ASSAM AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY UNIFORM MENTAL HEALTH POLICY, 2026

1. PREAMBLE

Assam Agricultural University (AAU) recognises mental health and psychological well-being as essential components of holistic development of student welfare. The University is committed to providing a safe, inclusive, supportive and non-discriminatory environment in which students can seek assistance for mental-health concerns without stigma.

This Policy has been formulated pursuant to the communication received from the Secretary to the Government of Assam, Higher Education Department, vide eCF No. 640108/6 dated 17.10.2025, regarding the judgment and directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court dated 25.07.2025 in *SukdebSaha vs. The State of Andhra Pradesh &Ors.*, Criminal Appeal No. 3177 of 2025

It also draws guidance from the UMMEED Draft Guidelines, MANODARPAN initiative and National Suicide Prevention Strategy, and other applicable Government/UGC guidelines.

2. SHORT TITLE AND COMMENCEMENT

This Policy shall be called the "Assam Agricultural University Uniform Mental Health Policy, 2026" and shall come into force from the date of its approval and notification by the competent authority.

3. VISION

To create a safe, inclusive, empathetic and mentally healthy University environment where every student has access to appropriate support, counselling and professional assistance whenever required.

4. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Policy are to:

1. Promote mental health, emotional well-being and resilience among students;
2. Promote physical fitness, sports, recreation and healthy lifestyles
3. Prevent and address stress, psychological distress, self-harm and suicide;
4. Provide accessible and confidential counselling and referral services;
5. Strengthen faculty mentoring and peer-support systems;
6. Reduce stigma and discrimination associated with mental-health concerns;
7. Address academic, examination, research and career-related stress;
8. Sensitise faculty, staff, wardens and parents/guardians;
9. Ensure safe and supportive hostel and campus environments; and
10. Establish mechanisms for monitoring, review and continuous improvement.

5. SCOPE

The Policy shall apply to all students of AAU, including undergraduate, postgraduate and research scholars, and shall extend to all constituent Colleges, Departments, hostels, research stations and other University establishments, as applicable.

6. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Implementation of the Policy shall be based on:

- Dignity and respect;
- Confidentiality and privacy;
- Non-discrimination and inclusion;
- Accessibility of support services;
- Prevention and early intervention;
- Student-centred and empathetic care;
- Professional and evidence-based support; and
- Institutional responsibility for student well-being.

7. INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM

7.1 Establishments

The University shall establish/strengthen a coordinated institutional mechanism for promotion of mental health and psychological well-being of students, covering prevention, early identification, counselling, referral, crisis response and follow-up.

The mechanism shall comprise:

1. University Mental Health & Well-being Committee;
2. Mental Health & Well-being Cell/Centre;
3. Qualified counsellor(s)/psychologist(s);
4. University Medical/Health Centre;
5. Designated Mental Health Nodal Officer;
6. Faculty Mentors/Student Advisers;
7. Hostel-level Mental Health and Student Support Mechanisms; and
8. External Professional Referral Network.

7.2 University Mental Health & Well-being Committee

The University shall constitute a University Mental Health & Well-being Committee for institutional oversight, coordination and periodic review of this Policy.

The Committee shall, as far as practicable, comprise representatives of:

1. Director of Student Welfare representing University Administration- Chairperson

2. University Medical Officer;
3. Qualified Counsellor/Psychologist;
4. Faculty member
5. Hostel Warden
6. Academic/College/Department representatives; and
7. Any other member/professional considered appropriate by the competent authority.

The Committee shall:

- Oversee implementation of the Policy;
- Coordinate counselling, referral, awareness and crisis-support services;
- Facilitate training and sensitisation of faculty, staff and hostel personnel;
- Review hostel and campus safety and recommend preventive measures;
- Coordinate with existing Anti-Ragging, Internal Complaints, Student Welfare, Disability Support and Grievance Redressal mechanisms;
- Review anonymised and aggregated information on mental-health services;
- Facilitate preparation of the Annual Mental Health & Well-being Report; and
- Recommend measures for strengthening institutional mental-health support.

The Committee shall respect the professional independence of qualified mental-health professionals.

Sub- committee in each of the Constituent colleges

7.3 Mental Health & Well-being Cell/Centre

The Mental Health & Well-being Cell/Centre shall function as the operational unit for counselling, awareness, early intervention, referral and follow-up. It shall coordinate with the Medical/Health Centre, faculty mentors, hostel authorities and external professionals, as required.

The Cell/Centre shall maintain appropriate records in accordance with confidentiality and data-protection requirements and shall not function as a disciplinary or surveillance mechanism.

