



FOCUSING ON CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

Childhood Development Matters

While mental and behavioral health conditions can and do occur at any age, children and youth are uniquely vulnerable. By investing in prevention, surveillance and treatment, children will grow up healthier and develop the skills they need to go on to successful and fulfilling lives.

The Pandemic and Mental Health

During the COVID-19 pandemic, children and families have experienced tremendous stress driven by social isolation, financial insecurity and grief, exacerbating the crisis in children's mental health. As a result, children's hospitals have seen 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.

Compared to 2016, children's hospitals across the U.S. in 2021 saw a:

31% increase in mental health inpatient visits for children and teens ages 3-18.

153% increase in ED visits for suicide attempts and self-injury for kids ages 5 to 18.

Nearly 100% increase in feeding and eating disorder inpatient visits for youth ages 10-18.

1 in 5

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

50%

of mental illnesses begin by age 14

11 years

pass between when first symptoms appear and treatment begins

Nearly 60%

increase in the rate of suicide among ages 10 to 24 from 2007 and 2018, making it the second leading cause of death for this group

4 in 10

teens in 2021 reported feeling sad or hopeless and 1 in 5 have contemplated suicide

On the Front Lines

Children's hospitals, pediatricians and other mental health providers see first-hand the effect mental, emotional and behavioral conditions have on children and families. For children's hospitals, this means seeing a growing number of children in crisis and reporting a shortage of inpatient beds and safe, alternative placement options. Children presenting in children's hospital EDs for mental health conditions since the onset of the pandemic have been more likely to require admission and have had longer patient stays. As a result, too many children are boarding in hospital EDs.

Kids Can't Wait

The importance of investing in services, supports and workforces that promote access to necessary pediatric mental health care cannot be overstated. To address the crisis in children's mental health, support legislation 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.
- Extend and enhance telehealth flexibilities.

This includes enacting:

[S. 4747, Investing in Kids' Mental Health Now Act](#), to incentivize states to increase reimbursement for pediatric mental health services with a 100% federal match, and share best practices to improve access in Medicaid to mental, emotional and behavioral health services for kids and identify barriers to care.

[H.R. 7236, Strengthen Kids' Mental Health Now Act](#), to fill the gaps in existing federal mental health programs to ensure funds reach pediatric mental health providers and are used to make a full continuum of care available to kids, including for the millions of children covered by Medicaid.

[S. 4472, Health Care Capacity for Pediatric Mental Health Act](#), to support training for the pediatric behavioral health workforce, expand the availability of a continuum of pediatric mental health services in communities nationwide and increase support for critical pediatric mental health infrastructure.

[H.R. 4944, Helping Kids Cope Act of 2021](#), 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.

[H.R. 4943, Children's Mental Health Infrastructure Act of 2021](#), to expand our national capacity to deliver appropriate care for children with more intensive treatment needs, including inpatient psychiatric care and step-down care, such as day programs or intensive outpatient services.

[H.R. 1397/S. 1798 Telehealth Improvement for Kids' Essential Services Act, \(TIKES\) Act](#), to promote the availability of telehealth services for children through Medicaid and CHIP and to study access barriers.

From 2016-2019, visits by

**6 to 12
year olds**

for mental health care needs

doubled

in children's hospitals

Currently, there are 10 child psychiatrists per 100,000 kids and teens. It is estimated the country needs

**47 per
100,000**

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
stays**