



BEHAVIORAL HEALTH: A SNAPSHOT OF A POLICYLAB RESEARCH PORTFOLIO

Behavioral health issues have a profound impact on the overall health and well-being of youth and their families.

Ten percent of social, emotional and behavioral problems start as early as preschool, and half of all mental health problems begin by the age of 14.^{1,2} In fact, nearly 7.7 million children and teens in the U.S.—about one in seven of all youth—have at least one treatable mental health disorder, yet many mental health conditions go unrecognized or untreated during childhood.³

THERE'S AN AVERAGE DELAY OF 8-10 YEARS BETWEEN THE ONSET OF SYMPTOMS AND MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT¹ AND CURRENTLY, ONLY ABOUT ONE-THIRD OF YOUTH EVER RECEIVE TREATMENT.⁴

This disconnect impacts millions of children and can have long-term implications for the trajectory of a young person's life.



How Do We Define Behavioral Health?

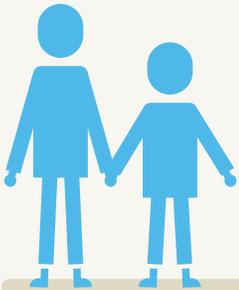
PolicyLab's definition of behavioral health encompasses mental health and emotional and psychological well-being.

Behavioral health interventions can target mental and substance use disorders, help individuals cope with medical illnesses or other stressors, and promote positive health behaviors.

Early identification and timely, effective prevention and treatment of behavioral health conditions provide youth the opportunity to be their healthiest selves.

To improve care for children and connect them to the services they need, it is important to increase the number and types of providers who can deliver evidence-based prevention and treatment services. We should also expand the settings in which services are delivered to meet families where they are—including schools, community programs, primary care and hospitals. At the same time, we must address barriers that make it difficult for families

to access care and treatment. In order to accomplish these goals, we've formed a collaborative of PolicyLab researchers who have expertise in behavioral health. We're partnering with health care providers, community leaders, and policymakers to ensure that our research informs programs and policies that provide necessary resources for accessible, affordable care and recognize the importance of child mental health.



POLICYLAB RESEARCH SEEKS TO ENSURE THAT CHILDREN AND FAMILIES RECEIVE THE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES THEY NEED BY...



Developing evidence-based programs that a variety of providers can deliver;

Expanding settings where services are available;



And establishing community partnerships that foster the growth and development of programs and policies.





SCREENING AND CONNECTING TO CARE

Early detection and connection to effective prevention and treatment can improve the lives of children and families as they face behavioral health challenges.⁵

If left untreated, mental health problems can last into adulthood making early identification critical for healthy development. To promote early detection, we are pioneering the inclusion of behavioral health screenings at pediatric well and subspecialty visits. Our researchers analyze screening data to determine the number of children facing behavioral health conditions and whether clinicians are connecting families to follow-up treatment. The data captured informs our efforts to address obstacles in caring for children with behavioral health needs. For instance, to ensure that poorly coordinated services don't prohibit access and receipt of mental health treatment, we are developing and investigating innovative patient navigation models to educate and empower families and connect them to appropriate care.



INTEGRATION INTO COMMUNITY SETTINGS

Early identification and treatment should occur where and when young people are most likely to present concerns, such as in community settings.⁷

Oftentimes, people who spend the most time with children have the greatest opportunity to notice initial behavioral health concerns, but may not have the tools they need to help. We are actively partnering with stakeholders to develop strategies for integrating behavioral health services into non-traditional settings such as schools, child care and even directly into homes to increase access to care. In particular, we are creating and adapting school-based interventions because we know that the vast majority of children who access mental health services do so at school. Additionally, we are training teachers, school counselors, Head Start staff and community nurses in best practices to ensure young people receive needed services that can set them up for success.



INTEGRATION INTO MEDICAL SETTINGS

Approximately 75% of children with mental health conditions are seen in the pediatrician's office, not in specialized mental health settings.⁶ Integrating high-quality behavioral health care into medical settings could reduce the gap in untreated conditions.

Our team of clinician-scientists is exploring solutions and applying expertise across the following settings to expand where families receive services:

Primary Care. We are studying interventions that a variety of providers can deliver in primary care to prevent and treat behavioral health conditions and related medical problems. Many of these interventions target children and adolescents, but this work also focuses on parents. For instance, we are researching whether parenting groups for children with behavioral problems and social media peer groups for moms with postpartum depression can be successful in providing support for caregivers.

Subspecialty Care. Many kids and teens with chronic medical conditions experience behavioral health difficulties that impact medical care and outcomes. We are investigating risk factors associated with medical and psychological outcomes for children with medical problems and piloting a resiliency intervention for children experiencing chronic pain.

Hospital Settings. Our research highlights how behavioral health conditions impact children who are hospitalized, showing an increase in costs and a link to other facets of care—hospital readmission, length of stay and ongoing engagement in treatment. Based on this research, we are developing and testing service delivery models that improve mental and emotional well-being during hospitalization to improve outcomes and offset costs.



EVIDENCE-BASED PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

There is a significant gap between the types of treatment that children and adolescents receive and what is considered best practice according to research.⁸

To close the gap between research and clinical practice, we are developing, studying and implementing evidence-based programs to ensure children and families have access to the most appropriate treatments. This includes developing and testing interventions for a number of behavioral and mental health concerns such as eating and sleep disorders, delays in language development, depression, disrupted mother-child relationships and disruptive behavior disorders. We also have a robust body of research focused on prevention since we know that delivering evidence-based interventions, before children develop a behavioral health disorder, provides a crucial opportunity to improve outcomes and reduces costs.⁹



VISIT [POLICYLAB.CHOP.EDU/
OUR-RESEARCH/BEHAVIORAL-HEALTH](http://POLICYLAB.CHOP.EDU/OUR-RESEARCH/BEHAVIORAL-HEALTH)
to learn more about all of our behavioral health research.



The mission of PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) is to achieve optimal child health and well-being by informing program and policy changes through interdisciplinary research.

PolicyLab is a Center of Emphasis within Children's Hospital of Philadelphia's Research Institute, one of the largest pediatric research institutes in the country.

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