



U.S. Social Prescribing Student Collective

UNIVERSITY CHAPTER PLAYBOOK

JUNE 2023

With Support From:



National Academy
for Social Prescribing

social prescribing usa



COLUMBIA

HnSSP
Harvard Undergraduate Initiative
of Students for Social Prescribing

Global Social
Prescribing
Alliance

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OUR VISION

We believe that health care in the 21st century will only improve if students are at the forefront of the movement to change it.

Quite soon, we will be the health care practitioners, policy-makers, business leaders, or simply the primary caregivers for our loved ones.

Why social prescribing?

The health issues of our day demand not only novel clinical interventions but also novel ways of thinking about what resources can heal and cure. Social prescribing bridges the clinical world with the community sector, ensuring that patients not only have access to pills and procedures, but also to the non-biomedical resources that improve psychological and social wellbeing: an arts class, or outdoors club, or housing and financial services. The National Health Service in the United Kingdom formally adopted social prescribing at a national scale, and more than 17 countries are starting their own national movements, with support from the World Health Organization and United Nations. [Yet the U.S. lags behind.](#)



What, really, does social prescribing look like?

When a young woman with end-stage kidney disease misses a dialysis appointment, causing her to have a heart attack—we want to know her full story. Perhaps if she had more accessible childcare services, she may not have had to choose between her family's health and her own health.

Or when an elderly widow living alone in a large house has bouts of debilitating pain that bring him to the emergency room twice a month—we want to know his full story, because something as simple as a weekly dance class could help cure the loneliness that triggered these painful anxiety attacks for him. We want to know the full story of the teenage boy too crushed by depression to go to school—and a weekend class with teens who enjoy painting as much as he does might make facing bullies more bearable.

We want to create a system that has the time and resources to listen to and understand these stories, because in so doing, doctors, nurses, and community organizations are better positioned to help the people telling them. As it stands, the bridges for patients between healthcare and local community and voluntary sectors are tenuous, if they exist at all.

Social prescribing is about fortifying those connections between community and healthcare. It is no panacea, but that is exactly our point: health is multidimensional. There are no panaceas.

JOINING THE MOVEMENT

How to start a university chapter

If you're here, you probably agree that health requires more than just the absence of disease. You can likely rattle off a laundry list of social and psychological factors which affect wellbeing beyond purely the biological, and think health professionals should acknowledge all these aspects in a more personalized way. **You've discovered that social prescribing can offer doctors another tool to help address complex health issues.**

All over the world, people are healing through art, music, nature, and volunteering. They're joining dance classes, birdwatching groups, and community gardens which not only exercise their body but also build confidence, relationships, and routine. If you believe in this model, our vision might resonate with you. So now you want to know...

How can I get involved?

We're glad you asked. Welcome to the U.S. Social Prescribing Student Collective! As students who will inherit the burdens and resources of our current healthcare system, we aim to change the culture and practice of healthcare to be more holistic, equitable, preventive, and co-created between patient, doctor, and community. Within each university chapter, students like yourself:

- Advocate for and educate your local community about social prescribing**
- Build a community of informed next-generation leaders who are passionate about shaping healthcare to be more holistic, equitable, preventive, and co-created**
- Advance the national movement for social prescribing**

In advancing the national movement for social prescribing, you might find yourself leading or joining cutting-edge research on benefits of social prescribing, publishing public-facing writing about key stakeholders, challenges, and opportunities, or supporting implementation of social prescribing programs by developing technological resources and written assets.

This guide shares actionable steps, tips, and templates, along with a few responsibilities to become a chapter in the U.S. Social Prescribing Student Collective. In the spirit of co-creation, we are happy to discuss ways to align the goals with yours, just as you should model your chapter around your members' talents and interests.

As students, we hold a unique position to change health and social service systems to deliver integrated, patient-centered care.

Who are we?

We are a collective of students committed to improving health; we are also individuals: young people who at one point had never heard the phrase "social prescribing," but who felt intuitively that as a population, we would be selling ourselves short if we continued to define health merely as a lack of disease.

We are individuals who enjoy hiking, or singing, or playing the trumpet; walking the dog or playing cards with a friend. We are individuals who know, on a visceral level, that humans are not meant to exist only as individuals, but must be connected to things larger than ourselves. We are individuals who came together to build a future we want to live in.

