Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
PolicyLab

Supporting the Mental Health of Teen Girls and LGBTQ+ Youth in 200 Words

Behavioral Health

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The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently released the 2021 Youth Risk Behavioral Survey report, stating teen girls and LGBQ+* youth are more likely than their peers to experience poor mental health, suicidality, sexual violence and bullying; they are also less likely to feel connected to others at school. These findings are contextualized by discriminatory legislation threatening LGBTQ+ teen well-being that is being introduced in many states across the country. For example, in some states, schools have been required to remove LGBTQ+ books from shelves, reinforcing stigma and placing teens at further risk for isolation and poor mental health outcomes.

PolicyLab researchers are working tirelessly to expand mental health resources available to teens and to explore how to build and sustain services. The CDC has identified schools as promising, accessible settings for mental health interventions. Dr. Jami Young and her team are exploring just this by testing a group-based depression prevention program delivered in schools via telehealth. This program specifically focuses on fostering connectedness and improving relationships, which protect teens from suicide.

There have also been efforts nationally to combat these issues. Some Medicaid funds have been dedicated to supporting school-based prevention and treatment programs and increasing behavioral health staff in schools. While the pandemic has exacerbated mental health challenges for teen girls and LGBQ+ youth, school-based behavioral health efforts offer strong potential for closing gaps in mental health inequities. For now, resources are available to those experiencing emotional distress or suicidality.

**Note that these data do not include youth who identify as transgender*

Diana Worsley, MPH, is a former clinical research project manager at PolicyLab.

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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