7.4 Counsellors/Psychologists and Medical Centre

The University shall endeavour to provide adequately qualified counsellors/psychologists and appropriate medical support.

Counsellors/psychologists shall provide professional counselling, assessment within their competence, referral and crisis support, while maintaining professional confidentiality. The Medical/Health Centre shall provide necessary medical assistance, emergency support and referral to appropriate hospitals or specialists, wherever required.

7.5 Mental Health Nodal Officer

A Mental Health Nodal Officer shall be designated to coordinate implementation of the Policy, facilitate communication among the Committee, Cell/Centre, counsellors, Medical/Health Centre, faculty mentors and hostel authorities, and coordinate urgent institutional responses, training and reporting.

The Nodal Officer shall not interfere with the professional responsibilities of qualified mental-health professionals.

7.6 Faculty Mentors and Hostel Support

Faculty Mentors/Student Advisers shall maintain supportive interaction with students, encourage help-seeking, remain alert to significant signs of distress and facilitate timely referral. They shall not diagnose or clinically treat students.

Hostel authorities/wardens shall maintain a safe and supportive residential environment, facilitate access to support services and promptly refer students requiring assistance. Hostel personnel shall not be expected to diagnose or clinically manage mental-health conditions.

7.7 External Referral and Coordination

The University shall maintain, as far as practicable, an updated network of qualified external mental-health professionals, hospitals, psychiatrists, psychologists and recognised support services for specialised assessment, treatment, emergency intervention and follow-up.

A student may seek assistance through any designated point of contact. Where the student's needs exceed the competence or resources of the first point of contact, appropriate professional referral shall be facilitated, subject to confidentiality and applicable law. Immediate or serious safety concerns shall be dealt with in accordance with the Mental Health Crisis.

7.8 Confidentiality, Accessibility and Accountability

All components of the institutional mechanism shall respect the dignity, privacy and confidentiality of students. Mental-health information shall be shared only on a need-to-know basis and in accordance with Provision 19 of this Policy.

The University shall endeavour to ensure accessible, non-discriminatory and appropriate mental-health support, subject to availability of resources and approval of the competent authority. The institutional mechanism shall be periodically reviewed by the University Mental Health & Well-being Committee.

8. COUNSELLING AND PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

The University shall ensure access to qualified counsellors/psychologists and appropriate professional referral services.
Counselling services shall, as far as practicable, be:

- Confidential;
- Accessible;
- Non-judgmental;
- Student-centred; and
- Provided by appropriately qualified professionals.

The University shall endeavour to maintain an adequate student-to-counsellor ratio and strengthen counselling support during examinations, academic transitions and other identified periods of stress.

9. FACULTY MENTORING AND EARLY IDENTIFICATION

Students shall, wherever practicable, be assigned faculty mentors/student advisers.

Mentors shall:

- Maintain periodic interaction with students;
- Provide academic and general support;
- Encourage help-seeking;
- Remain alert to significant signs of distress; and
- Facilitate referral to professional support wherever necessary.

Mentors shall not diagnose or clinically treat students.

10. MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

The University shall undertake regular mental-health awareness and literacy programmes covering:

- Stress and emotional well-being;
- Healthy coping mechanisms;
- Resilience;
- Recognition of distress;
- Help-seeking;
- Suicide prevention;
- Available counselling and referral services; and
- Emergency support.

Mental-health awareness shall form part of student orientation programmes.

11. ACADEMIC, RESEARCH AND CAREER STRESS

The University shall endeavour to minimise avoidable academic pressure and promote a supportive learning and research environment.

The University shall:

1. Discourage humiliation or public shaming of students for poor academic performance;
2. Provide academic mentoring and remedial support where required;
3. Address examination-related stress;
4. Provide appropriate support to research scholars facing research or academic difficulties; and
5. Provide structured career counselling and guidance.

12. PREVENTION OF RAGGING, BULLYING, HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION

The University shall continue to maintain a safe and inclusive environment free from ragging, bullying, harassment and discrimination.

Existing statutory and University mechanisms relating to anti-ragging, sexual harassment, discrimination and grievance redressal shall continue to function.

Students affected by such incidents shall be provided appropriate psychological and referral support.

13. SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE STUDENTS

Special attention shall be given to students who may require additional support due to socioeconomic difficulties, disability, discrimination, bereavement, family difficulties, isolation, academic difficulties or other circumstances affecting mental well-being.

Faculty, staff and hostel personnel shall be sensitised to engage with such students respectfully and without discrimination.

14. SUICIDE PREVENTION AND CRISIS RESPONSE

The University shall adopt a preventive and compassionate approach towards suicide and self-harm.

