

CHILDREN'S MENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH FOR A RESILIENT IOWA

Child Mental Health & Well-Being is Important to Iowa's Future Prosperity

Children with strong mental health are equipped to develop important skills that begin in early childhood. Mental health is connected to social, emotional, and cognitive development and is the foundation for a healthy life, healthy community, and healthy state. When we ensure children's mental health needs are met, they are more likely to perform better in school, graduate and more likely to be healthy, productive adults in our community. Children are the future drivers of our state's economic development. When we ensure the healthy development of the next generation, Iowa benefits from a productive workforce and responsible citizenship.

Children's Mental Health Facts

- 80,000 children in Iowa have a diagnosed Serious Emotional Disturbance (SED)
- 1 in 5 children ages 13-18 have or will have a serious mental illness
- There are only 31 child psychiatrists in Iowa, mainly located in Iowa City and Des Moines
- Approximately 50% of children age 14 and older with a mental illness drop out of high school
- 70% of youth in the juvenile justice system have a mental illness
- In Iowa, suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death in youth & young adults ages 15-34 (higher than the national average)¹

The architecture of a child's brain is built over time. Exposure to adverse experiences or trauma such as community violence or parental substance abuse (**Adverse Childhood Experiences - ACEs and Expanded ACEs**) can damage brain architecture, but secure, loving relationship, stimulating experiences, and a healthy environment can build a solid foundation to support children into adulthood.

All children have mental health, even infants and very young children. Children are not little adults. The mental health needs of children are similar, but different than adults. A children's mental health system should focus on the unique needs of children and their families, and not assume the adult system can meet those needs. Early intervention through a two-generation approach (serving the child and the family) has shown significant long-term improvements in children's mental health and well-being and better equips parents to raise healthy, successful children.

Iowans want policymakers to take responsibility and invest in fixing the patchwork of services that is putting our children's mental health and well-being at risk. A fully funded children's mental health system will allow families to know where to turn when they need help and will allow Iowans to access the same array of core services regardless of where they live.

Our budget is a reflection of Iowans' values. If we truly value the well-being of children as a foundation of thriving communities, then our healthcare system should include comprehensive and accessible children's

¹ National Alliance on Mental Illness – Iowa (2018, December 27). *Mental Health Facts: Children and Teens*. Retrieved from <https://www.nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/Infographics/Children-MH-Facts-NAMI.pdf>

mental health care including prevention, early identification and early intervention. With this foundation we can accomplish great things in Iowa.

Legislative Recommendations

1. ***Develop a Statewide Children's Behavioral Health System*** including a multi-tiered system of
 - Prevention, early identification, early intervention and community prevention;
 - Comprehensive crisis services;
 - Behavioral health treatment; and
 - Community-based flexible support services.
2. ***Promote Universal Social, Emotional and Cognitive Developmental Screening (Beginning at Birth) for All Children in Iowa.***
3. ***Establish Core Pediatric-Specific Behavioral Health Services Accessible to All Children in Iowa.***
4. ***Address Workforce Shortages within Children's Behavioral Health*** through workforce incentives such as Future Ready Iowa, tuition reimbursement programs, tax credits for behavioral health professionals, and student loan forgiveness programs.
5. ***Establish a State and Regional System of Governance which Consists of Experts in Children's Behavioral Health*** to ensure a comprehensive array of core services is available to children within their region.
6. ***Expand Funding for Children's Behavioral Health Services.*** Eliminate the Children's Mental Health Home and Community Based Services Waiver waiting list, and expand access to the Pediatric Integrated Health Homes (Medicaid population) and System of Care Programs (privately insured population).