

Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Children

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This Evidence to Action brief documents the crucial role that timely prevention, detection and intervention services play in achieving positive health outcomes for children with mental health disorders, and it identifies action steps that state and federal policy makers can take to ensure that these services are available and accessible to all children and families.

Recent estimates suggest that 10 to 20 percent of children have a diagnosable mental health disorder and 40 to 80 percent of children with mental health problems do not receive the services they need. Despite robust evidence indicating the benefits of timely prevention, detection, and intervention, physical and mental health systems continue to miss early opportunities to improve outcomes for these children.

Recent health reform legislation including the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 and the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 (PPACA, as modified by the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010) have made important strides in establishing mental health needs as equivalent with physical health needs. With the full implementation of these laws, all qualified health plans will be required to provide mental health services, including behavioral health treatment, at parity with medical benefits. In order to optimize the impact of these provisions on children's mental health, federal agencies, states, and private payers must establish care and reimbursement standards that promote a children's mental health environment more reflective of the evidence on best practices.

Through an examination of the evidence surrounding key issues in children's mental health, this brief proposes policy actions to improve outcomes for children and their families.

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Topics

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