



A policy toolkit for addressing burnout in universities

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FOREWORD

by the BENDiT-EU team



BENDiT-EU is an Erasmus+ project set up to prepare a comprehensive set of resources to address the issue of burnout in health and allied health universities. Our approach was to work at three distinct levels - organizational, collective, and individual – thus, including all the relevant stakeholders and generating the potential cumulative advantage of a multi-layered intervention.

To achieve this vision, we developed four resources to increase the chances of generating a large-scale effect as follows:

- for raising student awareness, we created a [Burnout Manual](#) focused on individual prevention and intervention in order to easily convey our key messages that burnout prevention can become a daily habit and self-treatment is easily available.
- to offer students the possibility to self-assess burnout and, based on their results, to receive counselling and suggestions for further reading, training or other forms of skills development in preventing or addressing burnout we have created a [web-based platform](#)
- to increase competencies and skills, we developed and tested a five-day, experiential, research-based curriculum for students and a short [training program](#) for support staff
- lastly, to drive policy changes and to support decision-makers in universities better address the topic of burnout, we have created this toolkit, which includes:
 - an academic burnout factsheet;
 - a checklist for assessing the current situation at the university level;
 - a set of best practices identified on an international level that the medical and allied health universities could employ in order to decrease student burnout.

As burnout may generate high societal costs and impact the quality of life of many people, we hope that our project's results could contribute to preventing this phenomenon in a timely and efficient manner.

Since 2017, UMFCF has offered free psychological, educational and professional support to students of all component faculties services, at the undergraduate, master's or doctoral level, through the Psychological, Educational and Professional Counseling Center (<https://umfcd.ro/studenti/servicii-sociale/consiliere-si-orientare-in-career/>& <https://consilierea.studentului.umfcd.ro/>).

Through the projects carried out annually at the level of the Counseling Center in collaboration with the Student Societies and Deanships, substantial prevention and information activities aimed to prevent the burnout syndrome were deployed in the field of mental health. Examples include the management of academic anxiety syndrome, learning difficulties, better career guidance and other situations specific to UMFCF students

The benefits of these types of programs, both on a short-term and long-term, are visible to students participating in these types of programs and interventions. These include better management of academic stress situations during the session, adaptation to university culture, minimizing the impact of culture shock for foreign students accessing foreign language modules, and the decrease of university dropout.

PROF. VIOREL JINGA, MD, PHD

Rector of the “Carol Davila” University of Medicine and Pharmacy

FOREWORD

by partner university
in Romania



FOREWORD

by partner university in Bulgaria



Trakia University has always been extremely active towards the complete well-being of its students. In this sense, burnout is a phenomenon to which the university pays due attention. Mental and emotional peace of mind are one of the guarantees for the high levels of competence of future specialists.

The commitment of the teaching staff of the university to the problems of our students is not limited to teaching in the classroom and evaluation - Trakia University has a Tutoring system that enables an extremely good relationship along the "student - teacher" line. In this way, we are always aware of the problems and difficulties experienced by students and we are there - as colleagues who will always help with their knowledge and skills.

The artistic-creative, cultural and social activity within our academic community includes students of different nationalities and religions, and succeeds in creating an atmosphere of reciprocity and empathy. Medical and health-related professions are known to experience extremely high levels of burnout. This statement also applies to students who are training in these important professions.

Having resources to prevent and address academic burnout will go a long way toward better learning for our students because they will know that if they experience a problem, their professors are there for them.

PROF. DOBRI YARKOV ,PHD
Rector of Trakia University

FOREWORD

by partner university
in Spain



Our University, and how can it be otherwise, is very concerned about health in general, and mental health in particular, of all our students. Knowing that one of the most negative aspects of a student's career can result in a high level of academic stress and lead to a disease called Burnout Syndrome fills us with concern and we are firmly committed to practice all necessary measures for prevention and intervention.

We have made a detailed analysis of the work that the BENDIT-EU group has developed, which publishes very reliable information on this problem with the edition and open edition of a manual, some resources for self-assessment of academic burnout, a training material and a toolbox useful for developing policies for its prevention.

From the University of Murcia, we would like to congratulate all the partners who have participated, for the work done and will take it into account to develop its policy of coping with this problem, encouraging faculty, support services and students to use the various tools that are proposed.

