Dear Cornell students,

I hope you have been able to take a moment to enjoy the beautiful weather today, on the first official day of spring! I write to provide a brief update on our continued efforts to support the mental health of all Cornellians.

Last fall, President Pollack announced that we would undertake a comprehensive review of student mental health to begin as soon as 2019. Over the course of the fall semester, extensive feedback was sought from a wide range of student, staff and faculty stakeholders, including the Coalition on Mental Health. This feedback led us to focus on two broad themes for the forthcoming review: 1) how to best meet the clinical needs of students in regards to mental health; and 2) the ways in which the campus environment and culture contribute to mental health challenges at Cornell. These two themes will be explored extensively in the review through parallel processes.

To explore how our clinical mental health services align with the needs of Cornell students, we have engaged an external review team. The team will come to campus and evaluate our services through the lens of best practices in collegiate and community mental health. We have already engaged these external reviewers and will begin sharing data with them this spring. We anticipate their site visit(s) will occur during the Fall 2019 semester.

The campus environment will be reviewed by a university committee comprised of students, faculty and staff who will gather information about the environment and culture at Cornell that can best be understood by those who experience it directly. This committee will launch this semester and will be co-chaired by Miranda Swanson, associate dean in the College of Engineering, and Marla Love, senior associate dean of students for diversity and equity.

Concurrent with this planning, the staff at Cornell Health and others have been hard at work considering immediate changes to our clinical services. To be clear, we are not waiting for the completion of the review before we implement these changes. You can expect to experience a new approach to accessing Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) and related mental health resources at the beginning of the Fall 2019 semester.

Specifically, changes that we expect to implement include:

- Transforming CAPS phone assessments into same-day initial sessions (in person, on the same day students request them)
- Scheduling enough openings to see all students who seek care each day
- Matching the length and number of sessions to students’ needs/goals (e.g., brief goal-focused, longer term)
- Enhancing students’ access to psychotropic medication management services

Achieving these changes is only possible because of the dedication and commitment of our excellent staff, including the CAPS therapists and medical providers, at Cornell Health. I would also like to publicly acknowledge the many student groups that have worked with us collaboratively through this process, including the Coalition on Mental Health, the student-led task force on mental health, the Student Assembly Health Advisory Committee, the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly, and the Cornell
Social Business Consulting club. The spirit of collaboration, engagement and understanding of the complexity of these challenges has allowed such a campus-wide group of stakeholders to come together towards a common vision: promoting health and well-being as a foundation for the academic and life success of all students.

Sincerely,

Ryan Lombardi
Vice President for Student & Campus Life