More than 360 people gathered at the Friday Center in Chapel Hill for the 2023 Behavioral Health Convening on Tuesday.

The crowd included people from all over the state representing schools throughout the university system in a search for mental health solutions for students.
UNC System President Peter Hans said he's concerned about the increase in people suffering from anxiety and depression, adding that he's suffered with those issues himself. He said the latest $7.7 million in funding from Gov. Roy Cooper will make a difference implementing programs across campuses. The funding will go toward resilience training for incoming students and grants for programs focused on life skills and healthy mindsets.

Hans spoke about the importance of telepsychiatry programs, particularly for the schools that are in more rural areas with less resources and fewer trained mental health professionals.

UNC System Vice President Dr. Bethany Meighen echoed those comments about the unique challenges that rural universities face. She spoke about the counselors in residence program at Pembroke and the Mental Health First Aid program, which teaches people to recognize signs of someone in distress, even if they are not a trained mental health professional.

"We found that wellbeing is a roads to assessing student success, and the way that students are productive on a campus," said Ruff, the President of the Bronco Wellness Ambassadors.
Fayetteville State student Rachel Ruff presented findings of a mental health survey she did on campus and shared some of her mental health journey.

Ruff said her journey is a work in progress.

"I've found solace in knowing that it's something that I have to keep going and have to keep going at it," Ruff said.

That sentiment is echoed at the top of the system by Hans.

"It gets better," Hans said. "I've experienced that. I have a lifetime issue with anxiety and depression myself. So I speak to this from a place of some understanding."

Hans is deeply concerned about a marked increase in depression and anxiety. Five students at NC State have died by suicide since the start of the school year.

"Those students that we lose, most of them, the vast majority of them, have not availed themselves of the resources on campus," Hans said. "We don't know exactly why."

Rural campuses have unique challenges in finding mental health providers. Dr. Meighen said UNC Pembroke uses a counselors in residence program.

"We have post docs that are living in the residence halls, that are living with the students delivering care," Meighen said.
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