FRANCISCO GONZÁLEZ DÍAZ
Secretary General University of
Murcia

FOREWORD

by partner university in Cyprus

Recognizing and addressing student burnout in universities is paramount to fostering a healthy learning environment and nurturing the well being of future leaders. By prioritizing mental health and providing support systems, we empower students to thrive academically, emotionally and socially, ensuring their long-term success and holistic development.

Engaging faculty and staff in preventing and dealing with burnout is key to creating a resilient and supportive educational community. By promoting open communication, offering professional development opportunities and implementing wellness initiatives, we empower our educators and staff to prioritize self-care, collaborate effectively, and sustain the passion for teaching, leading to a more vibrant and fulfilling educational experience for all.

The dedicated efforts of faculty and staff in medical and health allied fields extend far beyond the classroom, leaving a lasting impact on students' educational journeys and future professional endeavors.

By providing mentorship, sharing invaluable expertise, and fostering a supportive learning environment, faculty and staff empower students to become compassionate, skilled healthcare professionals who are equipped to positively transform lives and make a profound difference in the world.

PANAYIOTIS ANGELIDES, PhD

Vice Rector for Academic Affairs
University of Nicosia



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INTRODUCTION

The toolkit summarizes best practices on an international level and provides a set of plausible tested measures that medical and allied health universities could take, to reduce the degree to which their students report having experienced burnout. The examples included are not a comprehensive list but are intended to celebrate success and inspire further action.

Academic burnout is a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion that results from prolonged exposure to high levels of stress related to academic work. It can lead to decreased motivation, cynicism, and a decreased sense of personal accomplishment.



Academic burnout factsheet

The prevalence of student burnout

The stress of medical education and its consequences are widely recognized and acknowledged. A recent systematic review, which focused on burnout in medical students worldwide, has revealed an estimated burnout prevalence of 44.2% in the medical student population (Frajerma et al., 2019). Another systematic reviews and meta-analyses display even higher prevalence rates, of up to 75% (Erschens et al., 2019). These results suggest that averagely 2 to 3 out of four medical students suffer from burnout, even before getting into residency.

Risk factors

Identifying just one cause of burnout in medical and allied health students is unrealistic, as all potential causes of burnout should be recognized and understood by school administrations.

The risk factors which may trigger increased burnout levels in medical students include:

- competing demands for time resource allocation between constant medical school training and family/friends;
- the doctors' "don't have mental illnesses" stereotype;
- the "hidden curriculum", consisting in unrealistic tasks;
- unattainable expectations from parents, fellows, and doctors they admire;
- the lack of incentives for well-being, since a culture of 'push through it' is more encouraged.

The impact of burnout

Student burnout can have various negative consequences on both the academic and personal lives of students. Firstly, burnout can significantly impact academic performance, leading to poor grades, incomplete assignments, and decreased motivation (Shen et al., 2021; Llorens- Gumbau & Salanova-Soria, 2014). In addition, students who experience burnout are at a higher risk of developing mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety (Dyrbye et al., 2021; Al-Sowygh, 2020). Moreover, burnout can also lead to physical health problems such as chronic fatigue, headaches, and stomach issues (Morse et al., 2012). Furthermore, burnout can negatively impact relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners (Hudd et al., 2021). Lastly, burnout can have long-term negative consequences on career outcomes, such as lower job satisfaction, decreased productivity, and decreased job performance (Schaufeli et al., 2021).

Academic burnout factsheet

Strategies for dealing with academic burnout at university level

To deal with the academic burnout of their students, a series of strategies have been proved by research to be effective and can be implemented in order to recognize student burnout, reverse it when already present and support them build resilience.

Recognize (watch for and recognize the warning signs of burnout);

- Make tools available that individuals can use to self assess burnout
- Screen for distress in a group of medical trainees using a third party

Reverse (acknowledge the damage and reverse it by managing stress and seeking support)

- Empower and educate trainees to prioritize their own health through adequate access to care
- Structure required curricular time and work assignments to allow for time-off during a typical workday
- Assess for perceived and feared discrimination due to mental health problems and implement response
- Ensure adequate access to conveniently located mental health counsellors on and off campus who are not involved in trainees' academic assessment or promotion

Resilience (build resilience to stress by taking care of physical and emotional health)