Such was the case for Bogdan, whose advocacy as a medical student rippled outward into a student movement with chapters at nearly every medical school across the UK. Rachel, who interned with Bogdan, worked with physicians at the Cleveland Clinic to promote one of the first US social prescribing pilots. Maanasa, a founding member of the student initiative at Harvard that Rachel helped establish, contributed to an inaugural Massachusetts social prescribing pilot. Richard, at Columbia, began expanding the student movement within the US. In each case, all it took was a single voice, announcing, "**I'd like to help.**"

Internationally, there are many like us. The National Social Prescribing Student Champion Scheme in the U.K. consists of chapters at medical and allied-health professional schools across the U.K., allowing students to promote the model among their peers and colleagues, and facilitate its introduction into undergraduate and postgraduate curricula. Students at over twenty post-secondary institutions across Canada support the work of the Canadian Institute for Social Prescribing. So too in Japan, Australia, Portugal.

“

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead

”

Join the Student Movement

Students have a natural opportunity to make a difference. We can have an impact even before we begin our careers, no matter where they may lead: business, health care, policy, tech, writing, or research. Through joining the U.S. Social Prescribing Student Collective, we can make this change happen.



Our structure can be practically adopted on any college campus, with high impact. The program is co-created with leaders across the country and the world, through a network of supporters at the UN, WHO, Cleveland Clinic, Carnegie Hall, NIH, State Parks Departments, Volunteering Commissions, and Arts Councils, to name a few. It is a full team effort.

By 2025 we aim to have 20 student chapters leading the movement: individuals educating their peers, contributing to ongoing pilots, advocating for better health and medical curricula, and engaging with thought-leaders in industry, academia, medicine, and the voluntary sector. As individual chapters unified toward a common goal, we are driving the movement forward with the help of your individual talents and passions. Our work has already begun. Join us.



OUR STORY SO FAR...

In 2015, while chatting on a train to London, UK healthcare pioneer Marie Polley and King Charles' personal physician Michael Dixon came up with an idea. They decided to gather a group of academics, doctors, and community based organizations to advance the then-blurry concept of using community activity to create health. The new group met for a one-day conference, converging on the term "social prescribing" to describe a new kind of healthcare focused on integrating the community in the practice of medicine, planting the seeds for the social prescribing movement.

With encouragement and support from leaders in this nascent movement, in January 2017, an ambitious UK medical student reached out to every medical school across the UK asking them to recruit one social prescribing student "champion" from their school. These students became a network that lobbied their medical schools to change curricula to include modules on social prescribing, making the term ubiquitously understood in the next generation of healthcare professionals. At the same time, the UK's National Health System decided to scale social prescribing nationally after the release of compelling evidence on cost reduction and increasing need for non-clinical interventions. The National Health Service decided to invest millions of pounds to fund 2,000 link workers, with goals of giving 900,000 social prescriptions by 2023/24.

In 2018–2020, international health systems began to take interest. Movements sprouted up in Canada, Australia, the Netherlands, and 17+ countries with support from the United Nations and World Health Organizations. Students, again, were at the helm of adoption.

In 2021, the US movement began in what might be the hardest system to crack. Harvard student Rachel Chen wrote a TIME magazine article about the seeds of American adoption and then helped set up a social prescription pilot at Cleveland Clinic. Students began to realize they have power to drive the movement forward. Richard at Columbia hosted a conference for New York City adoption in collaboration with the Mayor's office and NYC public health system that serves over 1.4 million people. **Students are now realizing they can lead this movement.**

An organization was founded called Social Prescribing USA to organize US adoption. The team is coordinating a US grassroots physician movement, creating a network of 400+ experts, exploring a major prospective pilot study and inaugural US social prescribing conference in collaboration with Professors at Harvard, Stanford, University of Michigan, reps from hospitals, Cleveland Clinic and more. Check out this map of some USA based implementers.

Social Prescribing Implementers in the US



*As of March 2023

Organizations across the country committed to the practice of social prescribing are located all across the country, from California and Utah to Georgia and New York.

*Check out the virtual map here:
tinyurl.com/SPmap-US*

Who's Supporting the US Movement?

Social Prescribing USA



A network of US-based SP implementers, journalists, and resources that chapters can tap into to learn from and to support. Reach out to learn about the movement, stay up to date on developments, join or start a chapter, find implementers, or view projects.

