



Partnership Policy Spotlight

Community Action Recognizes Mental Health Awareness Month



MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES & COMMUNITY ACTION

Providing and promoting equitable access to mental health services is crucial to addressing the causes and conditions of poverty. People living with low-incomes are not only disproportionately exposed to conditions that lead to poor mental health outcomes, but they also face greater barriers to care, including cost, access, and stigma. The pandemic exacerbated these challenges by both expanding the causes of mental illness and simultaneously straining an already underfunded health delivery system, escalating inequities in the process. Consistent access to quality mental health services can help people improve their lives by finding a job, securing stable housing, or removing obstacles to receiving other services. Community Action Agencies are trusted providers in their communities, making them crucial access points for connecting people with the mental health services they



need. **The National Community Action Partnership (NCAP) recognizes Mental Health Awareness Month, supports universal access to mental health and substance use services, and celebrates the work being done throughout the Network to increase access to these vital resources.**

MENTAL HEALTH SNAPSHOT: DEMOGRAPHICS, ACCESS, & COST

In 2020, an estimated [20 percent of adults](#) (52 million) suffered from any mental illness (AMI), which encompasses disorders (e.g., anxiety, mood disorders, post-

traumatic stress, etc.) at all impairment levels from no impairment to severe mental illness. This number is higher for multiple groups, including [women](#) (26%), [youth](#) (31%), [members of the LGBTQIA+ community](#) (47%), [transgender individuals](#) (58%), [individuals incarcerated in state and federal prisons](#) (45% and 54%), and [people who identify as two or more races](#) (36%). [Suicidal ideation among adults has increased every year for the past decade \(up to 5% in 2021\)](#). During the pandemic, [21.1% \(or 2.5 million\) of those adults attributed that ideation to the pandemic](#) and [rates of depression and anxiety doubled among children and adolescents](#).

[Among adults with AMI, fewer than half \(46%\) received mental health services with a slightly higher rate \(51%\) among youth aged 6-17.](#) The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) has identified over [6,000 Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas \(HPSA\) across the U.S., almost 60% of them in rural areas.](#) Overall, more than 149 million people live in HPSAs, where their access to mental health services is severely limited. Even in areas with access, cost is often prohibitive: 11% of adults with AMI are uninsured and 8% of children (nearly 1 million) are enrolled in private insurance plans that do not cover mental health services.

LINKING POVERTY & MENTAL HEALTH

[The relationship between poverty and mental health is multi-dimensional and cyclical:](#) mental illness can lead to reduced income, which, in turn, increases the likelihood of developing a mental illness, exacerbates existing mental health issues, and prevents people from transitioning out of poverty. Living with low-income can result in negative



Issues We're Tracking

- The [Preventing Mental Health and Substance Use Crises During Emergencies Act](#) establishes a task force and implements strategies to address mental health and substance use issues during public health emergencies.
- The [COVID-19 Mental Health Research Act](#) requires the National Institute of Mental Health to support mental health research activities related to COVID-19.
- The [Stop Mental Health Stigma in Our Communities Act](#) requires SAMHSA to develop and implement an outreach and education strategy that promotes mental health and reduces stigma among Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander populations.
- The [Resilience Investment, Support, and Expansion \(RISE\) from Trauma Act](#) allows federal agencies to fund pilot programs to improve outcomes for children experiencing trauma and directs HHS to provide toolkits and trainings to frontline staff on toxic stress, trauma, and resilience.
- [Senate Resolution 518](#) recognizes that historic financial investments in mental health and substance use services are necessary to address the prevalence of behavioral health issues in our communities.
- The [Supporting Children's Mental Health Care Access Act](#) reauthorizes two grant programs focused on children's mental health that expand primary care behavioral telehealth for states, localities, and Tribal organizations, and develop and maintain infant and early childhood mental health promotion, intervention, and treatment programs.

mental health indicators like financial stress, exposure to stressful life events (including Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)), toxin exposure, and inadequate nutrition. Many adults with low-incomes work long hours and experience worry and anxiety about providing food, childcare, utilities, healthcare, housing, and other necessities for their families.

