

University Counselling Statistics

The New Zealand Union of Student's Associations (NZUSA) requested information (under the Official Information Act 1982) from all New Zealand Universities for the number of counselling sessions used by students, and the number of individual students who used counselling services. All Universities provided information except Lincoln who do not collect data on the number of individual students who use counselling. All Universities also released their counselling statistics for 2018 (end of June) except for Victoria.

Key Findings

Across New Zealand Universities

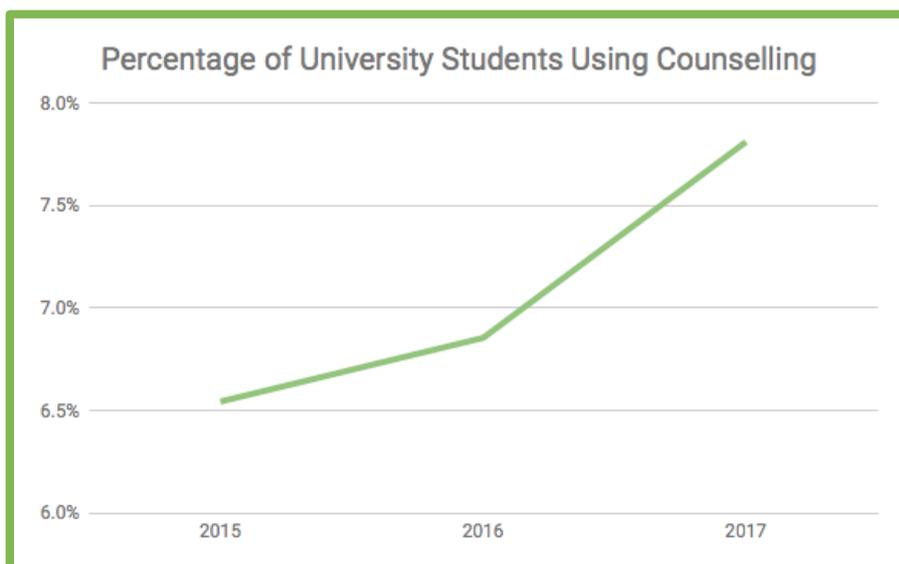
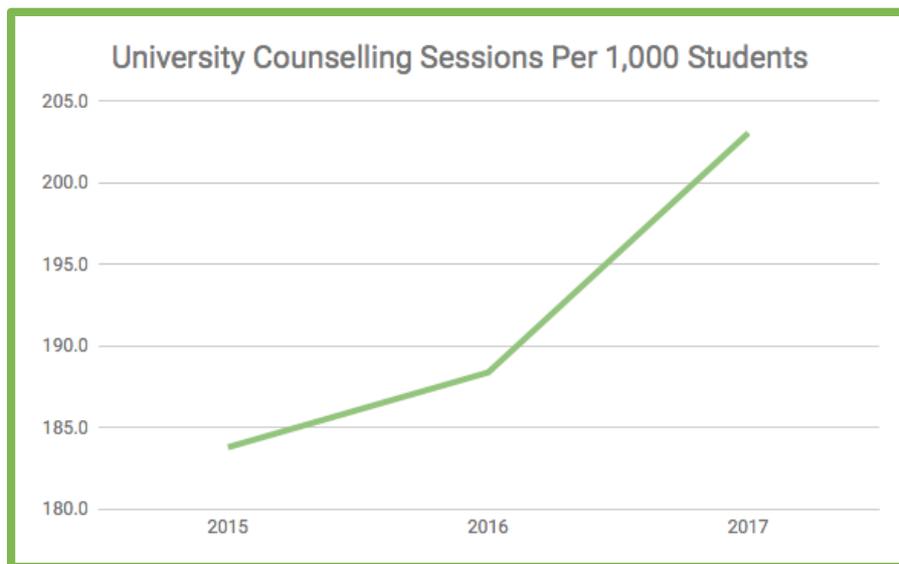
- In 2017, 13,137 individual students used counselling services. This is a 24.66% increase in individual students using counselling services since 2015 (10,538 students).
 - In 2017, an average of 203 counselling sessions per 1,000 students were used at New Zealand Universities. This is a 10.5% increase in the number of counselling sessions used per 1,000 students since 2015.
- *Note that individuals may have multiple counselling sessions.**
- In 2017, an average of 7.65% of University enrolled students used counselling services. This is a 22.89% increase in the percentage of University enrolled students that used counselling services since 2015 (6.23%).

