



APA Public Interest Government Relations Office

Promoting Awareness of Children's Mental Health Issues

Child and adolescent mental health problems are at a point of crisis for our nation.

- One out of every ten children or adolescents has a serious mental health problem, and another 10% have mild to moderate problems. Mental health problems in young people can lead to tragic consequences, including suicide, substance abuse, inability to live independently, involvement with the correctional system, failure to complete high school, lack of vocational success, and health problems.
- There is a lack of mental health services for children and adolescents. Less than half of children with mental health problems get treatment, services, or support. Only one in five get treatment from a mental health worker with special training to work with children. Families that are poor, are people of color, or have children with other disabilities or health concerns have an especially difficult time getting services that would identify, prevent or treat mental health problems.
- Children and adolescents with mental health problems are usually involved with more than one agency or service system, including mental health, special education, child welfare, juvenile justice, substance abuse, and health. However, no agency or system usually takes responsibility for coordinating their care or prevents them from falling through the cracks and not getting needed services.
- The costs of mental health problems in children are great for our country. They affect the children, adolescents and their families, as well as schools, communities, employers and the nation as a whole.

The importance of child and adolescent mental health problems must be recognized and stigma about mental health issues reduced.

- Mental health problems must be considered just as important as physical health problems by health care providers and as significant as learning problems by educators. Mental health assessment and care needs to be integrated into children's overall healthcare and education.
- Children's development of good social, emotional, and behavioral well-being needs to be a general part of their overall healthy development. Parents, educators, and health providers need to learn the best ways to encourage healthy social and emotional development.
- There must be a greater effort for early recognition of mental health needs of children and adolescents and greater awareness of warning signs. Early identification of mental health problems needs to be encouraged in preschool, childcare, education, health, welfare, juvenile justice settings, and substance abuse treatment programs. Staff in these programs must develop a greater awareness of the early warning signs of mental health problems, what to do about them, and where to make referrals for further assistance.
- We have many effective ways to treat and prevent mental health problems in children and adolescents. There is a need to get information about the best methods to people working with and treating children and adolescents. There remains a need for further research to develop new social, behavioral, pharmacological and multiple treatment approaches that work effectively.

There are not enough mental health professionals trained to work specifically with children, adolescents, and their families:

- Support education and training of more mental health professionals with the skills to deal effectively with the mental health needs of children, adolescents, and their families.
- Support workforce training on the advanced tools and methods that have been found to be safe and most effective for diagnosis and treatment of mental health problems in children and adolescents. Training should emphasize sensitivity to family needs, cultural differences, and what is appropriate for children at different ages.
- Support training of front line providers, including those in schools, child care settings, primary health care settings, juvenile justice system, and child protective services, to screen for and recognize mental health problems in youth and to take appropriate action.
- Support training for researchers and encourage interdisciplinary research that will find new behavioral, pharmacological, and multiple component treatment approaches to child and adolescent mental health problems.

Quality mental health services to prevent, identify, and treat children and families are unavailable in most communities. This is especially true for children living in poverty, those of color, and those with other disabilities.

- Mental health problems must be considered to be just as important as physical health problems by health care providers, and as significant as learning problems by educators. Mental health assessment and care needs to be integrated into all children's overall healthcare and education.
- Early identification of mental health problems needs to be encouraged in preschool, childcare, education, health, welfare, and juvenile justice settings, and substance abuse treatment programs. Staff in these programs must develop a greater awareness of the early warning signs of mental health problems, what to do about them, and where to make referrals for further assistance.
- Available mental health services must reflect current knowledge of prevention and treatment approaches that have been found to be safe and most effective, and a strategy must be developed to be sure that quality services are accessible to all children.
- Support training of more mental health professionals to work with children, adolescents, and their families and to provide care that is sensitive to family needs, cultural differences, and what is appropriate for children at different ages.
- Increase coordination and sharing of information by local agencies serving children and youth with mental health problems.

There is not adequate financial support for quality services for preventing and treating mental health problems of child and adolescent. Many child mental health services are not covered by managed care payers.

- Government agencies and private insurance companies should change payment policies related to children's mental health to support a full range of services, including home and community based services, as well as supports that are well coordinated, and sensitive to a family's needs, cultural differences, and what is appropriate for children at different ages. Payment policies for mental health

services should be the same as those for physical health problems. Mental health care costs need to be included in coverage policies for children's overall healthcare.

- Federal, state, and local governments should ensure that families, substitute families, and other caregivers, are full partners and involved in all aspects of service planning and decision making for their children.
- A national effort focusing on the mental health needs of young children and their families should be implemented. Because environmental factors can shape brain development later behavior, this effort should include educating parents, the public and professionals about the importance of the first year of a child's life for developing a base for healthy social and emotional development.

In order to promote mental health for children and adolescents, to identify problems early, and intervene early when efforts are most likely to be successful, a comprehensive national mental health care policy for children and adolescents in America, with a supporting infrastructure, must be established.

- Develop family-centered and culturally appropriate treatments in those areas where knowledge gaps remain for child and adolescent mental health problems.
- Support resources for the training and research needed to transfer successful prevention and treatment programs from research clinics to community clinics and to evaluate their effectiveness in those settings.
- Develop a system with built-in incentives for providers to deliver high quality care. Encourage additional provider training.
- Develop a primary mental health care system to fully address problems with the quality of child and adolescent mental health care in America, including reimbursement of primary care professionals for early intervention and prevention services that promote mental health and prevent or treat mental disorder. A private-public partnership will be necessary.
- Support basic research in child development and neuroscience into the effects of the family, culture, and environment on prevention and treatment outcome.
- Address the poor coordination, inconsistent policies, and inadequate funding that result in children with unidentified and unmet mental health needs in preschools, elementary and high schools, special education, foster care, child welfare agencies, medical centers, and juvenile justice systems across the US. Often children are involved in several of these systems simultaneously without any single agency assuming responsibility for their care.
- Direct effort and resources towards monitoring and evaluating the services provided to families in the community. Develop a system to judge progress, effectiveness of interventions, and improvement in the quality of care to families in need.
- Develop policies that promote integration, coordination and accountability of agencies and services, and provide sufficient resources for research, training, and reimbursement for high quality care.

