Announcer: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program, keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap: According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), more than 75% of all mental health conditions begin before age 24. That's one reason why college is such a risky time for students' mental health.

To shine a light on this issue, Missouri State University will host its first ever Impact Summit: College Student Mental Health Conference on campus this spring. It will take place from 7:50 a.m. to 4:50 p.m. May 2nd in the Plaster Student Union. I'm Emily Yeap.

Dr. Thomas Lane, MSU dean of students, and his graduate assistant, Emma Wessel, join me today to discuss mental health and why such a conference is important.

Lane.

Thomas Lane: According to the national data on campus suicide and depression, one in every 12 college students makes a suicide plan. In Missouri alone, suicide is the third leading cause of death for those age 10 to 24.

As dean of students, I've certainly seen an increase in the number of students who are struggling with their coursework or struggling with their personal relationships due to depression or anxiety, and they're having difficulty moving forward with their academic success, struggling with those mental health concerns.

Emily Yeap: Wessel highlights the struggle some of her peers face.

Emma Wessel: I think a lot of students are unsure as to how to kind of name what they're feeling, and because there is kind of this rise in mental health issues, there's not quite the same rise from professionals either. So there's this weird ratio happening, so students are struggling, but they don't know how to get help, or how to even verbalize what they're feeling to get help, too. I think it kind of makes them feel a little stuck.

Emily Yeap: The goal of the conference is to bring the mental health conversation to the forefront.

Thomas Lane: As Missouri State University's dean of students, I've directly witnessed the impact that one's mental health can have on a college student's success. And also, am acutely aware of the importance that conversations surrounding mental health can have in helping remove stigma and improve hope.

And so, Emma, Debora Biggs from NAMI Southwest and also Rhonda Lesley, who's the director of the Counseling Center, we were all having conversation together about how might we expand this conversation surrounding this important topic of college student mental health? And we thought, as we were having our discussions, that a conference might be a good way to begin forwarding the conversation.

Emily Yeap: The conference includes three national keynote speakers: Kevin Hines, a brain/ mental health advocate, Alison Malmon, founder and executive director of Active Minds, Inc., and Mike Veny, a leading mental health speaker. There are also 30-plus educational sessions.

Emma Wessel: These are going to be presented by a diverse population. We've got some students presenting, we have professionals within the Missouri State campus, but also professionals outside in the community. Plus, other higher education professionals, so I think there's going to be a good dialogue happening about college student mental health.

Emily Yeap: Anyone who works in mental health or is simply interested to learn more about college student mental health, are encouraged to attend the conference. This includes students, faculty, student affairs professionals, licensed counselors, medical staff and more.

Thomas Lane: As a planning committee, we had a lot of conversation about what expected outcomes would be for our attendees. And so we really hope they come away with four things. The first is to achieve a better understanding of important issues and concerns surrounding college student mental health. The second is we hope attendees will learn more about best practices and strategies in research pertaining to the topic of college student mental health.

We hope that there's going to be lots of opportunity for people to network and make connections with others that are interested in this topic. And finally, we hope to create awareness of statewide, local, national campus resources surrounding college student mental health.

Emily Yeap: Several organizations have made the conference possible. Among them are Missouri Foundation for Health, Chartwells Burrell Behavioral Health, NASPA IV-West - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, Community Foundation of the Ozarks, Ozarks Technical Community College, Partners in Prevention, Springfield-Greene County Health Department and NAMI.

Thomas Lane: The Impact Summit was selected by the NASPA IV-West Regional Association to be their spring critical conversation program, highlighting the importance of college student mental health, and so we were really honored to receive that designation.

Emily Yeap: Registration is $80 and is limited to the first 300 attendees. To find out more, contact Lane at 417-836-5527. I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

Announcer: For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at 417-836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at KSMU.org.