

2026 MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING SUMMIT

SPEAKERS



Keynote Speaker:
ANNIE BELCOURT, PhD

Dr. Belcourt (*Insimaki/Mdeboge*) is a tenured professor and clinical psychologist in the College of Health at the University of Montana's School of Community and Public Health Sciences. An enrolled tribal member of the Three Affiliated Tribes, Mandan, Hidatsa, Blackfeet, and Chippewa, she completed her doctoral studies and clinical training in clinical psychology followed by postdoctorate training at the Centers for American Indian and Alaska Native Health and a fellowship at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Her research and clinical priorities focus on mental health disparities, posttraumatic stress reactions, risk and resiliency, and environmental public health within the cultural context of American Indian communities.

Dr. Belcourt serves as a Faculty Senator and a member of the Executive Committee, the elected governing body of the University of Montana faculty. She is a reviewer for the National Institutes of Health and Chair of the Ford Foundation Psychology Fellowship review panel. As former Chair of Native American Studies, she led initiatives integrating traditional healing with higher education, and she is now a co-investigator on a Mellon Foundation Indigenous Healing grant extending this work to each tribal community in Montana.



ALANA BAHE, MS
Manager of Student Wellbeing Initiatives
University of Montana

Alana Bahe has built her professional career working alongside Tribal communities, with a focus on public health, leadership development, advocacy, and community wellbeing. Her experience includes serving as Director of Community Health & Development and Department Chair of Health Promotion Practices at Salish Kootenai College. She currently continues this work at the University of Montana, where she supports initiatives that strengthen health, wellbeing, and community connection.



REBECCA EDMONDS, MA, LMFT
Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist
AllOneHealth

Becky Edmonds is a Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist with extensive experience in trauma-informed care, crisis intervention, and clinical supervision. She has a proven track record in developing and delivering specialized training curricula for public safety organizations and providing pedagogical mentorship to graduate-level practicum students. She is an expert in the intersection of family systems, first responder mental health, and evidence-based trauma modalities.



BETSY ASSERSON, PhD
Associate Vice President of Student Wellness
Montana State University-Bozeman

Dr. Betsy Asserson is a licensed psychologist and the Associate Vice President of Student Wellness at Montana State University where she oversees Campus Recreation, Counseling and Psychological Services, Student Health Services, and health promotion work. She has worked in different mental health settings throughout her career and has devoted over 25 years to specializing in college mental health. She has served on the OCHE Suicide Prevention Task Force since its inception in spring 2015.

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BRIAN KASSAR, PsyD
Psychologist & Suicide Prevention Coordinator
Montana State University-Bozeman

Dr. Brian Kassar is a licensed psychologist and has worked at MSU's Counseling & Psychological Services since 2000. He served as the Project Director for the SAMHSA/GLS Suicide Prevention Grant and the Jed Campus Coordinator from 2015-2018, and currently serves as the Suicide Prevention and AOD Coordinator for MSU Student Wellness. Brian has served on various iterations of the MUS Mental Health Task Force since 2015. He holds a doctorate in clinical psychology from the Illinois School of Professional Psychology in Chicago.



DARLA TYLER-MCSHERRY, MS
Founder & Visionary
Ask In Earnest

A wheat farm in Lonesome Prairie, MT, is where Darla Tyler-McSherry was raised, leading her to pursue her Bachelor's and Master's degree from the University of Montana in health and human performance. She was involved with college health for 30 years and retired as the Director of Student Health Services at MSU-Billings. She is the Coordinator for the Yellowstone County DUI Task Force, a Prevention Specialist for Bridgemont Health and Wellness, and a Board Member for Vet READY. Darla's passion for helping people inspired her to become the founder and visionary of *Ask In Earnest*, a nonprofit designed to address mental health, especially depression and suicide, in the farm and ranch population. She embraces the role of serving as an agent of positive change and advocacy for the farm and ranch communities that helped build America.



JERRY GIRARD, MS, LCPC, LAC
Director of Student Health Services
Montana State University-Bozeman

Jerry Girard joined MSUB as the Counseling Director in 2021, after serving as the Director of Student Counseling at UM-Western. At MSUB, he provides leadership, educational programming, and counseling services and is active in outreach and networking across campus, including hosting Mental Health First Aid and QPR Gatekeeper trainings to students, staff, faculty, and community members. He and his wife, Sherri, own Girard Consulting and Education, which offers mental health programming for groups, teams, and businesses. Before entering the counseling field, Jerry spent thirteen years as a high school teacher and coach. A licensed clinical professional counselor and licensed addiction counselor, Jerry holds master's degrees in each from the University of Great Falls.



JOE COOPER, EdD
Vice Provost for Student Success & Dean of Students
Montana Technological University

Dr. Joe Cooper is Vice Provost for Student Success and Dean of Students at Montana Technological University, where he leads a broad range of student affairs and student success initiatives. With more than two decades in higher education, he has held progressive leadership roles spanning various areas of student affairs, including student success, housing, enrollment and financial aid, student leadership and involvement, and emergency management. Dr. Cooper holds a doctorate in educational leadership and is passionate about building campus environments where students and employees feel connected to the people and resources that support their wellbeing and success.



