

## Institution

**Utah State University Cooperative Extension**

## State

**Utah**

## Region

**Western**

## Title

The Utah State University Health Extension: Advocacy, Research, & Teaching Initiatives Response to COVID-19

## Relevance

The novel coronavirus, COVID-19, has impacted the way individuals and families live, work, learn, and socialize in 2020. The shift to remote work and learning opportunities has profoundly affected mental health and substance use disorders (SUD). In fact, 40% of U.S. adults are reporting struggling with mental health or substance use concerns (CDC, 2020). Of these adults, 11% had considered suicide, with self-reported caregivers (31%), young adults aged 18-24 (25.5%), and Hispanics (18.6%) reporting higher rates (CDC, 2020). This toll created an urgent need to provide safe and useful resources to help increase individuals learning and develop coping strategies to promote positive mental health. To provide these resources, trustworthy, credible messaging also needed to be created and disseminated quickly.

## Response

In conjunction with the timely response of USU Extension providing resources for COVID-19, the multidisciplinary HEART Initiative faculty specifically developed virtual education opportunities. With their unique background and expertise in SUD prevention, HEART faculty created three quick online courses on topics such as practicing mindfulness and managing stress. The HEART Team developed an online monthly video series, discussing relevant topics and solutions. Seven of these HEART Bunch videos have been published thus far on topics ranging from preventing burnout and connecting with coworkers to sleeping better and suicide prevention. A total of seven articles and factsheets were created on topics related to emergency preparedness, recovery resources, and remote work skills. In addition, a HEART faculty member was awarded a COVID-19 messaging grant in the amount of \$75,000 as project director along with other USU Extension faculty partners. Aimed at improving the health and wellness needs around COVID-19 with messaging throughout the state of Utah. Messaging targeted Utah residents considered high-risk, including those with underlying health conditions, multicultural communities (including Latino residents and tribal communities), COVID-19 hot spot areas, caretakers, and family members of the elderly. The project focused on four action areas, (1) concentrating content on general COVID-19 guidelines, (2) health, (3) nutrition, and (4) mental health. Content was provided in English and Spanish with flyers also translated into Navajo.

## Results

The HEART Initiative videos and publications were viewed and shared numerous times in the first several months of publishing across social media platforms. Quick courses developed received over 420 views, 24 reactions, and 17 shares across social media. The monthly HEART Bunch videos accumulated over 950 views and 40 reactions. Other publications, including articles and factsheets, reached over 1,000 people across the state. Feedback received from a county staff member stating, Thank you for the great HEART Bunch COVID and stress information, it is so needed at this time. These positive reactions highlight the importance of resources to enable individuals to expand their skills to cope, manage emotions, and create lasting resiliency. The COVID-19 messaging project was successful in reaching its multiple target populations in its first few months. Through collaborative efforts, 83 schools were reached sending nearly 59,000 e-newsletters while receiving 26,131 impressions. Over 7,500 Latino residents were reached through targeted radio ads and magnet distribution (1,000 total). Older adults and caregivers were also targeted through resource magnet distribution, distributing 2,050. Social media posts received over 315 reactions, reaching over 5,000 accounts and people. Messaging was also shared via an e-billboard located on the local interstate, gathering over 2.5 million impressions.

## Public Value Statement

USU Extension HEARTs focus is centered on the health and wellness needs of Utah residents, specifically addressing public health issues, such as the opioid and mental health crises. Despite the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, HEART faculty continued all programming by switching to an online format, creating and disseminating timely and relevant content, and serving thousands of people. The HEART Team are continuing their efforts in assessing and responding to the needs of Utah residents to create relevant content promoting positive mental and physical health over the lifetime. We look forward to continuing this important work, together we can build knowledge and improve lives.

## Primary Focus Area

Youth, Family, & Communities

## Secondary Focus Area

None Selected

## Primary Funding Source

State Appropriations

## Secondary Funding Source

None Selected

## Urban Impact Statement

No

## Statement Year

2020

## Submitter is Point of Contact

No

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## Integrated Impact Statement

No

## Integrated With

None Selected

## Statement Synopsis

COVID-19 has left individuals dealing with prolonged periods of isolation, loneliness, job loss, stress, and reduced engagement with others, ultimately imposing negative impacts on mental health, including substance use disorders (SUDs). These circumstances provided a unique opportunity to address these needs and provide resources in unconventional ways, such as through remote and virtual experiences. Utah State University Extensions Health Extension: Advocacy, Research, & Teaching (HEART) Initiatives quick response created relevant virtual resources and communication messages to address these mental health needs in order to help individuals develop resiliency building skills, expand upon coping skills, establish connections to local resources, and more. The positive feedback and interactions with messages and content indicate impactful results among our population served.

## Resource Links

<https://extension.usu.edu/heart/resource/>

<https://extension.usu.edu/covid-19/>

<https://extension.usu.edu/covid-19/stay-t>