



# 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.<sup>6</sup>

**153% increase** in ED visits for suicide attempts and self-injury for kids ages 5 to 18.<sup>6</sup>

**Nearly 100%** increase in feeding and eating disorder inpatient visits for youth ages 10-18.<sup>6</sup>

**1 in 5**

children and adolescents experience a mental health condition in a given year<sup>1</sup>

**50%**

of mental illnesses begin by age 14<sup>2</sup>

**11 years**

pass between when first symptoms appear and treatment begins<sup>3</sup>

**14%**

of suicides are youth and young adults between the ages of 10 and 24, making it the third leading cause of death<sup>4</sup>

**4 in 10**

teens in 2021 reported feeling sad or hopeless and 1 in 5 have contemplated suicide<sup>5</sup>

# 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.

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. "[Mental Health Screening](#)," National Alliance on Mental Illness, May 2019.

4. "[Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System \(WISQARS\)](#)," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

5. "[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.

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

7. "[Workforce Maps by State: Practicing Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists](#)," American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 2018.

8. 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 2016-2019, visits by

**6 to 12  
year olds**  
for mental health care needs  
**doubled**  
in children's hospitals<sup>6</sup>

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

**47 per  
100,000**<sup>7</sup>

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**<sup>8</sup>