[Environmental factors disproportionately experienced by low-income communities and people of color, like pollution, crime, and challenging sleep conditions, also negatively affect mental health.](#) Well-documented disparities in [chronic health conditions among those populations can also lead to mental health issues](#) like depression, anxiety, and social-isolation. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), [more than a quarter of the nearly 10 million adults with a serious mental illness live below the Federal Poverty Level \(FPL\).](#) Additionally, multiple studies have demonstrated that [mental health conditions stemming from trauma and toxic stress have measurable negative](#)

Highlighted Resources

- National Alliance on Mental Illness: [MHAM – Get Involved!](#)
- U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services: [Fact Sheet Celebrating Mental Health Awareness Month 2022](#)
- Mental Health America: [2022 Mental Health Awareness Month Toolkit](#)
- National Council for Mental Wellbeing: [MHAM Resources](#)
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention: [Mental Health During COVID-19](#)
- From the White House: [Proclamation on National Mental Health Awareness Month](#)
- Office of Head Start: [Mental Health Resources During COVID-19](#)
- MentalHealth.gov: [Mental Health Myths & Facts](#)
- SAMHSA: [Guide to Promoting Wellness at the Community Level](#)
- National Council of Nonprofits: [How \(and Why\) Nonprofits Are Supporting the Mental Health of Their Employees](#)
- NonprofitAF: [It's still the apocalypse, let's give ourselves and one another some grace](#)

[effects on physical health,](#) contributing to conditions including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and asthma.

BARRIERS TO ACCESS

People living with low-incomes also face greater barriers to mental health care access. Many Americans cite cost and insufficient health care coverage as major impediments to receiving mental health services and those challenges are more pronounced for low-income

individuals and families. When money is tight, people are forced to prioritize survival needs like food and housing, while deferring spending on preventive services like mental health. [Proximity to services is also a challenge,](#) especially among rural communities with fewer mental health professionals where consistent transportation access is required to travel longer distances to appointments. For immigrants and refugees, who are at higher risk for depression and anxiety, [limited access to](#)

[providers who speak their native language results in fewer services](#) being accessed among these populations. [Low-income patients have also cited stigma and lack of mental health literacy within their communities as barriers to receiving care.](#)

LOOKING FORWARD TO SOLUTIONS

Barriers to mental health access present challenges for our communities, but there is transformative work being done at the community, state, and federal level to overcome these obstacles and get people the services they need. Community Action Agencies across the country are integrating services, rethinking service delivery methods, and providing education opportunities to train more mental health professionals (Check out “From the Field!”). On the provider side, the [Surgeon General released an Advisory on Protecting Youth Mental Health](#), several national groups have declared a [National Emergency in Child and Adolescent Mental Health](#), and some have looked to pediatricians as a health point of contact to prioritize family [mental health services and](#)

From the Field!

[Community Chest, Inc. in Nevada](#) integrates both clinical and subclinical staff to provide and match a variety of health and human services programs and resources to the needs of its clients. Utilizing evidence-based treatment approaches, its team of mental health clinicians provides treatment to individuals, families, and groups across three rural Nevada counties and six distinct communities in schools, jails, and homes, through telehealth and in-person visits. Additionally, the mental health team helps to train staff in all other programs to be comfortable recognizing and responding to signs of suicidality and other signs of mental health distress. [Learn more about their work HERE!](#)

[Comprehensive Community Action Program \(CCAP\) in Cranston, Rhode Island](#), a multi-site comprehensive health and social service agency, provides integrated medical, behavioral health and dental programs serving low-income populations. Accepting all third-party insurance coverages, including but not limited to Medicare and Rhode Island’s Medicaid program for families with children and pregnant women, the program also provides a sliding fee scale for those without insurance coverage. [Learn more about their work HERE!](#)

[universal screening in a primary care setting.](#)

During the pandemic, [many states expanded behavioral health access under Medicaid by covering telehealth services](#) and [SAMHSA released additional funding to states and territories for comprehensive community prevention and recovery.](#) At the federal level, Congress

passed the [National Suicide Hotline Designation Act](#), which will change the current 10-digit Suicide Hotline number to the simplified 9-8-8 beginning in July 2022 and [multiple members of Congress are considering measures that would improve access to mental health services](#) (Check out “Issues We’re Tracking”).