- Implement a resilience curriculum and evaluate it's effectiveness
- Reorganize a large group of students into smaller learning communities to build group cohesion and social support
- Monitor and respond to absences to support trainees during major life events and facilitate detection of distress
- Organize social activities to foster peer-peer and peer-faculty relationships
- Subsidize access to fitness facilities
- Implement faculty staff development to raise awareness and facilitate a positive learning environment with effective, timely feedback, and enable them to detect and respond to emotional distress in trainees

Academic burnout factsheet

Resources developed by the BENDIT-EU team to support decision makers in medical and health allied universities to address student burnout

In the framework of the Bendit-EU Erasmus project, we have developed a set of resources which can be freely used and integrated into the well-being offerings of medical and allied health universities: a burnout self-screening platform to recognize burnout, a curriculum for teaching support staff in universities to use it in supporting students and a burnout manual which could be directly distributed to students - either in print or digital format. We encourage you to check out these resources and freely use them!

Recognize



Burnout self-screening platform

Reverse



Curriculum for Students and Train-the-Trainer for Support Staff



Curriculum for students and train the trainer resources for staff

Resilience



Burnout manual for students



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Academic burnout factsheet

ACADEMIC BURNOUT IN MEDICAL AND HEALTH ALLIED UNIVERSITIES



What is academic burnout

A state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion that results from prolonged exposure to high levels of stress related to academic work.

Statistics

44,2%



- competing demands for time
- strained finances
- mental health stigma
- unrealistic tasks
- unattainable expectations
- the lack of incentives for well-being

The impact of burnout

- poor grades, incomplete assignments, and decreased motivation
- higher risk of developing depression and anxiety
- chronic fatigue, headaches, and stomach issues
- negative impact on relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners

3Rs

approach for an organizational response to the student burnout issue

RECOGNIZE

Recognize the warning signs of burnout.

REVERSE

Acknowledge the damage and reverse it by managing stress and seeking support

RESILIENCE

Build resilience to stress by taking care of the physical and emotional health

Student experience with the BENDIT-EU program

"My experience was of a great value, as I now know how to deal with burnout in case it happens to me or people around me. Thus, as finals are on the way, all of the students are worried and anxious about their grades, their work schedule, their social life, so it is not uncommon for burnout to happen and students won't notice. I had the privilege to inform them about burnout as I had the tools from the program, and if anyone needs my help I will be there to help. The BENDIT-EU program was very informative and interesting overall since it was interactive with us. I would be more than happy to be part of other psychology programs that the BENDIT- EU has to offer in the future."


(Denisa Damo - participant to the BENDIT-EU Program)

"Being a fourth year Psychology student, the BENDIT-EU program was very beneficial not only for myself but for those around me. I was able to obtain several different self- help skills and learn how to cope if faced with a case of burnout. In my last semester, these tools have been very helpful for me and helped me make my semester more manageable. Additionally, I now know how to help those around me and give them the same tools to prevent burnout. The overall experience was very informative and beneficial in all aspects."

(Ioanna Ntrongouli - participant to the BENDIT-EU Program)

Checklist for assessing the current situation

Strategy	Does your university have/provide:	Yes/No
Governance	a student well-being and/or mental health strategy? must include a vision, objectives, steps to reach the vision	
	a formal policy document that specifically includes burnout? it describes the actions taken by the university as well as the responsibilities of all responsible actors	
	a governance body? a group/individual that oversees the implementation of the policy/strategy/actions	
Recognize	tools for students to self-assess burnout? can be provided via apps, websites or counseling services	
Reverse	access to community resources aimed at reducing burnout these can be in the form of: mentors, academic advising, career centers, financial support, etc.	
	access to professional support for students who experience burnout individual counseling, psychologist, psychiatrist, etc.	
Resilience	learning about burnout, how to prevent and/or intervene once experienced well-being curriculum, trainings, courses, reading materials, books, videos, etc.	
	practicing resilience skills self-monitoring apps, self-guided meditations, mindfulness apps etc.	
	ways of connecting with other students learning/self-development groups, peer-support, peer mentoring, etc.	
	access to community resources aimed at preventing burnout mentoring programs, ways of connecting with faculty staff	



best practices for addressing burnout in academic settings

The following categories of best practices for addressing burnout in academic settings have been identified through a process of literature review and expert consultation. They provide a framework for exploring opportunities to optimize both well-being and adequately address burnout within academic settings.

