

# 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 more successful careers and fulfilling lives.

- **1 in 5** children and adolescents experience a mental health condition in a given year.
- **50%** of all mental illness begin by age 14.
- **11 years** pass after the first symptoms appear before treatment begins.
- **Nearly a 60% increase** in the rate of suicide among those aged 10 to 24 between 2007 and 2018, making it the second leading cause of death for this group.
- **More than 1 in 3** high school students in 2019, reported feeling sad or hopeless, and nearly 1 in 5 seriously considered attempting suicide.

## 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. **Compared to 2019, from April to October 2020, hospitals across the U.S. saw a:**

- **24% increase** in the proportion of mental health emergency department (ED) visits for kids ages 5 to 11.
- **31% increase** in the proportion of mental health ED visits for kids and teens ages 12 to 17.
- **1 in 2 adults** with children in their household say they are concerned about the mental state of their children.

## Increased Demand and Stretched Care Capacity Collide

Children's hospitals have seen a steep rise in the number of ED and inpatient visits for suicidal thoughts or self-harm, with visits more than doubling since 2016. The pandemic has worsened this trend. Currently, hospitals are reporting a shortage of inpatient beds and safe, alternative placement options to support the growing numbers of kids in crisis, exacerbated by persistent shortages across disciplines within the pediatric mental health workforce. As a result, too many children are boarding in hospital EDs.

## On the Front Lines

Children's hospitals, pediatricians and other mental health providers see firsthand the impact mental, emotional and behavioral conditions have on children and families. For children's hospitals, this means seeing a growing number of children in crisis in their EDs, specialty clinics, and inpatient units. 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.

- Visits to children’s hospitals **doubled for 6 to 12 year-olds** for mental health conditions from 2016-2019.
- Currently there are **10 psychiatrists per 100,000 kids and teens ages 0 to 19**. However, it’s estimated that the country actually 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% are reporting longer boarding stays**.

## **Kids Can’t Wait**

The importance of investing in services and supports that promote access to necessary pediatric mental health care cannot be understated. Children need timely access to developmentally appropriate mental health services and supports within their communities. To address the ongoing crisis in children’s mental health:

### **Strengthen mental health investment in Medicaid**

- Increase Medicaid reimbursement rates for pediatric mental, emotional and behavioral health services to 100% of Medicare levels for similar services.

### **Invest in pediatric mental health infrastructure**

- Enact [H.R. 4943, the Children’s Mental Health Infrastructure Act of 2021](#), providing \$2 billion annually for five years in grants to increase provider capacity to deliver mental health services.

### **Bolster community-based systems of care**

- Enact [H.R. 4944, the Helping Kids Cope Act of 2021](#), providing flexible funding for communities.

### **Support the pediatric mental health workforces**

- Enact [H.R. 4944, the Helping Kids Cope Act of 2021](#), providing \$100 million annually for five years through HRSA grants for workforce training and development across pediatric mental health fields where shortages exist.
- Increase funding for the HRSA Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment program.

### **Extend and enhance telehealth flexibilities**

- Enact [S. 1798, the Telehealth Improvement for Kids’ Essential Services \(TIKES\) Act](#), promoting access to telehealth services for children through Medicaid and CHIP.