Children's Hospital of Philadelphia PolicyLab

Exploring the Effects of Pediatric Mental Health Boarding on Adolescents, Their Families and Health Care Providers

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There has been a nearly 200% increase in emergency department visits for mental health emergencies by children and adolescents over the past decade. This issue impacts not only the children and adolescents who are awaiting psychiatric treatment, but also the clinicians who care for them and the caregivers who support them.

Clinicians are challenged by the demand for mental health services that outpaces available resources, leading to prolonged waiting periods for definitive mental health treatment, including “boarding”—that is, waiting in a medical hospital until mental health treatment is available. Adolescents find themselves in medical settings that are not designed to treat mental health concerns, and caregivers are often left navigating a complex and fragmented mental health care system, all of which contribute to heightened levels of stress and helplessness.

This *Research at a Glance* highlights three studies that sought to understand the experiences and perspectives of those involved in the boarding process: the adolescents who are hospitalized, the caregivers who support them, and the clinicians who provide care. The goal of this research was to identify the main challenges and areas for improvement in the care and management of mental health boarding in acute care settings.

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