

## Health-promoting universities: Challenges in the post-pandemic period

*Universidades Promotoras da Saúde: desafios no pós-pandemia*

*Universidades Promotoras de Salud: desafíos en la pospandemia*

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Health promotion in university institutional environments has been the focus of discussions around the world since the end of the last century, having been signaled as an international movement through the creation of the Ibero-American Network of Health Promoting Universities (*Red Iberoamericana de Universidades Promotoras de la Salud*, RIUPS). To be considered a Health Promoting University (HPU), it is necessary that the institution meets some requirements proposed at international conferences, in which the performance areas deal with the following points: 1. Development of an institutional policy focused on appreciating the university culture and on creating healthy environments; 2. Development of health education actions; 3. Provision of health services for the academic community; 4. Training of the institutional collective in terms of health promotion actions; 5. Encouragement for the development and participation of collective groups and network among students; and 6. Appreciation of research in health<sup>1</sup>.

Although such axes support the elaboration of institutional health promotion policies, it is important to emphasize that, during the COVID-19 pandemic period, it was possible to perceive significant epidemiological changes related to the academic community, which brought to light an unknown panorama for the structuring of healthy university practices. Observational studies indicate that, among university students, the incidence of anxiety and depression was over 50% during the social isolation periods<sup>2</sup>, whereas the possibility of developing mental disorders reached 33% among professors<sup>3</sup>.

Now, if at previous moments deleterious behaviors were the main focus of attention in university health, today, living with the repercussions of the pandemic, especially related to mental ailments, they should be interpreted as an urgency in the conceptual understanding of HPUs and, mainly, in conducting interventions that may establish health promotion, recovery and maintenance.

Furthermore, establishing actions to promote university health is now a Herculean effort, as contemporary reality points to the need for care practices that go beyond the institutional policies, generating a gap between expectations and feasible reality<sup>4</sup>.

It is up to universities to review their political proposals targeted at students' health promotion, whose focus on mental health seems to be a perennial need. In addition to the harms caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is believed that the opportunity to reflect on the current moment may also be an important milestone in the review of academic practices based on productivism<sup>5</sup> and the accumulation of tasks, oftentimes carried out to the detriment of healthy practices and actions targeted at quality of life.

In addition, the scientific literature now points to the need for active participation by members of academic communities in the self-management process of health promotion activities, which implies carrying out diagnostic and intervention practices based on the connection between individuals, in participatory models and in the shared construction of horizontal strategies that may solve or minimize the health needs of this population segment<sup>6</sup>.

Longitudinal monitoring of the academic community's health is believed to be essential and, in addition, it is suggested to carry out activities that may stimulate dialog, resilience and empathy, in order to provide the academic collective with a sense of belonging<sup>7</sup>.

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Currently, there is no certainty about the post-pandemic future. However, with the resumption of in-person activities, the urgency for physical and mental health recovery became a public health issue. For such purpose, there is an evident need to create and implement public and institutional policies targeted at health promotion in universities. It is believed that this is a public investment of major relevance and impact for the population, especially due to the social and educational responsibility of public universities in society.

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