- o Ensure adequate governance of topics related to burnout
- o Recognize signs of burnout
- o Support recovery once burnout is experienced
- o Strengthening resilience and balance

“Many of the factors that contribute to depression and burnout in medical students are, however, outside students’ control and originate from the learning environment.”

(Dyrbye and al.;2019)

best practices for addressing burnout in academic settings

Governance

To consistently address the issues of burnout and student well-being, universities need to develop infrastructure and allocate resources, such as developing a well-being strategy, charging individual or a group of individuals with overseeing student well-being and allocating a budget for specific well-being activities.

“In a study conducted in 32 U.S. medical schools, 82% identified an individual or group of individuals specifically charged with overseeing student well-being.”

(Dyrbye and al.; 2019)

Opportunities for Action

- o Formulate a student well-being and/or mental health strategy that specifically mentions burnout
- o Make sure it includes a vision, specific objectives, the required steps for reaching the vision
- o Draft a formal policy document that describes the actions taken by the university in the area of well-being and burnout as well as the responsibilities of all responsible actors
- o Set up a governance structure that oversees the implementation of the policy/ strategy/ actions

The Student Wellness Committee at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine

The Student Wellness Committee is a student-led organization which exists to support and to facilitate students' holistic well-being. It aims to promote and facilitate the lifelong pursuit of balance, healthy lifestyle, community, and mental well-being while supporting the current and future needs of medical students.

The committee:

- introduces students to practices including meditation, yoga, and counseling to help them maintain a healthy mental and spiritual life.
- provides a support system and practical resources for students struggling with mental, emotional, or spiritual issues.

<https://medschool.vanderbilt.edu/student-affairs/student-wellness/>

Led by two fourth-year co-presidents, the Wellness Student Leaders address mental health issues, organize self-care events, and keep tabs on current health-related research.

Best practice

Governance

The WellMD & WellPhD Center at Stanford University

Since 2011, the Stanford Medicine WellMD & WellPhD Center has worked to advance the well-being of physicians and biomedical scientists. The center is funded by the Stanford School of Medicine, Stanford Health Care, and Stanford Children's Health.

The center focuses on promoting well-being not only at Stanford but also on advancing the field globally, collaborating with leading healthcare organizations, associations, and societies.

<https://wellmd.stanford.edu/>

Rather than place the onus of well-being on the individual alone, the center works to orient the entire organization around creating the cultures and practices that reduce burnout and drive professional fulfillment.



Best practice

best practices for addressing burnout in academic settings

Recognize

To recognize entails watching out for the warning signs of burnout. The assumption is that if one is aware of the burnout level then he/she can adopt relevant interventional measures and/or coping mechanisms.

Student burnout is a common occurrence within universities, and if left unaddressed, it can have detrimental effects on a student's overall well-being and academic performance. By recognizing the signs of burnout early on, universities can intervene and provide students with the necessary support to prevent further harm.

In addition to providing students with mechanisms to gain insight into their personal well-being, these tools provide resources for students; providing individualized feedback on well-being helps promote behaviour change and help seeking.

(Dyrbye and al.; 2019)

Opportunities for Action

- o Provide evidence-based tools for students to self-assess burnout
- o Make the self-screening tools easily accessible to students, such as through online portals or mobile apps.
- o Ensure confidentiality and privacy to reduce stigma and encourage students to seek support if needed
- o Provide appropriate support and resources, such as counselling services, stress management workshops, and academic support



Best practice

Recognize

The Bendit-EU Burnout Web Platform (BWP)

The Burnout Web Platform was tested in four European Universities and it is now freely available for use across Europe. The BWP offers several practical tools that might support students when feeling stressed or exhausted in the academic context:

- self-assessment of the own burnout level;
- information about community resources and self-help in distress;
- answers to frequently asked questions about burnout;
- the possibility to monitor one's burnout, well-being and resilience scores throughout academic studies;
- a brief information about reliable therapeutic interventions dedicated to burnout.

“It was very easy to access the platform and its parts, and to fill in the questionnaires. I liked the easy way to find out information and recommendations connected to the results of the questionnaire.”

(Student feedback via anonymous questionnaire)

best practices for addressing burnout in academic settings

Reverse

Reversing involves undoing the burnout damage by managing stress and seeking support. Providing free counselling sessions by professionals to students in need of psychological care, for those situations that do not require psychotherapeutic intervention but do require professional help to provide coping strategies to change these problematic situations, is a key component of well-being in academic settings.