JOHN SOMMERS-FLANAGAN, PhD
Director, Phyllis J. Washington Center for the Advancement of Positive Education (CAPE), University of Montana

Dr. John Sommers-Flanagan (he/him) is the Founding Director of CAPE, a counselor educator, clinical psychologist, and author or coauthor of over 100 publications, including 10 books and many training videos. His books, co-written with his wife Rita, include *Theories of Counseling and Psychotherapy in Context and Practice* (4th ed., Wiley, 2026), *Clinical Interviewing* (7th ed., Wiley, 2024), and *Suicide Assessment and Treatment Planning: A Strengths-Based Approach* (American Counseling Association, 2021). John's current work includes promoting evidence-informed kindness, gratitude, empathic relationships, and strengths-based education as the best way forward toward a civil and peaceful society. Learn more on his blog: <https://johnsommersflanagan.com/> or on the CAPE website, <https://www.umt.edu/education/specunits/cape/>.



JOY HONEA, PhD
Professor of Sociology & Faculty Association President
Montana State University-Billings

Dr. Joy Honea is a medical sociologist with a focus on the sociology of mental health and mental illness. Her primary research area is suicide prevention. For the past three years, she has partnered with the MSU-B Center for Teaching and Learning to conduct research on faculty wellbeing and belonging. The goal of the study is to assess levels and sources of burnout and emotional exhaustion and to make recommendations for institutional changes to better support faculty.

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KAREN WOOD, CLC

**Associate Director of Employee Wellbeing
Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education**

Karen Wood is a Certified Life Coach with more than 30 years of experience in healthcare and benefits, patient advocacy and employee mental health and wellbeing. For the past 12 years, she has focused on developing and supporting employee wellbeing programs and managing Employee and Manager Assistance Programs for the State of Montana and Montana University System. Karen brings a practical, compassionate approach to supporting individuals, teams, and organizations through challenges, change, and life transitions. Her work centers on helping people recognize concerns early, build healthy connections, and find meaningful support before challenges become crisis.



KARL ROSSTON, MSW, LCSW

**Suicide Prevention Coordinator, State of Montana
Department of Public Health & Human Services**

Karl Rosston provides evidence-based programs to all Montana secondary schools, implements the State Suicide Prevention Plan, supports the Montana Suicide Prevention Crisis line, implements firearm safety programs and statewide media campaigns, provides suicide prevention training, and coordinates suicide prevention efforts around the state. Karl is a nationally certified trainer in QPR and trains people at many of the state's universities and health care settings in suicide safe care for patients. Previously, Karl was the Director of Social Services at Shodair Children's Hospital in Helena. Before returning to Montana, he was on the faculty of the University of Colorado, School of Medicine, and a clinical consultant with the Colorado Division of Youth Corrections. He is a licensed clinical social worker and maintains a small private practice in Helena. He received his master's degree in social work from the University of Denver and his bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Montana.



KIRSTEN SMITH, MPA, MA

**Principal, Bloom Consulting
Coordinator, Gallatin Behavioral Health Coalition**

Kirsten Smith is a facilitator, strategist, and behavioral health systems leader with more than 20 years of experience helping organizations and communities navigate complex challenges and turn shared priorities into action. As principal of Bloom Consulting and Coordinator of the Gallatin Behavioral Health Coalition, she facilitates strategic planning, organizational development, and cross-sector collaboration, with a particular focus on strengthening behavioral health systems. Kirsten lives in Bozeman and enjoys dancing, hiking, skiing, and spending time with her husband and dog.



MEREDITH HECKER, PhD

**Assoc. Professor & Department Head, Native American Studies
Montana State University-Bozeman**

Dr. Meredith Hecker, a citizen of the Blackfeet Nation, leads initiatives that advance Indigenous knowledge, student success, and community partnerships, including culturally grounded programming in American Indian Hall and international Indigenous knowledge exchange. She earned her Ph.D. in interdisciplinary studies at the University of Montana, integrating astrobiology, mathematics, and education, and holds a B.S. in mathematics with a minor in history from MSU. Previously, she chaired the Mathematics Department at Blackfeet Community College, served as Assistant and Associate Professor at the University of Providence, and was Deputy Director and Co-Director of the Montana Space Grant Consortium. A proud MSU alumna, she is committed to culturally responsive teaching, research mentorship, and supporting Indigenous student pathways in higher education.



RAY FISCO, MS

**Associate Director of Statewide Coalition Trainings & Partnerships
NASPA & Healthy Colleges Montana**

Ray Fisco has over 13 years of higher education experience with 10 of those years in the prevention field. He has worked as project staff on the Healthy Colleges Montana Coalition related to commercial tobacco, chronic disease, and alcohol and other drug prevention. Ray has experience with coalition management, building partnerships, and working with the college population. He holds a master's degree in leadership with a concentration in student affairs in higher education and a bachelor's degree in biology.