Contact: Dan Morse at socialprescribingusa@gmail.com

National Academy of Social Prescribing



The UK's governmental body working to promote adoption in the UK and internationally. Their academic collaborative is building a robust research base and offers resources for implementation.

Contact: Hamaad Khan at hamaad.khan@nasp.info



U.S. Social Prescribing Student Collective

A national collective of students dedicated to promoting social prescribing principles and implementing the social prescribing model in the United States. Reach out to learn more about joining.

Contact: usspstUDENTCOLLECTIVE@gmail.com

Global Social Prescribing Alliance



An organization sponsored by the United Nations and World Health Organization that facilitates conversations amongst a number of national movement leaders over Zoom.

Contact: Bogdan Chiva Giurca at Bogdan.giurca@nasp.info

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

Structuring Your Group

Start with a small dedicated group of people passionate about social prescribing. Each college will have different official guidelines for founding a club, but you should consider a few things when creating your group.

1. Name

This will be the name your group uses for both college and national recognition. Your college may have specific rules regarding student organization names. All we ask is that you include the name of your school and "Social Prescribing."



2. Mission Statement

The mission statement will be an important touchstone for generations of club members and an easy way to convey the purpose and goals of your group. It could be something like:



"To change the culture and practice of healthcare to be more holistic, equitable, preventive, and co-created between patient, doctor, and community."

3. Membership

Before recruiting members, identify different circles of membership. Will everyone be a general member? Are there optional commitments that can place people into different membership groups? Will those different groups meet on their own in addition to meetings for everyone?



For example, members that decide they want to engage more deeply with group activities may fall into the "working group" membership category, and meet with each other monthly to discuss their placements. Or members of the governing board may meet monthly to discuss logistics for the next all-member meeting. At first you may not need to divide into different groups, and that's okay! It may be something you consider later.

4. Constitution

Most colleges require groups to write a constitution in order to gain recognition. There is a sample one linked at the end of this document, but some things to consider are: How will someone formally join the group? How will the group approach decision-making processes?



5. Leadership

Initially, you may start with a small team. More positions can be added as needed, but the necessary roles are:

- A leader or spokesperson for the group that is the contact for the US Social Prescribing Student Collective
- Someone to coordinate meeting times, locations, and information sent to all members
- A person to handle club finances, grants, and funding applications
- Someone who keeps records of what happens during the meetings and helps make sure the club is on track to pursue its goals



6. Leadership Transitions

While creating your constitution, consider how you will transition leadership. In a college environment, a good time to do this is during the start of the second semester. This allows new officers to ask outgoing officers questions, and it facilitates the passage of institutional knowledge.



7. Shared Decision-Making

Social prescribing is a process built on the concept of community accountability and co-creation, and we strongly encourage all groups to use this idea to guide their club in the decision making process. All members should be invited and encouraged to shape the goals and decisions of the club.



8. General Guidelines

When considering your constitution, you should also think about general guidelines or practices that you want to follow. This is also the time to write out the duties and expectations of club leaders. You can also include expectations for members and how to resolve conflict and disagreements.



9. Amendments

It is important to clearly convey the amendment process to your members. You want to be able to amend the rules as situations arise, but you also want to do it in a controlled manner that involves the right people. Consider what works best for your club. Who can bring an amendment to the table? Will you have specific meetings to do this? Can an amendment be brought up at any meeting?



Recruiting Members

Once you've determined the structure of your club, it's time to bring more people into the fold! There are many ways students find out about potential clubs, such as:

- Email lists
- Activity fairs
- Club spotlights by university departments
- Flyers
- Word of mouth
- Speaker events
- Presentations to other clubs

Advice from the Harvard Chapter:

Since social prescribing intersects with the medical field, a good place to start is by reaching out to pre-health societies with a poster and description of your club! You can also reach out to groups that are already doing social prescribing work, such as volunteer organizations, and ask if you can give an informational presentation about social prescribing to their members.

Beyond emailing and giving presentations, holding a public event with an activity is also a great way to increase visibility. For example, you can set up a nursing home letter writing session in your dining hall. This is a small action activity that anyone can join, and you can explain why social connection is important to health and how someone might get involved with the social prescribing movement.

Eventually, you can build your chapter to become a university-wide interdisciplinary coalition that draws on various perspectives and strengths!

