Investing in Effective Mental Health Initiatives for

Youth and Young Adults

Fact Sheet

At this time when concerns about the unmet mental health needs of youth and young adults are in the spotlight, we must act to ensure that a full array of effective mental health services and supports are readily available in all communities across our nation. With the right services and supports, the overwhelming majority of young people can thrive and reach their full potential. Mental health is critical to healthy development, school success and readiness for the opportunities and challenges of adulthood. The best outcomes are achieved through early identification and treatment of emerging disorders. By strategically investing in mental health initiatives that increase access to the most effective interventions and supports, Congress can help lead the way in creating bright futures for all children and youth.

The Facts

- 13% of youth aged 8-15 live with mental health conditions serious enough to cause significant impairment in their day-to-day lives[1]. This figure jumps to 21 percent in youth aged 13-18.[2]

- Half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14 and three quarters by age 24. Early identification and intervention improve outcomes for youth, before these conditions become far more serious, more costly and difficult to treat.[3]

- Despite the availability of effective treatment, there are average delays of 8 to 10 years between the onset of symptoms and intervention—critical developmental years in the life of a child[4]. In our nation, only about 20% of youth with mental health conditions receive treatment[5].

- 1 in 4 parents find it difficult to obtain specialized mental health services for their child and waiting lists to see a mental health professional can be 3 months to a year[6].

- Unidentified and untreated mental health conditions are associated with serious consequences for children, families and communities[7]:
    - Approximately 50% of students aged 14 and older with mental illness drop out of high school—the highest dropout rate of any disability group[8].

    - 90% of those who die by suicide have a mental illness[9]. Suicide is the third leading cause of death for youth aged 15-24; more youth and young adults die from suicide than from all natural causes combined[10].

    - 70% of youth in state and local juvenile justice systems have mental health conditions, with at least 20% experiencing severe symptoms. At the same time, juvenile facilities fail to adequately address the mental health needs of youth in their custody[11].

There have been repeated calls by major non-partisan institutions and organizations for a national commitment to the early identification of mental health conditions and intervention with effective services and supports.

- In June 2010, the American Academy of Pediatrics called for all pediatricians to screen children and adolescents for mental health conditions and substance use.
- In April 2009, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force called for physicians across the country to screen for depression in adolescents aged 12-18 because of the failure to identify this serious condition in youth[12].
- In 2009, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) called for schools, primary care, community-based organizations, child welfare and juvenile justice systems and political leaders to make prevention of mental illness and the promotion of mental health in youth a national priority.
- In July 2003, the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health called for early mental health screening, assessment and referral to effective services to be common practice.

The time is now to act on these calls for action. By identifying children and youth living with mental health conditions and providing effective services and supports, we can improve the lives of the next generation.

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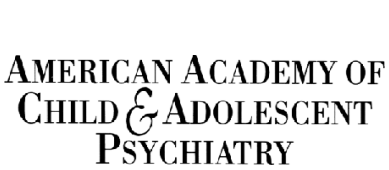

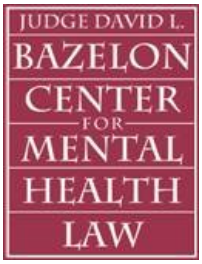

[1]National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 2010.
[2]National Comorbidity Survey Replication—Adolescent Supplement, 2010.
[3]NIMH, Mental Illness Exacts Heavy Toll: Beginning in Youth, 2005.
[4]NIMH, 2005.
[5]Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General, 1999.
[6]Mott, CS 2008.
[7]NIMH, 2005.
[8]U.S. Department of Education, 2006.
[9]Surgeon General, 1999.
[10]CDC, 2007.
[11]National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice, 2006.
[12]U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, 2009