University Specific

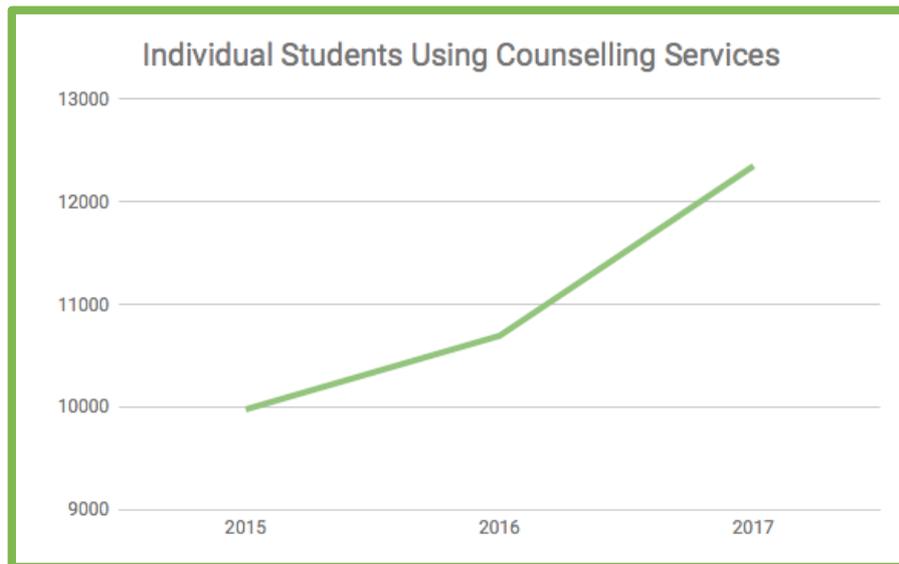
- There has been a 69.14% increase in the number of individual students using counselling services at Massey University since 2015 (2015: 1633, 2016: 1807 2017: 2762).
- Victoria has had the highest percentage of enrolled students using counselling services in the last three years consultatively (2015: 9.6%, 2016: 9.6%, 2017: 9.7%).
- Victoria also has had the highest number of counselling sessions per 1,000 students in the last three years consecutively (2015: 292, 2016: 288, 2017: 297).
- Victoria had the lowest increase of both the number of counselling sessions per 1,000 students since 2015, and the percentage of enrolled students using counselling services since 2015 despite having the highest overall figures.

- The University of Canterbury has a 15.8% decrease in the number of counselling sessions per 1,000 students since 2015, but at 27.26% increase in the number of individual students using counselling services since 2015 (2015: 1038, 2016: 1111, 2017: 1321). This would suggest there are more individual students using counselling services, but they are having less sessions.
- All Universities except Waikato (*Victoria and Lincoln did not provide data*) exceeded 50% of last year's percentage of enrolled students using counselling services mid-way through 2018 (end of June).

Graphs



**Excludes Lincoln and Waikato*



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Key Findings

In July 2018, the New Zealand Union of Students' Associations released *Kei Te Pai?*, a report on student mental health in Aotearoa. The findings highlighted what many already suspected, that tertiary students are facing a mental health crisis. This is having significant impacts on their academic performance and their desire to remain in higher education. The findings of this report, shed light on the counselling statistics shown above and provide some possible reasons as why more students are seeking help.

*Causes of Depression, Stress and Anxiety *(to a great extent)*

- Academic anxiety (51%)
- Worried about finding a job (31%)
- Loneliness (29%)
- Financial difficulties (28.5%)
- Coping with adjusting to student life (28%)
- Cost of education (24%)

Diagnosed mental health issues and counselling services

- 7.6% of students used counselling services in 2017
- 15% of participants had been diagnosed with depression
- 15% of participants had been diagnosed with anxiety

While it is reassuring to see more students seek help, there is still a long way to go to ensure all students with mental health issues are getting help.

Reasons for avoiding seeking help

- I felt I could handle the issue myself (16%)
- I did not feel that I needed it (14%)
- I was embarrassed to seek help (10%)

On top of this, 33% of participants said they waited over two weeks to be seen by a counsellor.

Themes from comments on counselling services

- More counsellors
- Better emergency/crisis response
- Increased availability
- Increased accessibility (online bookings)
- Reduce the cost
- Decrease waiting times
- Increase the number of appointments an individual can have (currently 6?)
- Increase awareness of counselling services

A Possible Explanation

Every year, the cost of living increased for tertiary students. Rent prices increase, tuition fees increase, and general living costs gradually increase also. This alone can cause students to accept a lesser standard of living, take fewer papers, or drop out of study altogether.

When students live in sub-par flats, skip meals and don't turn the heating on this can lead to health issues that have flow on effects to study and mental wellness. Aside from the immediate financial stresses, there is future financial considerations that are causing stress among tertiary students.

Students have told us that they don't know whether they will get the job they want, or get a job at all. This places more importance on academic achievement. The result of this is that students now become more distressed when they do not achieve to their level of expectation because the stakes are much higher.

Academic anxiety is also exacerbated when students are working on the side of study to pay for the increased living costs or to be in a better position to pay off their expensive student loan that continues to grow year upon year.

Achieving in tertiary study is now more important than ever to getting an adequate job that will put people in a position to pay of their student debt, buy a house and save for retirement. There is not singular cause to this mental health crisis, but rather a string of challenges that all students face to varying degrees that accumulate and manifest themselves in the form of mental health issues.

Student loans, substandard living conditions, little to no income, and an intense and challenging course load all affect the wellbeing and mental health of students in tertiary education.

A Tailored Approach to Mental Health *(from Kei Te Pai?)*

Our survey shows that minority groups such as sexual minorities and gender minorities are more susceptible to high levels of psychological distress. We know from this survey, and as student representatives, that different student communities have different stresses that affect their mental health. Each and every one of these students must be included in any action taken on mental health. A more tailored approach to minority groups is therefore needed to ensure we do not inadvertently exclude any section of the student community from getting the support that they need.

Counselling and support services can be intimidating for certain demographics of students to use. For example, conventional practices may not align with the cultural values of some communities. Outreach counselling in maraes or in Pasifika spaces are examples of providing comfortable and safe environments for ethnic minority groups to seek help.

Tailored support also plays a role in normalising the conversation around mental health within those communities who are more likely to suppress their feelings and not reach out for help. Steps also need to be taken to ensure that gender and sexual minorities feel safe using support services by knowing that they will be accepted and respected when talking to someone about their struggles.

A 'one size fits all' model will not work.

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