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
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.

- 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
- 14% of suicides are youth and young adults between the ages of 10 and 24, making it the second leading cause of death
- 1 in 5 teens have contemplated suicide
- 1 in 10 high school students attempted suicide one or more times during the past year
- 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
- 59% of youth with major depression do not receive any mental health treatment
- 1.2 million youth who are covered under private insurance do not have coverage for mental health care

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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. 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.

From 2016-2019, visits by 6 to 12 year olds for mental health care needs doubled in children’s hospitals.

Currently, there are 14 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.

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6. Pediatric Health Information System Database (PHIS), Children’s Hospital Association.