Taking Action to Support Our Youths’ Mental Health

Youth Mental Health Roadmap for Western Massachusetts

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“...everyone has a role to play in combating this mental health pandemic... If we each start reorienting our priorities to create accessible space in our homes, schools, workplaces, and communities for seeking and giving assistance, we can all start building a culture that normalizes and promotes mental health...”

- U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory, Protecting Youth Mental Health
“Healthy mental health comes when you feel seen and heard, when you feel connected to something bigger than yourself- you belong at school, in your family, faith community, sports team, whatever. Healthy mental health comes when you move, when you get fresh air. Healthy mental health comes when you feel that your gifts align with the world's needs, when you're engaged in things you are passionate about.”

- Mental Healthcare Provider, Key Informant Interview, Community Health Needs Assessment, Coalition of Western Massachusetts Hospitals and Insurer, 2022
Roadmap Process

Advisory Group
Content experts, behavioral health organizations, public health providers, organizations serving youth of color, and more...

Built off existing efforts

Research
- Key informant interviews
- Review evidence base

+ Framework, Findings, & Recommendations
  - Young Adult Empowerment Coalition & Springfield Youth Mental Health Coalition
  - Beat the Odds youth advisors

Western MA Youth Behavioral Health Roadmap
Roadmap Focus

• **Geography:** Four Western MA counties with particular focus on Hampden County and Springfield

• **Youth and young adults:** middle school, high school, young adult/transition age youth

• Acknowledging inequities exist, focus on Black and Latine youth
"Always keep in mind that it is important to find out directly from youth what is impacting them, what challenges they are facing, keep them in the forefront, keep them in the decision-making process."

-mental health provider
Destigmatizing and Normalizing Mental Health

Mental health stigma has been improving over time, though it remains

- Generational differences
- Cultural differences
- Gender differences

Affects

- Ability to acknowledge own mental health challenges
- Willingness to talk about mental health and mental health challenges
- Willingness to seek help
Destigmatizing and Normalizing Mental Health

Recommendations

- Center youth and parents/caregivers
- Multiple strategies in multiple settings
- Partner with media
- Partner with the faith community

★ Acknowledge how oppression and racism impact how stigma shows up today

Thorncraft et al. The Lancet Commission on ending stigma and discrimination in mental health. Lancet 2022;400:1438-80
WE ARE BIOLOGICALLY WIRED WITH THE NEED FOR SOCIAL CONNECTION.

Studies have shown

Among children and teens, social isolation increases risk of depression and anxiety, and the risk remains high up to nine years later.

More than half of U.S. adults report loneliness → some of the highest rates are among young adults.

Youth are still recovering from the effects of social distancing and online schooling during COVID-19.

Source: U.S. Surgeon General Advisory. Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation, 2023
Fostering Social Connection

**Recommendations**

- Make social connection a priority in our local governments, organizations, schools and healthcare
- Design for social connection in all environments, policies, programs and practices
  - Think about both peer and intergenerational opportunities
- Create and support more programs that connect youth
  - Mentoring and peer mentoring
  - Meet youth where they are at and consider culture, customs and traditions
- Education – parents/caregivers, youth, broad-based community efforts

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

- Learn knowledge, skills, and attitudes to:
  - Develop healthy identities,
  - Manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals,
  - Feel and show empathy for others,
  - Establish and maintain supportive relationships,
  - Make responsible and caring decisions.

- Shown to improve social and emotional skills, mental health, behavior, school functioning, and more...


Image source: Interactive CASEL Wheel
Source: https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/
### Social and Emotional Learning

**Recommendations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOLS</th>
<th>COMMUNITY</th>
<th>PARENT/CAREGIVER EDUCATION</th>
<th>POLICY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Structures to support implementation</td>
<td>• Offer SEL in youth programs</td>
<td>• Educate parents/caregivers about SEL</td>
<td>• More state funding to support SEL and</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Utilize existing resources – BIRCH, DESE funding</td>
<td>• Work with faith-based community</td>
<td>• Meet parents where they are at</td>
<td>parent/caregiver education</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Non classroom SEL</td>
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<td>• Align school-based policies and</td>
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<td>• Incorporate transformative SEL</td>
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<td>overlapping regulations</td>
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⭐ Acknowledge cultural differences and approach with cultural humility
Addressing Social Media

95% of youth aged 13-17 use social media. More than a third use it "almost constantly".

**BENEFITS:**
- Social support among youth who feel marginalized, such as LGBTQ+ youth and youth of color

**HARMS:**
- Impacts self-esteem and mental health; cyberbullying; reduces in-person interactions; excessive use because platform algorithms designed to maximize user engagement

- Currently minimal legislation to regulate companies.
- There are some school policies in place locally limiting use.

Source: U.S. Surgeon General Advisory. Social Media and Youth Mental Health, 2023
Addressing Social Media

Recommendations

**EDUCATION**
- Students, parents, caregivers
- Through schools and through Community-Based Organizations

**COMMUNITY**
- Raise awareness of risks of social media and strategies to address
- Creating safe spaces where youth can talk about their experiences and challenges

**POLICY**
- Collaborate on federal policies, e.g. COPPA 2.0, KOSA

Keep in mind equity!

🌟 Be mindful that social media can be a way for youth to get social support they wouldn’t otherwise have

🌟 Ensure tech-free schools' policies (no phones) aren’t an additional opportunity for disproportionate discipline, especially for Black and Latine youth
Community-Clinical Linkages

- Embed prevention in clinical
- Embed clinical in community spaces
- Coordinate efforts between community, schools, and clinical services
Moving to Action

Our youth are resilient. They need our support. Together we can make change.

The roadmap can be used to support:

• Collaborative regional change
• Policy advocacy
• Funding advocacy
Thank you!

• PHIWM Team
• Reviewer Groups – YMHC, YAEC, BTO
• Interviewees
• Advisory Group
  • Baystate Health
  • Behavioral Health Network
  • Berkshire Community College
  • Center for Human Development (CHD)
  • Clinical and Support Options Inc. (CSO)
  • Community Action Pioneer Valley
  • Community Foundation of Western MA
  • Estoy Aquí
  • Franklin Regional Council of Governments
  • Gándara Center
  • Holyoke Medical Center
  • Mercy Medical Center, THofNE
  • MiraVista Behavioral Health Center
  • National Association of Social Workers – MA Chapter
  • River Valley Counseling Center
  • SPIFFY Coalition (Strategic Planning Initiative for Families & Youth), CES
  • Springfield City Council
  • Springfield Public Schools School Committee
  • Square One
  • The Brien Center
  • The Massachusetts Health Policy Forum
  • Tools For Success Counseling Service
  • BIRCh Project, UMass Amherst
  • Volunteers in Medicine- Berkshires