transformation has arrived, and the Brain Health Initiative faculty see young people are leading the way. The Project Healthy Minds survey shows that mental health/brain health is surpassing physical health in importance for Millennials (born between 1977 and 1995) and Gen-Zers (born between 1996 and 2012). A stunning 86 percent said their mental health is ***as*** important or ***more*** important than their physical health. ***Watch for an upcoming survey from the BHI Brain Health Scholars and participate by sharing your perceptions and priorities related to brain health and brain illness in the community of the young and older. Contributing your opinion to the Brain Health Scholars' effort is imperative to their efforts to improve brain health outcomes.***
5. This increased awareness and focus by young people on brain health and illness means that brain health in the home and community, including the academic setting and workplace, will be the next frontier in our focus of enhancing health and well-being and in promoting optimal student and workforce achievement. BHI Brain Health Scholars predict that young people will have higher expectations regarding their brain health at home, school, and where they play and work. In addition to considering the implications of the rigors of academics, job, and workplace on their mental health, BHI

Scholars perceive that young people, their parents, and support systems, will be looking for places to live, academic settings, and employers who prioritize and support their brain health.

The Project Healthy Minds survey says young people will be more likely to leave situations, such as schools and jobs, which have a negative impact. The survey further points out that many employers are not keeping pace with young workers' expectations, providing an opportunity for companies to differentiate themselves and demonstrate their commitment to employee health by providing mental health resources and redesigning employee benefits.

6. Role models are critical to shattering the stigma and solving the brain health crisis. BHI Brain Health Scholars communicated that young people need aspirational and relatable role models. Nearly half of the respondents in the Project Healthy Minds survey said hearing public figures (think Naomi Osaka, Simone Biles, Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, Demi Lovato), friends, family members, or coworkers talk about their personal brain health struggles inspires them to improve their own brain health.

For the future, these findings will impact where young people choose to live and who they choose to learn from, work for, buy from, and vote for. A recent article in [Harvard Business Review](#), suggests that while changes are happening in corporate cultures and perceptions around mental health, more change is needed. The future of our brain health demands culture change, flexibility, and deeper connection.

Do you know a youth thought leader interested in promoting and protecting brain health and a career in life sciences? [Nominate](#) that person as a Brain Health Scholar.

[Read more](#) about ways you can support your brain health today.

About the Brain Health Initiative (www.brainhealthinitiative.org)

The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is a cutting-edge approach to protecting brain health, promoting brain performance, and preventing and fighting brain illness across the lifespan. The BHI is creating brain healthy communities, cultures that foster brain health protective factors and address risk factors, thereby improving brain health and optimizing brain performance outcomes for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. Join the ***Be Brain Healthy*** movement, ***because brain health matters, and lifestyle makes a difference.*** To view all Brain Health Boosts [click here](#).