

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 putting them at risk of 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.

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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 systems 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 systems 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 systems experience PTSD at two times the rate of US war veterans.

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

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About 20,000 youth age out of foster systems every year without the support of family and with significant mental health needs. Youth aging out 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 systems have experienced an arrest, conviction, or overnight stay in a correctional facility. The instability of foster systems 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 legal 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 providing community-based services to children living with families.

Because of the lack of community-based providers, some states send children in foster systems **out of state** to receive mental health treatment. In 2019, **19,415** children in foster systems 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.



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