– Rachel C., Maddie M., Sonia E., Chudy I., and Thea C.

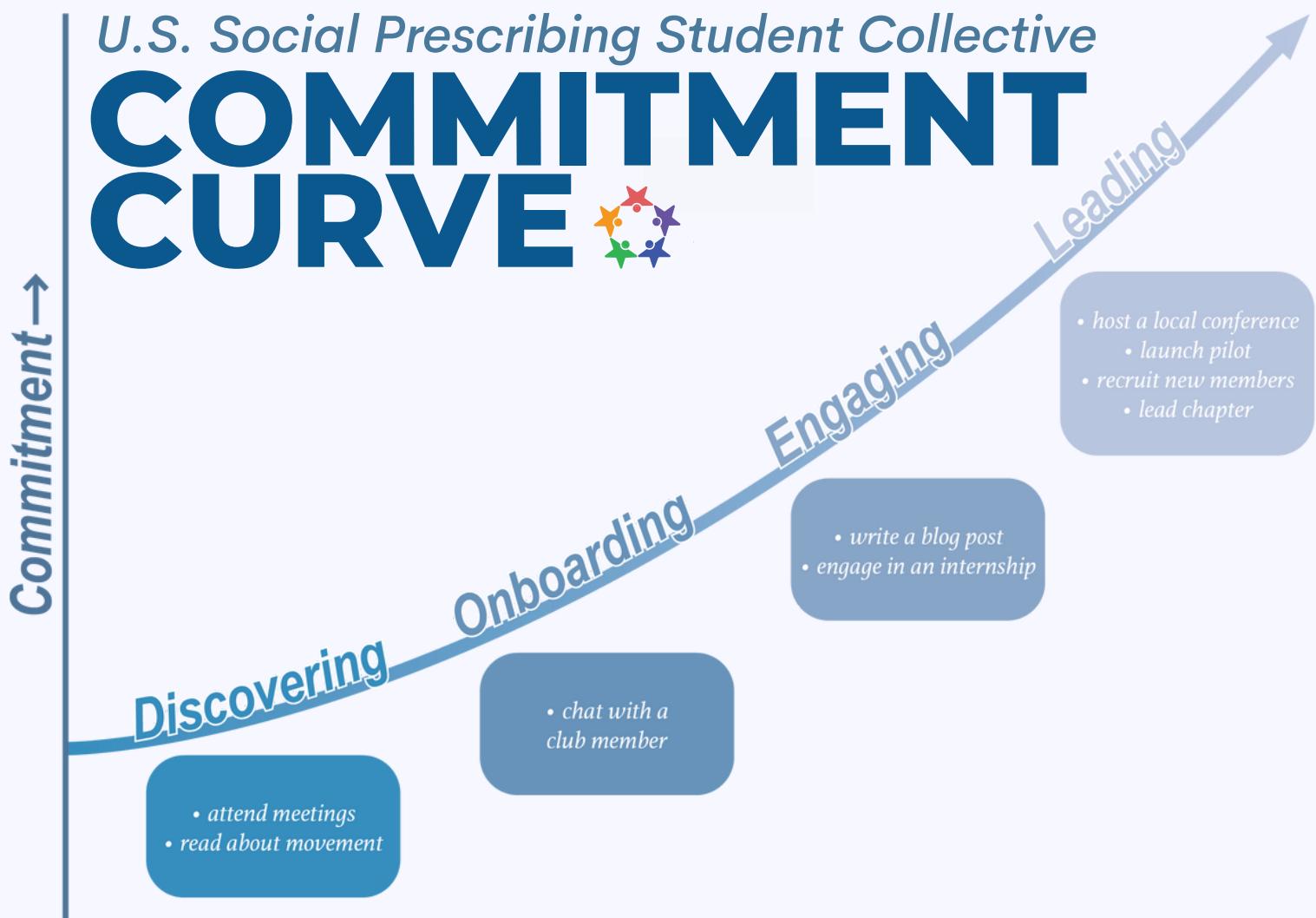


A speaker event is a great way to gather a group of people interested in social prescribing principles. You can structure the event so a chapter spokesperson gives a short introduction of your chapter and speaker before the presentation. Afterward, you can provide ways for people to sign up for your chapter's email list and invite attendees to join your next meeting. We have a list of amazing mentors in the U.S. social prescribing network who would be happy to speak at your event if you don't have someone in mind. Just reach out to us at usspstudentcollective@gmail.com

