



THE **HOPE** SUMMIT

BELMONT UNIVERSITY

*Hope Summit Workshop Series*

# MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS IN ENTERTAINMENT

WHITE PAPER PRODUCED BY BELMONT UNIVERSITY

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**



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# MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS IN ENTERTAINMENT

Mental health and wellness play a crucial role in the music industry, where perfectionistic pressures, performance demands, creative expectations, and touring commitments can exact a significant psychological toll.<sup>3,5,9</sup> Artists and industry professionals often experience intense scrutiny, irregular schedules, financial instability, and limited mental health support.<sup>3,5,9</sup> **These stressors frequently lead to anxiety, depression, substance use, and burnout.** Prioritizing mental health and wellbeing not only helps individuals maintain their personal health and resilience but also fosters a more sustainable and compassionate industry culture.<sup>2</sup> Stakeholders who promote and destigmatize mental health can help protect their talent while creating a healthier, more inclusive, and more productive music and entertainment industry ecosystem.

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*...researchers reported that those working in the music and entertainment industry as touring professionals have approximately 5 times greater prevalence of suicidality than the general U.S. public.<sup>4</sup>*

## **THE RESEARCH GAP: WHAT'S MISSING FROM CURRENT DATA**

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Research on mental health in the music industry has been conducted for years, but significant gaps remain. One of the most comprehensive studies in the United States was conducted by Stack, nearly 30 years ago.<sup>7</sup> Subsequent studies have either had a Eurocentric focus or focused almost exclusively on performing artists. Newer research paints a disturbing portrait of the overall mental health of the music industry. A Record Union report entitled “The 73 Percent Report” discovered that 70% – 73% of musicians report struggling with anxiety or depression during their careers.<sup>9</sup> More recently, researchers reported that those working in the music and entertainment industry as touring professionals have

approximately 5 times greater prevalence of suicidality than the general U.S. public.<sup>4</sup> While some empirical evidence exists on mental health in the entertainment industry, up-to-date research is necessary to represent the broader experience of those individuals in diverse roles across the music industry in the United States. Fortunately, we have models in other countries and other industries that could provide insight for tackling this issue here in the U.S.<sup>1,6</sup>

Belmont University’s College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences (CPHS) along with the Curb College of Entertainment and Music Business (CEMB) are uniquely positioned to fill these gaps, conduct research on current mental health challenges faced by industry professionals, and train mental health professionals to provide services tailored to the entertainment industry’s distinctive needs.



## THE CRISIS: UNIQUE INDUSTRY CHALLENGES

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Despite the absence of recent empirical support, the unique challenges experienced by those in the music industry are clear. The very nature of the industry often conflicts with maintaining good health. Loneliness, easy access to unhealthy coping mechanisms, and limited access to both mental and physical health care services may also contribute to this crisis.

A consistent theme expressed by professionals across various roles in the music industry is the lack of understanding of the industry's unique context within the mental health and wellness space. This disconnect between conventional mental health approaches and the realities of the music industry has emerged as a significant barrier to forming effective counseling relationships. Professionals from the music industry face unique occupational hazards. If these occupational hazards are not considered when counseling a client, they may lead to unrealistic suggestions or interventions. These circumstances create a complex web of challenges that general mental health approaches often fail to address effectively.



Over the past few years, the Belmont University team has been fortunate enough to participate in several in-depth conversations with those who have a vested interest in the wellbeing of the industry professionals in our community. These conversations have been in group settings and in one-on-one opportunities with rising leaders in the music industry, about the state of mental health and wellness within our workspaces and communities. These conversations uncovered several themes around which we can build a united action to better serve this community. Some of the themes that rose to our attention across these conversations are:

## **STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO WELLNESS**

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- Irregular work schedules and income instability
- **Limited access to traditional healthcare benefits**
- Frequent travel and displacement from support systems
- **High-pressure performance environments with public scrutiny**

## **CULTURAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS**

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- Industry culture that often normalizes substance use and extreme behaviors
- The “Hustle Culture” or “Must be Present to Win” environment
- **Social isolation despite public visibility**
- Pressure to maintain image and hide vulnerability
- **Lack of industry-specific mental health literacy among professionals**

## **ECONOMIC PRESSURES**

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- **Financial instability affecting access to mental health services**
- Gig economy structure limiting traditional employee benefits
- Pressure to work despite health concerns due to economic necessity



*Barriers are opportunities to solve the problems of yesterday for those who may be affected tomorrow.*

## CURRENT EFFORTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Across the nation and here in Middle Tennessee, numerous organizations are addressing these challenges with dedication and innovation. These groups are beginning to fill the gaps in published data on entertainment and music industry health while providing essential support to those who need it. While awareness has grown significantly in recent years, a fundamental gap remains in foundational research based in the United States that would enable the development of clear, effective strategies for creating a thriving, sustainable industry culture. The existing efforts and newly developed strategies must be evaluated regularly to ensure that they are as effective as possible.

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# BELMONT UNIVERSITY'S UNIQUE POSITION

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Belmont University's CEMB and CPHS have joined forces to launch the ***Center for Mental Health in Entertainment***. This is a first-of-its-kind initiative focused on community, research, and education tailored to the entertainment community and our students. Belmont University is uniquely qualified to partner in this transformative initiative through our distinctive combination of academic excellence, industry connections, and strategic location in Music City. Belmont University uniquely bridges two critical worlds through its specialized programs.

The CEMB has cultivated an extensive network of over 6,000 alumni across 50 years, creating deep connections throughout the entertainment industry. Simultaneously, programs in the CPHS have been training high quality, compassionate professionals in the behavioral health space for over 50 years. Additionally, the Center for Abundance, Resilience, Excellence, and Spirituality (CARES) brings together research excellence and practice transformation across CPHS to advance health and human potential. With this infrastructure, CPHS prepares specialized professionals who understand and can effectively address the unique mental health challenges prevalent in the entertainment industry.

Combining academic rigor with deep industry integration makes us the ideal partner to provide the research foundation that existing organizations need to maximize their impact. This powerful combination positions Belmont as an ideal partner because we understand both sides of the equation.

**Belmont's interdisciplinary team approach to mental health and wellness in entertainment will provide a holistic foundation for addressing the complex challenges facing industry professionals. The CPHS, the CARES clinics, and our specialized expertise in mental health and wellness, combined with the distinctive strengths of the CEMB, positions Belmont to lead research and intervention strategies that address not just symptoms but the whole person within their professional context.**

# GET INVOLVED

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The mental health crisis in the music and entertainment industry demands immediate, comprehensive action. The gap in foundational research represents both a critical challenge and an unprecedented opportunity. The music community has demonstrated its readiness to address these challenges collaboratively.

By investing in this collaborative approach, the music and entertainment industry community can create a comprehensive support system that honors the valuable work already being done while building the evidence base necessary for lasting change. Robust education and professional development programs can be created to equip artist and industry professionals with essential wellness tools and mental health literacy, while also training industry leaders to recognize and respond to mental health challenges. This initiative has the potential to transform the music industry from one characterized by mental health challenges to one that serves as a model for creative industry wellness.

The time for action is now. Belmont University is ready to lead this critical work in partnership with the dedicated organizations already serving our community. Together, we can create a thriving, sustainable industry culture that supports the health and wellness of all who contribute to the music and entertainment industry we love.



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