



Naomi Ruth Cohen
Institute for Mental Health Education
at The Chicago School

Strategic Plan

2026-2030





Our Mission

The Naomi Ruth Cohen Institute for Mental Health Education (NRCI) at The Chicago School is committed to ending the stigma surrounding mental illness and suicide. We empower individuals, families, and communities by fostering understanding, expanding access to support, and encouraging honest conversations about mental health. Through community outreach, training programs, and events, we provide education, elevate lived experiences, and inspire hope. Our work amplifies voices too often unheard, creating a more compassionate, informed, and stigma-free world.

WHO WE ARE

GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE

NRCI's work is rooted in the Chicagoland community, where long-standing relationships and local context are central to its mission. We maintain this focus while developing programs that can be shared across The Chicago School, laying the foundation for future growth at other locations. We balance community identity with institutional footprint.

PRIMARY AUDIENCES

NRCI provides accessible mental health education to organizations of all sizes and sectors. To maximize impact, we prioritize:

- Community members and organizations across education, healthcare, nonprofit, and workplace settings
- Chicago School students who will be practitioners in education, healthcare, nonprofit, and workplace settings

We seek intentional, mutually beneficial partnerships with:

- Institutions scaling mental health education
- Community organizations, including schools, healthcare providers, and nonprofit partners, focused on stigma reduction and suicide prevention
- Organizations serving historically underrepresented or underserved communities
- Internal and networked university partners delivering mental health education through co-curricular and professional learning initiatives

Annual Community Mental Health Conference

The annual conference brings people together to learn, share lived experience and engage in open conversations. It expands NRCI's reach, strengthens partnerships, and provides meaningful learning opportunities.

As NRCI approaches the 25th anniversary of the conference, future planning will emphasize impact, accessibility, and alignment with strategic priorities.

Conference Goals



Advance dialogue on timely and emerging mental health issues related to stigma reduction, mental health literacy, and prevention



Elevate underrepresented perspectives



Strengthen NRCI's brand, partnerships, and credibility



Offer leadership and applied learning opportunities for students

FOCUS AND IMPACT

IMPACT VISION

By 2030, NRCI will be recognized as a trusted regional leader in mental health education and suicide prevention, known for measurably increasing mental health literacy, reducing stigma-related barriers to help-seeking, and strengthening institutional readiness to respond to mental health needs. NRCI will serve as a practical model for how institutions can expand community capacity through shared learning and collective effort. Success will be demonstrated by:

- Measurable increases in mental health literacy, confidence, and willingness to engage in help-seeking behaviors among program participants
- Institutional adoption of evidence-informed mental health education and prevention practices
- Expanded cross-sector collaboration across education, healthcare, and community systems

Implementation of this strategy will occur through phased initiatives, annual priorities, and ongoing evaluation to guide progress toward the 2030 vision.

STRATEGIC FOCUS AND POSITIONING

NRCI is a community-facing institute embedded within The Chicago School. Distinct from clinical services or crisis response, NRCI strengthens the ability of individuals and institutions to recognize, understand, and respond to mental health challenges with confidence and care. By integrating academic expertise, lived experience, and community practice, NRCI translates scholarship into practical application, extending the university's impact beyond the classroom and into communities. This approach prioritizes accessibility and ensures mental health education reaches diverse communities that may not traditionally engage with higher education institutions.

What Differentiates NRCI



Positioned at the intersection of higher education and community impact



Mission-driven focus on education, stigma reduction, and prevention



Cross-sector learning environments for students, professionals, and community members

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT WITH INSPIRE 2030

The Naomi Ruth Cohen Institute for Mental Health Education (NRCI) advances The Chicago School's Inspire 2030 Strategic Vision by strengthening workforce readiness, operationalizing integrated health education, enhancing student engagement, and extending the university's community impact.

NRCI serves as a strategic partner in advancing the university's mission to educate change-makers and expand access to culturally competent, integrated care.

DEVELOPING TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE

NRCI enhances workforce preparation by equipping students and community members with evidence-informed mental health literacy, suicide prevention competencies, and applied skills that extend beyond academic coursework. Through certification-based training and applied learning opportunities, NRCI contributes to professional readiness and community capacity-building.

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF INTEGRATED HEALTHCARE EDUCATION