Only a third of medical students with burnout seek help. Perceived stigma, negative personal experiences, and the hidden curriculum may contribute.

(Dyrbye et al.; 2015)

Opportunities for Action

- o Ensure timely and adequate access to conveniently located mental health counsellors on and off campus who are not involved in trainees' academic assessment or promotion;
- o Provide access to community resources aimed at reducing burnout, such as mentors, academic advising, career centers or financial support;
- o Structure required curricular time and work assignments to allow for time-off during a typical day;
- o Assess for perceived and feared discrimination due to mental health problems and implement response.

The Applied Psychology Service of the University of Murcia

The Applied Psychology Service (SEPA) of the University of Murcia is a non-profit Welfare Service dependent on the Vice-rectorate of Health Sciences and Services to the University Community.

The SEPA constitutes a set of human and material resources that make it possible for the different Departments, Areas of Knowledge, Schools of Professional Practice and professionals in Psychology or related disciplines to have an organizational structure in which to carry out clinical, research and training activities of an applied nature.

On 17 October 2016, the Vice-Rectorate for Transfer, Entrepreneurship and Employment and the Vice-Rectorate for Students reached an agreement whereby the Applied Psychology Service (SEPA) assumed responsibility for psychological counselling for students at the University of Murcia in order to be able to provide psychological counselling to students who need it free of charge.



Best practice

The University can make its own research and applied practice resources available to mental health, benefiting students who cannot afford to see a psychologist.

best practices for addressing burnout in academic settings

Resilience

Strengthening resilience and balance includes providing students with the tools, resources and opportunities to maintain optimal health and well-being. Developing personal health resources and skills will help students to manage stress, succeed with their academic goals and become resilient and engaged citizens.



Opportunities for Action

- Provide resources for learning about burnout, how to prevent and/or intervene once experienced such as well-being curriculum, trainings, courses, reading materials, books, videos, etc.
- Support the habit of practicing resilience skills by making available self-monitoring apps, self-guided meditations, mindfulness apps etc.
- Create opportunities for connecting with other students through learning/self-development groups, peer-support or peer mentoring programs.
- Facilitate access to community resources aimed at preventing burnout mentoring programs, ways of connecting with faculty staff