Engaging Members

College students are busy. We need a fail-proof way to inspire involvement. Let's make this first involvement invitation so small and rewarding that new members will naturally want to engage more. We call this step-by-step deeper engagement the "**community commitment curve.**" The result is smooth onboarding of teammates, a consistent feeling of success and progress, and smooth onramps to leadership within the club and movement. Our commitment curve builds relationships and a group culture which ensures that people are intellectually prepared and socially empowered before stepping up. These support systems strip the intimidation factor from assuming greater responsibility and making larger contributions.

Our commitment curve is addressed to new members and can be used as a standalone resource. Feel free to customize it to your group's goals and present it at chapter or leadership board meetings.



Discovering Knowledge and Spirit

ATTEND

Dip your toes into the world of social prescribing by attending a club meeting or national movement "happy hour" on Zoom. This welcomes you to the sandbox to see where you want to play.

LEARN

Get inspired by reading and watching videos about social prescribing. Begin to envision how social prescribing can transform your life and our health system.

Suggestion: Explore our [Starter Library](#) and come back with 3 clarifying questions about social prescribing.

CHAT

Polish up your understanding of social prescribing by interviewing two senior group members about social prescribing and about their innovation internship experience.

Suggestion: Have a coffee chat with a senior member. Get to know your teammates and social prescribing better at the same by asking questions!

CAPTURE A STORY

Interview an actual social prescribing implementer from our national network and write a summary case study to include in our story library on their lessons learned and tips for success.

Suggestion:

While capturing a story, brainstorm a Thought Leader project or Innovation Internship you might be interested in pursuing. What steps would it take to accomplish? How can the story you're capturing inform this project?

Engaging Contribution

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Do you have a niche curiosity or interest in social prescribing that you want to explore? Build out a mini research project or presentation on a topic of your choice. Examples include the intersection of social prescribing with antidepressants, healthy aging, or nature.

Suggestion:

Act as a mini-journalist to investigate and publish an article on a specific aspect of the movement. Our network will help you find interview subjects, field-experienced coauthors, and potential journals for publication.

INTERNSHIP

Match with one of 20+ organizations pioneering social prescribing to help them work on an innovation project. This project can become a shining portfolio project that shows off your professionalism and initiative. Reach out to us, and we can connect you with organizations eager to mentor students.

Catalyze a social prescribing conversation in your local area. This might involve hosting a discussion with friends, presenting social prescribing to a professor or university club, or scoping partnerships between your local arts nonprofit and clinic. You'll cement your learning on social prescribing by inspiring others.

CLUB

Multiply your impact by leading your student chapter to new heights. You could also recruit chapters at other universities or lead a big initiative on your campus.

TRANSFORMATION

Drive forward an ambitious high-impact project. System transformation projects build infrastructure for the national movement and often require you to recruit a team to collaborate with you. Your work will catalyze the efforts of hundreds working on the movement. This is not for the faint of heart.

Examples include:

- Pilot at local clinic
- Conference to facilitate local implementation
- National social media campaign

IRAMPING UP!

The Commitment Curve in Practice

As new members join the group, you'll want to keep up their momentum and excitement. Since our Commitment Curve is written to address new members themselves, here are some practical resources for delivering the commitment curve to your group members.

We offer some suggestions for meeting activities and homework assignments to encourage engagement and group cohesion at every stage.

Discover

The purpose of this step is for members to explore social prescribing and get inspired in knowledge and spirit.

Meeting:

- Watch testimonials from national movement stakeholders or have senior members give presentations about their projects.
- Hold breakout discussions with senior members.

Homework:

- Read about social prescribing and come to the next meeting with 3 clarifying questions. You can offer them our [Starter Library](#) to begin exploring.

Onboard

As members continue learning about the movement, it's important to build group cohesion and social community within your club. These relationships often sustain the group's mission more than intellectual curiosity alone can!

Meeting:

- Invite Dan Morse (Founder of Social Prescribing USA) to give a 10-minute presentation on developments in the national movement.
- Ask new members to identify another club member to interview about their internship experience, or find a researcher or implementer in the national network to write a case study.

