



State of Children's Mental Health Crisis

There is a mental health crisis among our children and teens. Children's mental health concerns were common before the COVID-19 pandemic, with 1 in 5 children experiencing a mental health condition annually. The pandemic worsened this ongoing and significant crisis in children's mental health by causing disruptions in daily routine, social isolation, financial insecurity, and grief for many children and families. These challenging circumstances will continue beyond our national recovery. Unfortunately, our current system and infrastructure to handle this mental health crisis are inadequate. As a result, families are suffering, and suicidal intent and self-injury among youth is on the rise. We urgently need Congress to help end this crisis.

COVID-19 AND CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

Data illustrates that the pandemic has had a significant negative impact on the mental health of children and teens.

- Symptoms of depression and anxiety and the **risk of suicide among children and teens have increased** throughout the pandemic.
- In the first half of 2021 alone, children's hospitals reported **cases of self-injury and suicide in children ages 5-17 at a 45% higher rate** than during the same period in 2019.
- **More than half of adults** (53%) with children in their households say they are concerned about the mental state of their children.



INCREASED DEMAND AND STRETCHED CARE CAPACITY COLLIDE

Currently, children's hospitals report a shortage of inpatient beds to support growing numbers of kids in crisis, resulting in more children boarding in hospital emergency departments while awaiting alternative placement options. The lack of capacity is exacerbated by persistent shortages across disciplines within the pediatric mental health workforce.

- **Children's Hospital Colorado** reports that emergency room visits for behavioral health reasons shot up 72% statewide between January and April. They declared a mental health state of emergency in May of 2021.
- **Franciscan Children's** in Boston reports that requests for outpatient behavioral health services for children of color increased 19% during the first year of COVID-19, compared to the year before.
- **Children's Wisconsin** in Milwaukee experienced an 80% increase in referrals for mental health services in December 2020. Currently, more than 700 children are on the waitlist for outpatient therapy.
- **Wolfson Children's Hospital** in Jacksonville, Florida, experienced a greater than 200% increase in the number of behavioral health emergency admissions in 2020 compared to the previous year.

TO ADDRESS THE ONGOING CRISIS IN CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH:

- **Invest in pediatric mental health infrastructure** – provide additional funding in grants to children's health care providers to increase their capacity to provide pediatric mental health services.
- **Support the pediatric mental health workforce** – provide additional funding annually dedicated to pediatric mental health workforce training and development across a wide array of pediatric mental health fields.