Resilience

Academic Resiliency Curriculum

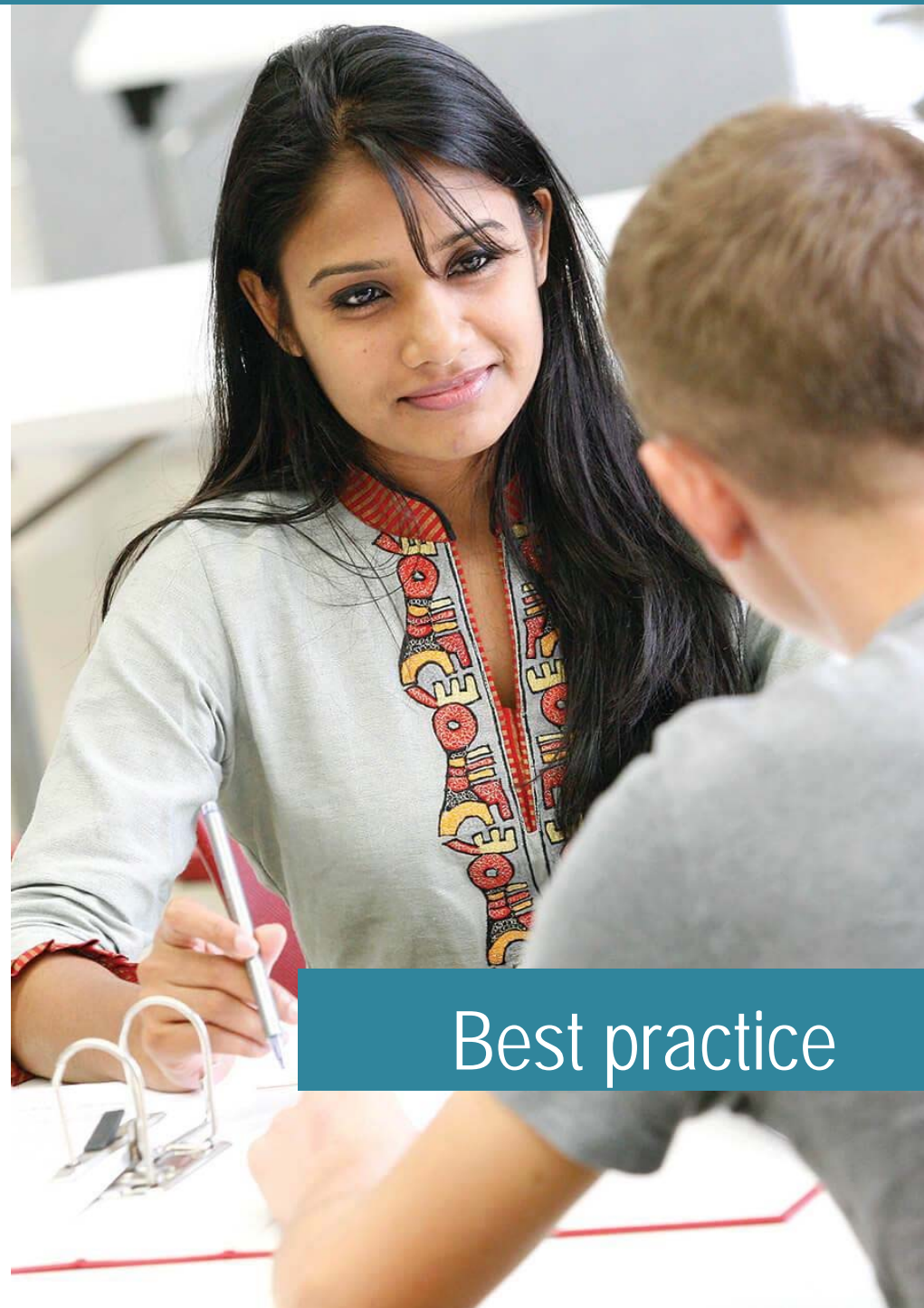
California State University San Marcos has implemented an academic recovery course for first-year students who experienced academic difficulty during their first semester.

The goal is for students to:

- Learn (or re-learn) strategic academic skills g., time management, prioritizing, cognitive learning skills, communication skills
- Cultivate personal growth and connections to self, culture, and community through deep, introspective reflection
- Build navigational capital, e.g., access to support and resources, self- advocacy skills
- Create a sense of belonging between peers within the classroom

<https://www.csusm.edu/fyup/arc/academic-recovery-success- course.html>

I loved the positive energy and understanding that everyone was in the same boat, it was a place for us to learn off each other without any shame or guilt towards one another.



Best practice



Best practice

Resilience

Resiliency Curriculum

At New York Medical College (NYMC), a student-led initiative in 2018 resulted in the introduction of the Resiliency Curriculum. The program aims to teach the foundational skills necessary to promote wellbeing and resiliency among the students, so that they are better trained to care for themselves and their colleagues and ultimately better able to serve their patients throughout their careers. Examples of sessions, which are led by upperclassmen mentors trained by the Office of Student and Mental Health Services, include: From Surviving to Thriving; Mindfulness in Medical School; and Self-doubt and Self-care in Medicine.

<https://tinyurl.com/yhv5mvan>

"Fostering resilience is a way to mitigate the negative effects of stressors, prevent burnout and help students succeed after difficult experiences. However, resiliency like the rest of their education must be learned and practiced."

(Susan Rachlin, associate dean of Student Affairs NYMC)

Resilience

Bouncing Back online course

An online Canvas course called “Bouncing Back” has been created by Simon Fraser University (SFU) Health Promotion to support student resilience. The course incorporates visuals, YouTube videos and self-reflection activities, providing students with practical and research-based strategies and tools for building their resilience and supporting their well-being. The course also introduces and familiarizes students with relevant services and supports available to them both on campus and online as an SFU student. Moreover, students retain unrestricted access to the course throughout their academic journey allowing them to revisit the course content. The course is available for Faculties and Departments to share with students as a means of building their personal resilience and strengths in order to successfully navigate their academic program, and maintain their own personal balance and well-being.

https://www.sfu.ca/students/health/resources/online-tools.html#main_content_text_1855768851