Homework:

- Match new members with senior members for a coffee chat where they can ask questions and form relationships.
- Capture a story. Interview a club member or social prescribing researcher or implementer and write a case study about their experiences. The finished piece could be published on social media platforms, a blog, or even on Social Prescribing USA's newsletter.

Engage

Once members feel more familiar with the model and principles of social prescribing, they can begin contributing to the movement in meaningful ways. Encourage members to incorporate their personal passions so that their project feels rewarding and sustainable.

Meeting:

- Invite members to present their case study learnings
- Ask members to brainstorm a larger project or internship they'd like to start or join. Invite them to share their ideas and encourage the whole group to offer constructive feedback and suggestions.

Homework:

- Ask members to begin planning their project by contacting necessary organizations and faculty mentors.

Lead

When members feel ready to step up, offer them the opportunity to take the reins and shape the movement to reflect their leadership vision. Don't forget to offer plenty of support to ensure continuity and maintain a sense of community!

Meeting:

- Introduce board positions for your chapter and describe expected responsibilities and opportunities for each role.
- Encourage members to brainstorm Systems Transformation projects and what steps it would take to accomplish them.

Homework:

- Hold elections by vote or appointment.
- If members are interested in pursuing a Systems Transformation project, offer them support and connect them to Dan Morse of Social Prescribing USA at socialprescribingusa@gmail.com.



GOALS FOR YEAR 1

This is just a suggested list — tailor your club's goals according to the strengths and interests of your members. The goals can also be scaled depending on the capacity of your members. Send us your goals for the semester, and join our bi-monthly chapter meetings to talk about any progress, concerns, and projects. We want to help you achieve your goals!

- 🎯 *Apply for school official student organization status*
- 🎯 *Host one recruiting or launch event in fall semester*
- 🎯 *Establish a social media presence*
- 🎯 *Host one general event in spring semester*
- 🎯 *Collaborate on a national project for World SP Day*
- 🎯 *Host two meetings per semester*

Longer term goals could include...

- ✓ *Form working groups*
- ✓ *Create social prescribing blog posts*
- ✓ *Engage faculty mentors*
- ✓ *Develop a social prescribing pilot in your community*

CONTINUING TO GROW

Once you've established your core members and official group structure, seek new directions to grow based on your members' interests.

If one member wants to publish original writing, launch a blog publishing interviews with social prescribing stakeholders and intersections with education, mental health, or healthy aging. If another member thrives off the excitement of organizing events, partner with other student groups on campus to hold an open studio or nature walk, followed by a discussion about holistic health afterward. If someone is itching to deliver social prescribing on the ground, start scoping community stakeholders, clinical partners, and funding sources to establish a local pilot project. If another person is passionate about producing original research, consult faculty mentors to identify the best metrics for evaluating social prescribing.

and apply those practices to a local program. Next projects can range from bake sale to community-based art to hosting campus-wide hack-a-thons or national conferences with other student chapters.

No project is too small. Every initiative creates local impact, especially if it inspires members to think critically about the challenges and opportunities of social prescribing — and the effects always ripple outward. The possibilities are endless when you build from the myriad skills, talents, goals, and interests of your members. Co-creating your next steps with other members can also help capture their full interest and participation.

As your group grows, we ask that you deliver the following each year:

- Two general events*** open to your entire campus, including a launch event around September/October every year to educate and recruit new members
- Monthly meetings*** with core group members involved in “engage” and “lead” projects to encourage peer learning, collaborative community, and mutual accountability
- Semesterly check-ins*** with the U.S. Social Prescribing Student Collective
- One initiative*** to aid the U.S. Social Prescribing Student Collective’s contribution to annual World Social Prescribing Day, held annually mid-March

We are happy to help you think of new ways to engage members and maximize your impact. Please reach out at usspstudentcollective@gmail.com to get in touch with us!

A P P E N D I X

Further Reading



Our [Starter Library](#) provides resources to explore social prescribing basics, models in the U.S. and around the world, research and evidence, and lived experiences from patients and providers.



Sample Materials



These are all examples from the Harvard Undergraduate Initiative for Social Prescribing. Reach out to huissp.info@gmail.com to receive templates you can edit and personalize.

- Recruitment [Flyer](#) for First Meeting
- Presentation [Slides](#) for First Meeting (titled “Social Prescribing 101”)
- Club [Constitution](#)

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