



FOCUSING ON CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

Childhood Development Matters

While mental and behavioral health conditions can and do occur at any age, symptoms, and conditions often begin in childhood. By investing in prevention and treatment, children will grow up healthier and develop the skills they need to go on to successful and fulfilling lives.

Youth Mental Health Crisis

America is experiencing a crisis in the mental health of children and adolescents, which began long before the pandemic, and worsened as a result of the tremendous stress and uncertainty experienced by families. Children's hospitals are seeing the impact on youth every day, through a steep rise in the number of emergency department (ED) and inpatient visits for suicidal thoughts or self-harm, with visits more than doubling since 2016.

42%

of high school students felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for at least two weeks in a row that they stopped doing their usual activities.⁶

1 in 10

high school students attempted suicide one or more times during the past year.⁶

59%

of youth with major depression do not receive any mental health treatment.⁷

1.2 million

youth who are covered under private insurance do not have coverage for mental health care.⁷

1 in 5

children and adolescents experience a mental health condition in a given year¹

50%

of mental illnesses begin by age 14²

14%

of suicides are youth and young adults between the ages of 10 and 24, making it the second leading cause of death³

1 in 5

teens have contemplated suicide⁴

On the Front Lines

Children’s hospitals, pediatricians, and other mental health providers see firsthand the effect mental, emotional, and behavioral conditions have on children and families. Children commonly experience significant delays in beginning the mental health treatment they need. For children’s hospitals, this means seeing a growing number of children presenting in crisis and a shortage of appropriate placement options, including inpatient beds. As a result, too many children are boarding in hospital EDs.

Kids Can’t Wait

The importance of investing in services, support, and workforce that promote access to necessary pediatric mental health care cannot be overstated. To address the crisis in children’s mental health, enact policies that would:

- Strengthen mental health investment in Medicaid.
- Support the pediatric mental health workforce.
- Bolster community-based systems of care.
- Invest in pediatric mental health infrastructure.
- Expand mental health crisis services and suicide prevention.
- Extend and enhance telehealth flexibilities.
- Improve implementation of the mental health law.

This includes enacting

[Helping Kids Cope Act](#), to make long overdue investments in growing and strengthening the pediatric mental health workforce and building community-based systems of care for pediatric mental health services, including prevention, early identification, and treatment.

[Early Action and Responsiveness Lifts Youth \(EARLY\) Minds Act](#), to allow a portion of the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant to be used for the types of mental health support kids most often need, prevention and early intervention services.

1. [“What is Children’s Mental Health?”](#) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, April 2019.
2. [“Lifetime Prevalence and Age-of-onset Distributions of DSM-IV Disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication,”](#) National Institutes of Health, June 2005.
3. [“Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System \(WISQARS\),”](#) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.
4. [“Mental Health, Suicidality, and Connectedness Among High School Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic—Adolescent Behaviors and Experiences Survey,”](#) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, April 2022.
5. Pediatric Health Information System Database (PHIS), Children’s Hospital Association.
6. [“Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report,”](#) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, February 2023.
7. [“The State of Mental Health In America,”](#) Mental Health America, 2023.
8. [“Workforce Maps by State: Practicing Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists,”](#) American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 2018.
9. Leyenaar J, Freyleue S, Bordonga A, et al., “Frequency and Duration of Boarding for Pediatric Mental Health Conditions at Acute Care Hospitals in the US,” JAMA: Vol 326, No. 22, 2021.

From 2016-2022, ED visits by

3 to 18 year olds

for mental health care needs
increased by

50%

in children’s hospitals⁵

Currently, there are 14 child psychiatrists per 100,000 kids and teens. It is estimated the country needs

47 per 100,000⁸

The kids’ mental health crisis has caused an increase in boarding. Compared to before the pandemic,

84% of hospitals

are boarding more youth
patients, and

75% report longer boarding stays⁹