One in seven children in the U.S.—nearly 7.7 million children and teenagers—have at least one diagnosable mental health issue, but **half** of the children who need treatment do not receive help.

Mental health care treatment is very effective, especially if begun early in a child's life. Left untreated, mental health disorders can have a debilitating impact on children, leaving them at increased risk of contact with the criminal legal system, becoming homeless, developing other preventable health conditions, and even suicide.

According an **August 2021 JAMA Pediatrics study**—one of the largest studies on children's mental health during the pandemic—depression and anxiety have essentially doubled among children worldwide, with 1 in 4 children suffering from clinically elevated symptoms of depression and 1 in 5 from increased signs of anxiety.

The proportion of mental health-related emergency room visits increased **24 percent** for young children and **31 percent** for kids ages 5-11 between March to October of 2020 compared to 2019. For children who were ages 12 to 17, that number rose **31 percent**. Emergency departments are often the first point of care for children experiencing mental health emergencies, particularly when other services are inaccessible or unavailable.

> **...less than 25 percent of children in foster care have received any mental health services after a year in state custody.**

Children living in poverty and those involved in child welfare systems, who are disproportionately LGBTQ+ and Black children, face profound mental health challenges. It is estimated that up to **80 percent of the over 400,000 children in foster care** in America suffer from a mental health issue compared to 18-22 percent of the general population of children.

As many as **60 to 80 percent** of children with severe mental health conditions demonstrate a positive response to therapeutic treatment, but **less than 25 percent** of children in foster care have received any mental health services after a year in state custody.

> **Youth in foster care are 3-13 times more likely to be prescribed psychotropic medications than other minors.**

Youth in foster care experience PTSD at **two times the rate of U.S. war veterans.**

Because their trauma is often untreated, children living in foster care engage in behavior that is symptomatic of the trauma they have experienced. That is the primary reason why **one-third** of foster youth crossover into the juvenile justice system, spending **at least one night** in detention.

Youth in foster care are **3-13 times more likely** to be prescribed psychotropic medications than other minors.

About 20,000 youth age out of foster care every year without the support of family and with significant mental health needs. Youth aging out of the child welfare system with untreated mental health illness often slide into homelessness and incarceration.

Because of the lack of community-based providers, some states send children in foster care out of state to receive mental health treatment.

By age 17, over 50 percent of youth in foster care have experienced an arrest, conviction, or overnight stay in a correctional facility. Instability of foster care exacerbates mental health problems and leads to criminalization of behavior – 90 percent of youth with 5 or more placements in foster care enter the juvenile justice system.

Most states lack adequate home and community-based mental health support for children and families even though these services cost less and have better outcomes. This too often leads to children being placed in facilities that cost 7-10 times more than community-based services provided to children living with families.

Because of the lack of community-based providers, some states send children in foster care out of state to receive mental health treatment. In 2019, 19,415 children in foster care were placed out of state and every state had children placed out of state. Most states have hundreds, but some have thousands placed out of state.