# Mental Health Promotion and Prevention

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# Definition of Mental Health

A state of well-being in which every individual realizes their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community. (World Health Organization)

# Global Landscape

According to the latest World Health Organization (WHO) Global Burden of Disease study, about one billion people globally are affected by mental disorders.

In 2019, using a composite approach that included mental disorders, alcohol and drug use, neurological disorders, chronic pain, suicide, and self-harm, encompassing, in total, 418 million disability-adjusted life years (DALYs), over 16% of global DALYs. The burden of mental disorders (in DALYs) exhibited a country-income gradient, with mental disorders comprising over twice the burden of disease in high-income countries compared to low-income countries.

Per year losses associated with this burden could exceed 5 trillion USD.

# Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic June 24–30, 2020

During late June, 40% of U.S. adults reported struggling with mental health or substance use.

# Impact Trends

COVID-19 pandemic impacts on children and young people are more pronounced

Inequalities in poor mental health following the pandemic have also been reported for women, low-income households, and several groups minoritized by race and ethnicity, gender identity and sexual orientation, or migrant status.

# Nearly Seven in Ten Women Under Age 30 Report A Negative Mental Health Impact From Pandemic; Few Older Adults Say the Same

[Graphic indicating large percentage of both women and men under 50 who noted that worry or stress related to COVID-19 has had a negative impact on their mental health]

# Younger Adults Feel Completely Overwhelmed by Stress

[Graphic indicating large percentage of both women and men under 45 who noted that most days they are completely overwhelmed by stress]

# Share of Adults Reporting Symptoms of Anxiety and/or Depressive Disorder, February 2023

[Graphic indicating a third of all adults and half of individuals aged 18-24 reporting symptoms of anxiety and/or depressive disorder]

# Early Onset

A recent systematic review of the pre-pandemic literature estimated that the onset of around one third, half and two thirds of any mental disorder will have already occurred by ages 14, 18 and 25, respectively.

# CDC DATA GIVE MORE INSIGHT INTO SEVERE CHALLENGES U.S. YOUTH HAVE ENCOUNTERED DURING COVID-19

[Graphics regarding large number of individuals reporting stressful events]

# CDC DATA ON YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH DURING COVID-19

[Graphics regarding large number of youth reporting poor mental health or sadness]

# CDC DATA ON YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH DURING COVID-19

[Graphics regarding increasing proportion of mental health related ED visits]

# Teen girls in the U.S. are experiencing threats to their health and well-being

[Graphics regarding sexual violence, feelings of persistent sadness or hopelessness, and considerations of suicide]

# Teen girls who persistently felt sad or hopeless increased dramatically from 2011 to 2021

[Graphic showing increasing percentage of teens who felt sad or hopeless]

# Percentage of high school students who experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness during the past year, by demographic characteristics, United States, YRBS, 2021

[Graphic]

# Youth Suicide Risk High School Students – BY Sexual Orientation

[Graphic]

# State of Emergency in Youth Mental Health

“It would be a tragedy if we beat back one public health crisis only to allow another to grow in its place.”

Vivek H. Murthy, M.D., M.B.A. Vice Admiral, U.S. Public Health Service Surgeon General of the United States

# Mental Health Promotion and Prevention of Mental Illness

Promoting mental health and well-being is now identified as a specific outcome in the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals, alongside targets to tackle various social determinants of health – including poverty, inequality, gender equality, and social justice – by 2030.

In the recent World Mental Health Report, T. Ghebreyesus, the WHO Director-General, reaffirmed the Organization’s commitment in “transforming the environments that influence our mental health” to promote mental well-being and prevent mental disorder.

# Promotion

[Graphic depicting the promotion, prevention, treatment, and maintenance continuum]

# The Building Blocks of Mental Health Promotion

Individual, Families, Communities, Organisations, and Governments  
  
Fulfilment & contribution  
Promote mindfulness, compassion, gratitude, personal growth, purpose & civic contribution.

Psychological skills  
Foster mental health literacy, social and emotional competence, self-care and resilience & encourage help-giving and help-seeking for stress, psychological distress or suicidal ideation.

Healthy behaviours  
Encourage regular physical activity, high quality diet, good sleep hygiene.

Supports and connections  
Promote secure attachment, positive parenting, social support, social participation and a sense of belonging.

Safety  
Ensure freedom from child abuse, gendered violence, racism and discrimination.

Material Basics  
Ensure equitable access to food, adequate income, education, work, stable housing, and holistic healthcare.

The Environment & Culture  
Protect the environment and support people to speak their language and practice their culture.

# Mental Health Promotion

Prenatal interventions

Early childhood interventions

Programs targeted at vulnerable groups, including minorities, indigenous people, migrants, and people affected by conflicts and disasters

Incorporating mental health promotional activities in schools

Community development programs –elevating youths' strengths by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths

# [Graphic Depicting Universal Preventive Interventions, Selective Preventive Interventions, Indicated Preventive Interventions, and Treatment]

# Critical link to equity and social justice

Since poor mental health can be the invisible hand that suppresses life chances, including both how long we live and the quality of years lived, improving population mental health by designing effective prevention strategies that intervene on modifiable social risk factors should be seen as a central issue of social justice.

(Kirkbride et al., 2024)

# What Communities Can Do

Educate the public about the importance of mental health, and reduce negative stereotypes, bias, and stigma around mental illness. Community groups can play a key role in fostering open dialogue about mental health at the local level and correcting misconceptions and biases. For example, community groups can partner with trusted messengers such as faith leaders and health care professionals to speak to community members about youth mental health needs. It’s particularly important to address misconceptions in populations that have an outsized influence over young people, such as families, educators, health care professionals, juvenile justice officials, online influencers, and the media.

Elevate the voices of children, young people, and their families. Youth are experts on their own lives, so it is important to engage youth in community-based mental health efforts. Explore youth advisory councils and other ways to involve young people in all phases of programming, from ideation to implementation. Gather feedback to understand what is and isn’t working. Include youth and families directly in delivering services, for example by creating peer support programs.

# What Funders and Foundations Can Do

Create sustained investments in equitable prevention, promotion, and early intervention. Prioritize interventions that address social and economic factors known to affect children’s healthy development and mental health, such as poverty, discrimination, and inequality, among others.

Incentivize coordination across grantees and foster cross-sector partnerships to maximize reach and bring together a diversity of expertise. The scale and complexity of mental health issues among young people require collaborative approaches. Consider leveraging resources across sectors to advance practices, policies, and research that support the mental health of children, youth, and families. And support grantees in developing and sharing meaningful mental health outcome measures.

Social Isolation – Social support and decrease stigma

Stress & Dysregulation – Skills for emotional regulation and health

Helplessness – Knowledge and self-efficacy

# Recommended Readings

Kirkbride, J. B., Anglin, D. M., Colman, I., Dykxhoorn, J., Jones, P. B., Patalay, P., ... & Griffiths, S. L. (2024). The social determinants of mental health and disorder: evidence, prevention and recommendations.*World psychiatry*,*23*(1), 58.

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2. Raymond, I. J., Burke, K. J., Agnew, K. J., & Kelly, D. M. (2023). Wellbeing-responsive community: a growth target for intentional mental health promotion.*Frontiers in Public Health*,*11*, 1271954.
3. Waechter, R., Gallant, C., De Wilde, K., Arens, G., Brady, T., Custodio, J., ... & Bhagat, A. (2023). Prevention of mental illness within public health: An analysis of progress via systematic literature review and a pathway forward.*Preventive Medicine Reports*, 102249.