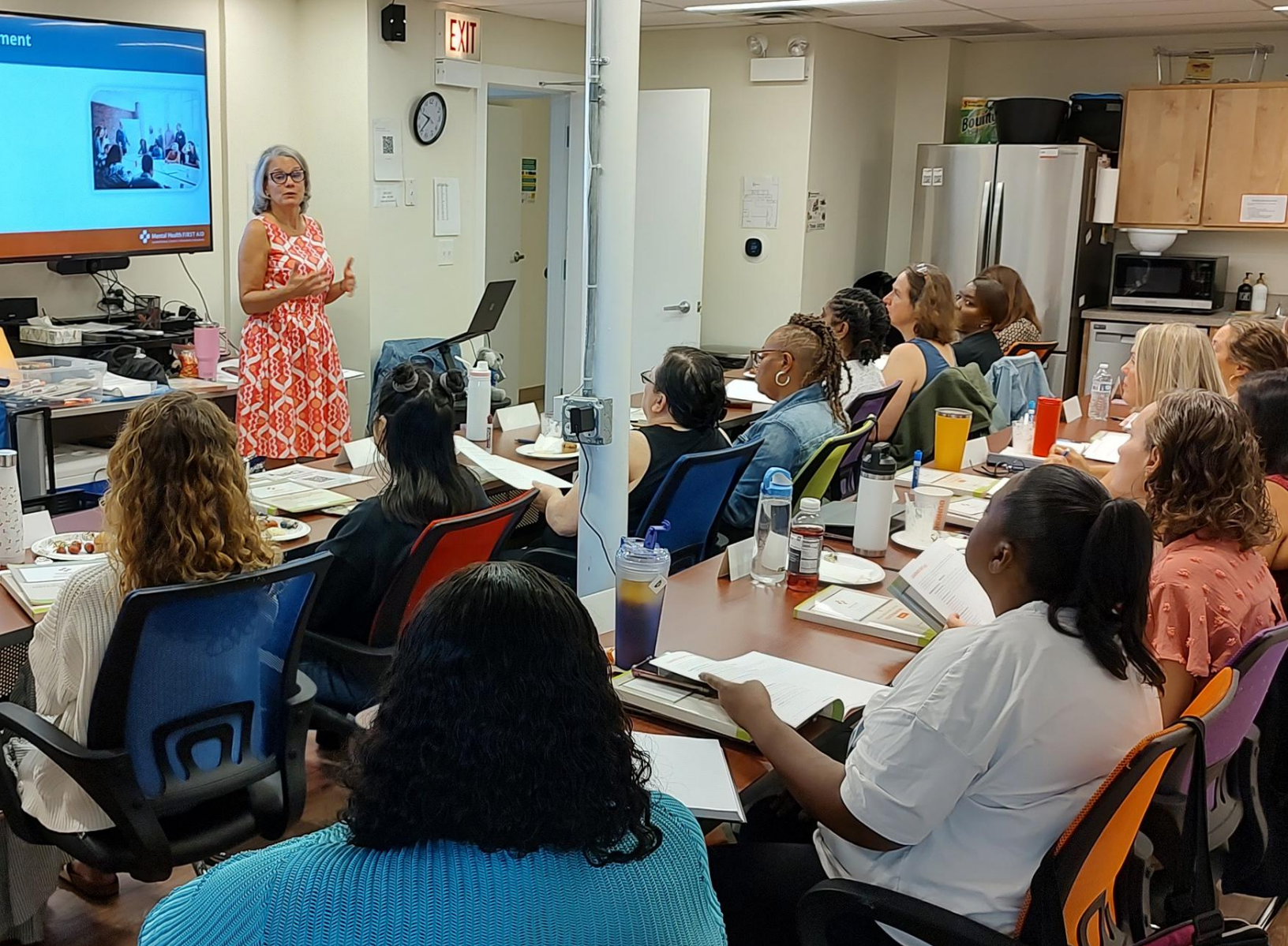
NRCI operationalizes integrated health principles by bridging disciplines, elevating lived experience alongside scholarship, and convening cross-sector learning environments. The annual Community Mental Health Conference and training programs model interdisciplinary collaboration in practice.

REDEFINING EXCELLENCE ACROSS THE STUDENT JOURNEY

NRCI strengthens the student experience through co-curricular engagement, leadership development opportunities, and community-based applied learning. These initiatives foster belonging, purpose, and professional identity development.

BUILDING AN AGILE AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

NRCI contributes to a collaborative and inclusive institutional culture by reducing stigma, advancing culturally responsive mental health education, and cultivating cross-program partnerships that extend the university's reach and impact.



Strategic Plan Focus Areas



BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY TO REDUCE STIGMA AND PREVENT SUICIDE

OBJECTIVES

1. Increase participant confidence, reduce stigma, and normalize help-seeking through high-quality programs
2. Build sustained, long-term institutional partnerships for mental health literacy and education
3. Integrate student engagement as a core component of NRCI's work

KEY STRATEGIES

1. Deliver evidence-based, high-impact trainings
2. Refine training offerings to meet the needs of community organizations and institutional partners
3. Create pathways for student involvement through fellowships, work-study roles, volunteer opportunities, applied learning experiences, and community training initiatives
4. Leverage evaluation data to measure learning outcomes, partnership impact, and areas for program improvement

METRICS

1. Participant survey results measuring changes in confidence, knowledge, and intentions related to help-seeking and stigma reduction (pre- and post-training assessments, training satisfaction and impact surveys)
2. Total participation in NRCI activities across community partners and university stakeholders
3. Number of long-term partnerships and repeat partnership engagement

STRENGTHENING THE FINANCIAL FOUNDATION THAT FUNDS THE FUTURE

OBJECTIVES

1. Align funding strategies with institutional priorities related to community impact and student education and experience
2. Achieve a balanced and diversified revenue mix to support consistent delivery of programs and measured growth
3. Solidify integration within university priorities to reinforce long-term support

KEY STRATEGIES

1. Implement pricing and partnership models that balance accessibility with financial viability
2. Secure grant funding and sponsorships aligned with NRCI's core impact areas
3. Strengthen institutional support through alignment with university funding priorities

METRICS

1. Year-over-year revenue growth
2. Distribution of revenue across institutional, earned, and philanthropic sources
3. Partner retention and repeat engagement

ADVANCING REGIONAL LEADERSHIP IN MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION

OBJECTIVES

1. Clarify and elevate NRCI's brand and value proposition
2. Expand NRCI's visibility across the university network and the greater Chicago area
3. Establish NRCI as a recognized thought leader in applied mental health education

KEY STRATEGIES

1. Develop and implement a cohesive communications and brand strategy
2. Enhance NRCI's digital and professional presence through expanded conference representation, publication, and strategic optimization of web and social platforms
3. Leverage the expertise and networks of students, faculty, staff, and alumni to amplify NRCI's visibility, credibility, and regional influence

METRICS

1. Internal and external speaking engagements, conference presentations, and invitations to serve on expert workgroups or task forces
2. Digital presence and engagement with NRCI's resource platforms (social media, website, newsletters)
3. Engagement opportunities generated through student, alumni, or faculty networks