



Defense Health Agency (DHA) Clinical Communities Speaker Series

APR 2023 CCSS: Targeted Interventions Focused on the Whole Health and Wellbeing of the Military Child

S07: Evaluation and Management of Mental Health Emergencies in Children and Adolescents

Resource List

The American Psychological Association (APA) published a Trends Report, [Children's mental health is in crisis](#) (2022), detailing the urgent need for mental health services for children. This report notes that mental health related emergency department visits have increased 24% for children between ages 5 and 11 and 31% for those ages 12 to 17 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Emergency visits can be mitigated with more widespread outpatient care however even before the pandemic, children often had to wait months for mental health appointments. According to APA data, there are a limited number of clinical psychologists that specialize in pediatric care. Only 4,000 out of more than 100,000 U.S. clinical psychologists are child and adolescent clinicians.

Children's mental health is a growing public health crisis. The [Children's Mental Health Policy Brief](#) (2022) published by Harvard University – Kennedy School of Government explores five common operational challenges child welfare agencies face in meeting children's mental health needs and offers tactical solutions that states can use to address these issues for children in foster care. While this brief focuses primarily on strategies for strengthening referrals and coordination of care, gaps in the existing service array may also create significant barriers to meeting children's mental health needs. In addition to the strategies outlined, jurisdictions should also explore addressing gaps in the children's mental health service array itself to broaden access to more intensive community-based supports.

Across the US, rates of pediatric emergency department (ED) visits with mental health diagnoses have increased substantially. The Journal of Pediatrics article, [Five-Year Trends in Pediatric Mental Health Emergency Department Visits in Massachusetts: A Population-Based Cohort Study](#) (2022), evaluates temporal changes in pediatric emergency department (ED) visits for mental health problems in Massachusetts based on diagnoses and patient characteristics and assesses trends in all-cause pediatric ED visits. The study concluded that overall rates of pediatric ED visits with mental health diagnoses in Massachusetts declined from 2013 to 2017, although ED visits with autism- and suicide-related diagnoses increased. The study reports that Massachusetts' policies and care delivery models aimed at pediatric mental health may hold promise, although there are important opportunities for improvement.

The [National Guidelines for Child and Youth Behavioral Health Crisis Care](#) (2022) guide published by the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) describes a framework that states and localities across America can consider as they develop or expand their crisis safety net for youth and families. This guide offers best practices, implementation strategies, and practical guidance for the design and development of services that meet the needs of children, youth, and their families experiencing a behavioral health crisis. The priority is keeping youth in their own homes and keeping families intact whenever possible. SAMHSA strongly encourages youth crisis systems to meet the needs of all families by providing culturally and linguistically appropriate, equity-driven services.



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References

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