

## The Insider: New Tulane festival celebrates mental health

April 15, 2016 8:45 AM Samah Ahmed  
newwave@tulane.edu



While New Orleans blossoms with countless festivals every spring, Tulane University adds one to its own springtime calendar: the [Celebrate Mental Health Arts and Music Festival](#).

The Celebrate Mental Health festival is organized by the Tulane chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). It is an entirely student-organized celebration featuring live music, food, interactive art installations, workshops, raffles and an art gallery — all with a focus on making mental health a more approachable topic.

"It's often hard to talk about mental health because there's a lot of taboo," says Jesse Benzell, Tulane senior and president of the Tulane chapter of NAMI. "This is just one way to open up the dialogue to say that [mental health] is not just something that is OK to talk about, it's good to talk about."

The inaugural event will be held on Saturday, April 23, from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. on the Tulane uptown campus in several locations — in the Lavin-Bernick Center (LBC), Pocket Park, McAlister Drive and Keller Plaza.

The festival starts with a suicide prevention workshop at 11 a.m. in the LBC, followed by a range of wellness workshops on yoga, mindfulness and empowering dance that will run until 3 p.m. Workshops will be held on a first-come, first-served basis.

Attendees will then be invited outdoors to participate in interactive art installations and mental health activities, as well as enjoy food and live music.

"We want this one giant event where all of campus can come together and be unified under a banner of mental health and well-being," says Benzell. "We believe that mental health is doing what you love and loving who you are."

The event is free and open to the entire Tulane community. It is sponsored by Tulane Athletics, Forum Tulane, the Community Action Council for Tulane Students (CACTUS) and the American Psychological Association.

*Samah Ahmed is a sophomore majoring in public health and political science at Tulane University.*

"We believe that mental health is doing what you love and loving who you are."

Jesse Benzell