Kids Are Unique

While mental health disorders can and do occur at any age, children and adolescents are uniquely vulnerable. Mental health disorders diagnosed during adolescence often arose years earlier during childhood. Stigma, lack of awareness and inadequate access to resources can delay care by weeks, months or even years.

Investment Must Start Early

By ensuring children get the help they need, we can help ensure our kids grow into resilient, healthy, productive adults. This means making care accessible and affordable. Early intervention enables diagnosis and treatment before disorders become more difficult and expensive to treat.

Medicaid, jointly funded by states and the federal government, is the single largest payer in the U.S. for mental health services. The cost of care for children in Medicaid with a behavioral health diagnosis can be as much as 2.5 times the cost of care for kids without one.

With so many children enrolled in Medicaid—approximately 37 million at some point during a year—the opportunity to focus program resources should be optimized. Children can be treated earlier, in part thanks to Medicaid’s Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit.

Access to timely care and support keeps kids healthier, reduces symptoms of concurrent issues, allows them to do better in school and potentially avoid risky behaviors. Growing up healthier, children can go on to more successful careers, higher lifetime wages and fulfilling lives.
Children’s Hospitals Are Addressing These Challenges

Children’s hospitals continue to see an increase in the number of patients that, in addition to the injury or illness that brought them in, also need mental health services.

Hospital stays grow longer for kids with co-morbid mental health issues by:

- **8.8%** for medical care
- **16.9%** for surgical care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>12,600</th>
<th>the estimated number of child and adolescent psychiatrists needed by 2020</th>
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<tr>
<td>8,300</td>
<td>the anticipated supply by 2020</td>
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Developing Solutions

Children’s hospitals—in partnership with their communities—are providing care in settings where kids are comfortable, like their schools and local communities. In addition, children’s hospitals are:

- **Screening to promote early intervention** by educating health care professionals to recognize and rapidly care for patients with mental health needs.
- **Integrating mental health and primary care services** by equipping pediatricians and families at check-ups to care for kids early, strengthen care coordination services between providers, and decrease the likelihood kids will need emergency mental health services.
- **Promoting access through telemedicine** and leveraging telehealth to facilitate virtual consultations between mental health providers and families distant from sites of care.
- **Coordinating care to support effective transitions and family supports** by working with families to outline future treatment plans and help them identify and navigate needed resources outside the hospital.