



The Nation's Voice on Mental Illness

**POLICYMAKER'S
FACT
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Policymaker's Fact Sheet on the Mental Health System

Who is affected by Mental Illness?

- One in every five adults, or about 40 million Americans, experiences some type of mental disorder every year.
- Of this number, 5% have a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, major depression or bipolar disorder. ¹
- Deinstitutionalization has far too often tragically meant moving people with serious mental illnesses from hospitals to homeless shelters, the streets, jails and prisons.
- Mental disorders cross all boundaries of race, gender and ethnicity, although the prevalence of some disorders is higher for some population groups:
 - Women and Hispanics are more likely to experience a major depressive episode; ²
 - Younger people-ages 15 to 24-are more likely to experience a major depressive episode; ³
 - Elderly Americans are the demographic group most likely to commit suicide, ⁴
 - Among children in the United States, 1 in 10 children and adolescents suffer from mental illness severe enough to cause some level of impairment.⁵
 - Recent evidence compiled by the World Health Organization indicates that by the year 2020, childhood neuropsychiatric disorders will rise proportionately by over 50% internationally, to become one of the five most common causes of morbidity, mortality and disability among children. ⁶
 - Suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death among teens, followed only by accidents and homicide.⁷
 - Between 50% to 75% of youth in juvenile justice facilities suffer from a diagnosable mental health disorder and frequently do not receive counseling, treatment or support. ⁸

How Well Are Needs Met?

- Fewer than one-third of adults and half of children with a diagnosable mental disorder receive any level of treatment in any one year. ⁹
- An estimated 25% of homeless people suffer from serious mental illness. Some groups put that number as high as 50%. ¹⁰

- Today, it is estimated that only 1 in 5 children suffering from a mental illness receives mental health services, with unmet needs as high today as it was 20 years ago. ¹¹
- 16% of people in jails and prisons suffer from a serious mental illness.
- A NAMI national survey revealed that 23% of parents and caregivers with children with mental illness were told by a state official that they must relinquish custody of their child to the state to receive mental health services and 20% of them actually relinquished custody. ¹²
- Health care insurers place arbitrary and discriminatory caps on benefits for serious brain disorders like brain disorders like bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and others.

What Does the Mental Health System Look Like?

- Caring for people with mental disorders involves myriad providers, services and settings.
- Mental health services are provided by psychiatrists (physicians specializing in the diagnosis and treatment of mental illnesses and are able to prescribe medication), clinical psychologists (most of whom have doctorates in psychology and are licensed as specialists in the diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders), social workers, professional counselors, and other service providers, such as general practitioners, occupational therapists, school counselors and school psychologists.
- Services range from medical and clinical services (prescribing of medications, counseling and psychotherapy) to psychosocial rehabilitation and assertive treatment services that assist people with severe illnesses in living successfully in the community to services designed to help people with mental illnesses find employment or housing.
- Jails, prisons and juvenile facilities have all too often become the treatment facilities for adults, children and adolescents with mental illnesses.
- Most private insurance benefit plans unfairly and arbitrarily limit access to needed mental health services. This reflects the historic stigma and misunderstanding surrounding mental health treatment, although mental disorders are typically as treatable as general medical conditions.
- A growing body of evidence has demonstrated that most people with mental illnesses who need treatment can be treated more effectively and at less cost in community settings than traditional psychiatric hospitals. Today, fewer than 70,000 people receive mental health services as inpatients in state hospitals. ¹³

What Roles Do the Private and Public Sectors Play in Providing Mental Health Services?

- Most types of mental health services are available in both the private and public sectors, and individuals often receive services in both sectors.

- Private providers may be nonprofit or for-profit, and may offer an array of services that include inpatient hospitalization, partial hospitalization, outpatient counseling and psychotherapy.
- The public system often serves people who lack private health insurance or whose private health insurance has bumped up against inpatient or outpatient visit limitations. It provides a range of inpatient and outpatient mental health treatment, rehabilitation and support services.
- Publicly financed treatment plays a key role in the overall mental health service-delivery system. Public sector spending accounts for approximately 53% of all spending on mental health and substance abuse treatment services. In comparison, the public sector is the payor for 47% of total personal health care spending. ¹⁴
- Medicaid accounts for more than 50% of state and local mental health spending and is expected to reach 60% by 2007. Medicaid is nearly 15% of many states budget. It is second only to education in total state spending.
- The public system is administered by state mental health agencies and financed through state appropriations, Medicaid, and programs of the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Many states rely on counties and county based providers to deliver services in the community.

How Effective is Mental Health Treatment?

- Diagnoses of mental disorders made using specific criteria are as reliable as those for general medical disorders, according to the Surgeon General's Report. ¹⁵

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- Following more than two decades of significant scientific advances and improvements in behavioral and biological treatments, mental disorders are as treatable today as general medical conditions.
- Treatment effectiveness rates for disorders like Schizophrenia, Bi-polar illness, Major Depression, Panic Disorder, and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder compare favorably with such well-established general medical or surgical treatments as angioplasty or atherectomy for heart disease, which have success rates at or below 50%.
- Treatment success rates for other non-severe mental and emotional disorders are also high, if not higher.

Treatment for Severe Disorders

- As with certain general medical conditions, such as diabetes, some cases of mental illness must be categorized as long-term, severe and persistent. Increasingly, individuals with such disorders can focus on recovery and their well being and quality of life can be significantly improved with access to services.

- Mental health treatments are provided in a variety of settings, including inpatient hospitals, day treatment programs, assertive treatment programs, psychosocial rehabilitation programs, residential providers and the offices of private service providers.
- The most effective service system is one that combines a full range of treatment options, with assistance in securing affordable housing, income support, health care services, employment training, social services, social and recreational opportunities and, as needed, the most effective medication as prescribed by their physician.
- For individuals with co-occurring mental illness and addictive disorders, integrated treatment interventions delivered simultaneously at the same treatment site by staff trained in both mental health and addictive disorders treatment, is more effective than sequential or parallel treatment of each disorder.

Notes

1. *Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*. 1999
2. *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Sourcebook, SAMSHA, Department of Health and Human Services (1995)*
3. Ibid
4. Hoyert, D., Kochanek, K., & Murphy, S. (1999). Deaths: Final Data for 1997. *National Vital Statistics Reports*, 47; Vol. 9. (Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics). 1999.
5. U.S. Public Health Service, Report of the Surgeon General's Conference on Children's Mental Health: A National Action Agenda (Surgeon General's Report). Washington, DC: Department of Health and Human Services, 2000, p. 11.
6. Id. at p.11
7. Facts and Statistics on Youth Suicide available from the Centers for Disease Control, www.cdc.gov.
8. Coalition for Juvenile Justice (CJJ), 2000 Report: *Handle with Care-Serving the Mental Health Needs of Young Offenders*, p. 11.
9. *Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*, 1999, p.408.
10. *National Journal*, April 20, 2002, p. 1126.
11. Surgeon's General's Report, p. 11.
12. *Families on the Brink: The Impact of Ignoring Children with Serious Mental Illness*. NAMI 1999
13. *Closing and Reorganizing State Psychiatric Hospitals*: 1996, NASMHPD Research Institute, Inc., Alexandria, Va.
14. *Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*, 1999
15. *Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*, 1999, page 15.



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