A separate Mental Health Crisis Response SOP shall be developed and notified to prescribe the procedure for:

1. Identification of a crisis;
2. Ensuring immediate safety;

3. Psychological First Aid
4. Contacting the counsellor/medical centre;
5. Professional assessment;
6. Emergency referral;
7. Communication with parents/guardians/emergency contacts, where appropriate;
8. Follow-up support; and
9. Post-crisis intervention.

Mental-health concerns shall not be treated merely as disciplinary matters.

15. HOSTEL AND CAMPUS SAFETY

The University shall periodically review hostel and campus infrastructure from the perspective of student safety and mental well-being.

Appropriate measures shall be taken, wherever required and technically feasible, regarding:

- Rooftop and balcony access;
- Elevated structures;
- Lighting;
- Hostel-room safety;
- Isolated areas; and
- Other identified high-risk locations.

Hostel wardens and caretakers shall be sensitised to identify distress and facilitate timely support.

16. FACULTY, STAFF AND WARDEN TRAINING

Faculty members, non-teaching staff, hostel wardens and other personnel regularly interacting with students shall receive periodic training on:

- Mental-health awareness;
- Identification of distress;
- Empathetic communication;
- Suicide prevention;
- Referral procedures;
- Confidentiality; and
- Crisis response.

Such training shall be conducted at least twice a year, as applicable.

17. PARENT/GUARDIAN SENSITISATION

The University shall sensitise parents/guardians on:

- Student mental health;
- Academic and career pressure;
- Supportive communication; and
- Available university support services.

18. HELPLINES AND REFERRAL SERVICES

The University shall prominently display updated information regarding:

- University counselling services;
- Medical Centre;
- Emergency services;
- Recognised mental-health facilities;
- Tele-MANAS and other approved mental-health helplines; and
- Other relevant referral services.

A directory of referral services shall be maintained and periodically updated.

19. CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA PROTECTION

Mental-health and counselling information shall be kept confidential and accessed only by authorised persons.

Information shall not ordinarily be disclosed without the student's consent, except where disclosure is required by law or reasonably necessary to protect the student or another person from serious and imminent harm.

Institutional reporting shall use anonymised and aggregated information.

20. SPORTS, CULTURAL AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

The University shall encourage students to participate in sports, cultural activities, student clubs, recreation and other constructive extracurricular activities as part of holistic development and mental well-being.

21. MONITORING AND ANNUAL REVIEW

The University Mental Health & Well-being Committee shall monitor implementation of this Policy and prepare an Annual Mental Health & Well-being Report containing anonymised information on:

- Counselling/wellness interventions;
- Referrals;
- Awareness programmes;
- Staff training;

- Career counselling;
- Parent sensitisation;
- Crisis interventions;
- Hostel safety measures; and
- Other relevant activities.

The Policy shall be reviewed at least once every year and revised as necessary in accordance with applicable laws, judicial directions, Government/UGC guidelines and institutional requirements.

22. RESPONSIBILITIES

University Administration

Provide leadership, resources and institutional support for implementation.

Mental Health & Well-being Committee

Coordinate, monitor and review implementation.

Mental Health & Well-being Cell

Provide/coordinate counselling, awareness, referral and crisis support.

Faculty Mentors

Provide supportive academic interaction and facilitate referral.

Hostel Authorities

Maintain a safe residential environment and facilitate timely support.

Students

Promote a respectful environment and seek appropriate assistance when required.

Faculty and Staff

Maintain an empathetic, inclusive and non-discriminatory environment and support referral mechanisms.

23. FINANCIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

The University shall make appropriate budgetary and administrative provisions, subject to availability of resources and approval of the competent authority, for counselling services, professional support, training, awareness programmes, referral services and campus safety measures.

24. COORDINATION WITH EXISTING MECHANISMS

This Policy shall operate in coordination with existing University mechanisms, including:

- Anti-Ragging Committee;
- Internal Complaints Committee;
- Student Welfare mechanisms;
- Equal Opportunity/Equity mechanisms;
- Disability support mechanisms;
- Grievance Redressal mechanisms;
- Hostel administration; and
- University Medical Centre.

Nothing in this Policy shall replace or dilute the statutory functions of these bodies.

25. POLICY REVIEW AND AMENDMENT

The Policy shall be reviewed annually by the University Mental Health & Well-being Committee and placed before the competent authority for approval of any proposed amendments.

Any amendment shall be consistent with applicable law, directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court, Government of India/Assam and UGC guidelines.

26. EFFECTIVE DATE

This Policy shall take effect from the date of its notification by Assam Agricultural University.