Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
PolicyLab

Children's Mental Health: Building Up Our System of Care in 200 Words

Behavioral Health

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The pediatric mental health crisis persists, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and inequities in health care. Meanwhile, the mental health care system—with its workforce shortages, historic underinvestment in mental health care, and complex and disjointed systems of care and payment—struggles to respond.

These combined systemic issues and growing pediatric mental health needs led three prominent children's organizations—the American Academy of Pediatrics, Children's Hospital Association, and American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry—to declare a national emergency in child and adolescent mental health in October 2021 and launch a national campaign, Sound the Alarm, to prompt federal action.

Around the same time, the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance recognized the urgency for a coordinated response and requested policy proposals to address unmet mental health needs. PolicyLab responded, suggesting federal actions to increase equitable access for all and strengthen the continuum of care for youth. Specifically, we offered recommendations that will:

- *Drive changes in mental health care delivery models, inclusive of integrated care, school-based services and treatment of caregivers, through health care payment policy reform*
- *Expand the workforce providing and supporting mental health services to children*
- *Enable evidence-based service delivery in community settings and through telehealth*
- *Support funding for preventive services*

- *Invest in care navigators to improve uptake of mental health services*

Together these strategies will help children access the right care at the right time.

Encouraged by the bipartisan recognition of the unique needs of children, we remain hopeful that substantial investments in and changes to the mental health system are forthcoming. We continue to seek opportunities to inform mental health policy reform and ensure that these efforts are guided by research.

This post is part of our "____ in 200 Words" series. In this series, we tackle issues related to children's health policy and explain and connect you to resources to help understand them further, all in 200 words. If you have any suggestions for a topic in this series, please send a note to PolicyLab's Strategic Operations & Communications Director Lauren Walens.

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