



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

Currently, children's 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.

Kids Can't Wait

The importance of investing in services and supports that promote access to necessary pediatric mental health care cannot be overstated. Children need timely access to developmentally appropriate mental health services and supports within their communities. To address the crisis in children's mental health, support legislation that would:

- Strengthen mental health investment in Medicaid.
- Invest in pediatric mental health infrastructure.
- Bolster community-based systems of care.
- Support the pediatric mental health workforce.
- Extend and enhance telehealth flexibilities.

This includes enacting:

- **S. 4472, the 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. 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.
- **H.R. 4944, the 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, the 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.

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**