

Where We Stand:

NAMI believes that public policies and practices should promote greater awareness and early identification of mental health conditions. NAMI supports public policies and laws that enable all schools, public and private, to increase access to appropriate mental health services.

Why We Care:

One in six U.S. youth aged 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year, and half of all mental health conditions begin by age 14. Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), behavior problems, anxiety, and depression are the most commonly diagnosed mental disorders in children. Yet, about half of youth with mental health conditions received any kind of treatment in the past year.

Undiagnosed, untreated or inadequately treated mental illnesses can significantly interfere with a student's ability to learn, grow and develop. Since children spend much of their productive time in educational settings, schools offer a unique opportunity for early identification, prevention, and interventions that serve students where they already are. Youth are almost as likely to receive mental health services in an education setting as they are to receive treatment from a specialty mental health provider – in 2019, 15% of adolescents aged 12-17 reported receiving mental health services at school, compared to 17% who saw a specialty provider.

School-based mental health services are delivered by trained mental health professionals who are employed by schools, such as school psychologists, school counselors, school social workers, and school nurses. By removing

barriers such as transportation, scheduling conflicts and stigma, school-based mental health services can help students access needed services during the school-day. Children and youth with more serious mental health needs may require school-linked mental health services that connect youth and families to more intensive resources in the community.

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Early identification and effective treatment for children and their families can make a difference in the lives of children with mental health conditions. We must take steps that enable all schools to increase access to appropriate mental health services. Policies should also consider reducing barriers to delivering mental health services in schools including difficulty with reimbursement, scaling effective treatments, and equitable access.

To learn more about NAMI's work on this issue, visit
www.nami.org/Advocacy/Policy-Priorities