BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

A SNAPSHOT OF A POLICYLAB RESEARCH PORTFOLIO

WE'RE SEEKING TO ENSURE THAT CHILDREN AND FAMILIES RECEIVE THE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES THEY NEED TO BE THEIR HEALTHIEST SELVES BOTH PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY.

Behavioral health has a profound impact on the well-being of youth and families. Early identification and timely, effective prevention and treatment of behavioral health concerns help children become their healthiest selves. Yet, families face challenges in connecting to the right care, at the right time, in the right place.

Our researchers develop, study, and implement evidence-based interventions and programs designed around the unique needs of children and families. PolicyLab research also explores ways to bolster the number and types of providers who can deliver behavioral health services and expand settings in which these services can be delivered, while addressing barriers to care and treatment.

Through collaboration with Children's Hospital of Philadelphia's Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Behavioral Services, and alongside our policy and communications strategists, we also establish community partnerships that foster the growth and development of programs and policies that recognize the importance of child mental health.

POLICYLAB'S FOCUS ON BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ISSUES

Evidence-based Prevention, Screening & Treatment

Early detection and connection to effective, evidence-based care can enhance the lives of children and families as they face behavioral health challenges.

However, there is a *significant gap* between the types of treatment that children and adolescents receive and what is considered best practice according to research. To bridge this divide, we develop and test interventions to prevent and treat a number of behavioral health concerns—such as eating disorders, depression and suicide, and disruptive behavior disorders.

To promote early detection and ultimately prevention, our researchers examine how and when to identify if a child or caregiver is at risk of mental health conditions in primary care settings. For instance, some of our researchers explore which data might better identify youth at risk of an

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eating disorder, while others look at trends in maternal and caregiver mental health during the early childhood period.

A variety of barriers can inhibit families' access to care. Our experts evaluate different team-based care models to better support healthy early childhood development and positive parenting through intergenerational care and help families access higher level care when needed. Researchers also investigate the impact that care navigators have on families' engagement with mental health services.

Integration into Medical Settings

Integrating high-quality behavioral health resources into a variety of medical settings could improve access to care and ultimately outcomes for children.

Youth experiencing mental health concerns are often first seen in primary care or emergency departments, rather than behavioral health settings. Our team of clinician–scientists explore solutions and apply expertise across settings to expand where families receive services, determine how best to provide interventions to support children's physical and behavioral health needs, and when needed, connect to additional care within the health system. We seek to improve how different aspects of the health system support the whole child.

In primary care, we study interventions that providers can deliver to prevent and treat behavioral health conditions and related medical problems. This body of work seeks to augment the capacity of pediatric primary care to identify, refer, and manage youth at risk for suicidal behavior, improve access to treatment and enhance outcomes for children with ADHD, and adapt and study prevention programs that can be implemented in primary care.

For kids and teens with chronic medical conditions, our research investigates ways to improve their behavioral, emotional and physical health. For example, we study how to improve resiliency for children with chronic pain and to help youth with sickle cell disease manage stress as they move from pediatric to adult care.

Integration into Schools

Youth spend most of their time in school. Bolstering the interventions and resources available to support school teams in identifying and addressing the mental health needs of their students is crucial.

Our researchers partner with schools to develop and test resources for the classroom, school counselors and other student services staff, and school administration working in settings ranging from early education to high school.

For teachers, we create and adapt school-based interventions to utilize in the classroom to support their students with specific concerns, such as ADHD, and to prevent and address broader issues such as bullying.

For school counselors and other student services staff, we are developing and testing interventions they can implement to ensure young people receive services that can set them up for success, addressing concerns like anxiety and depression.

And, in translating research to practice, we actively partner with schools and administration teams on leveraging data to inform school-based mental health programming.