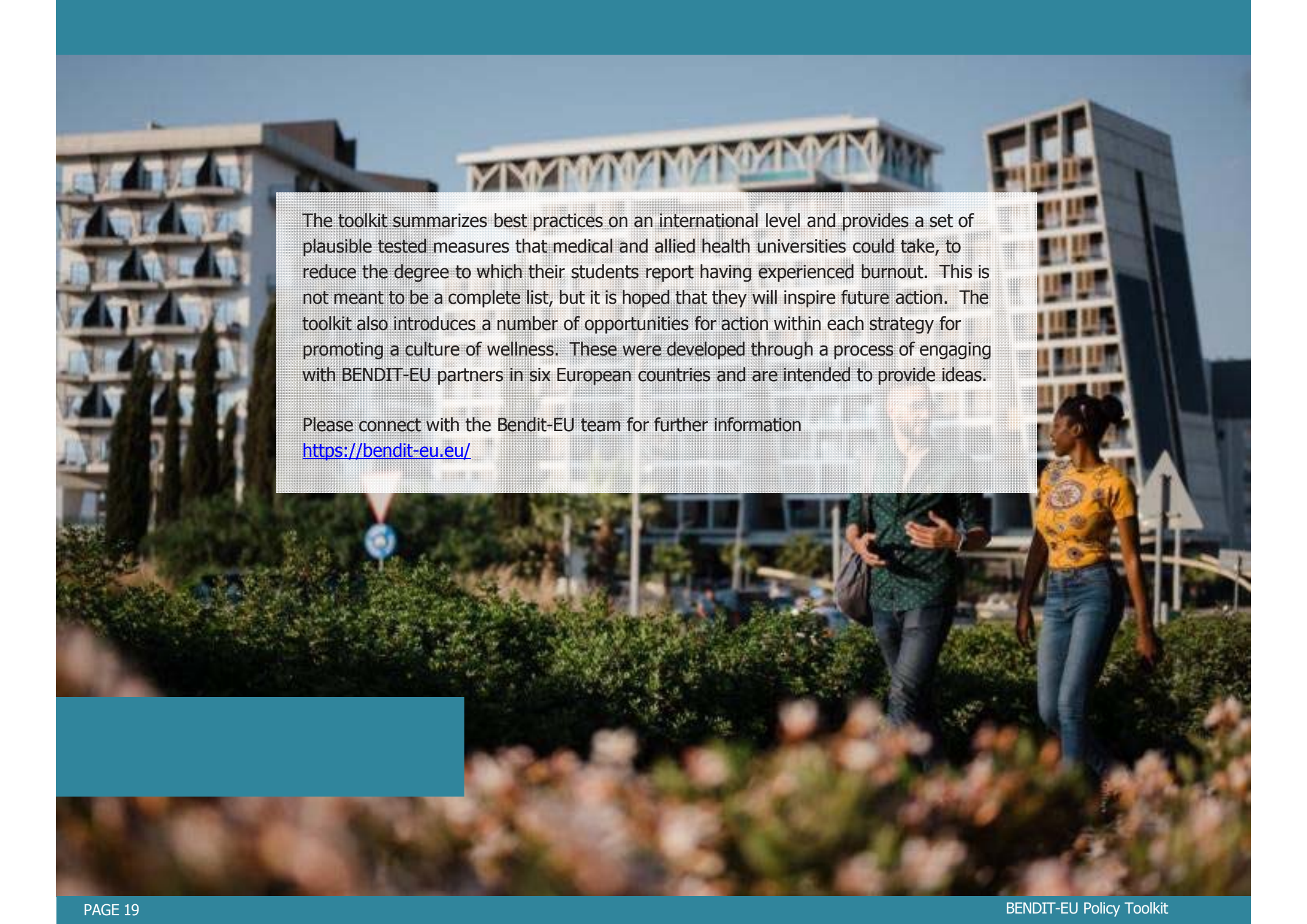


Best practice

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The toolkit summarizes best practices on an international level and provides a set of plausible tested measures that medical and allied health universities could take, to reduce the degree to which their students report having experienced burnout. This is not meant to be a complete list, but it is hoped that they will inspire future action. The toolkit also introduces a number of opportunities for action within each strategy for promoting a culture of wellness. These were developed through a process of engaging with BENDIT-EU partners in six European countries and are intended to provide ideas.

Please connect with the Bendit-EU team for further information

<https://bendit-eu.eu/>