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# Key Education Issues in Review: Child and Adolescent Mental Health

## Introduction

In recent years, child and adolescent mental health issues have become a significant healthcare concern across the U.S. and in Nevada. As many as 1 in 5 children and adolescents experience a diagnosable mental health disorder each year; however, fewer than half of them receive mental health treatment. Nevada has one of the highest rates of major depression and suicide in the nation and ranks 36<sup>th</sup> in the nation on per capita mental health care state funding.

## Nevada's Facts and Statistics

- Between 2008 and 2012, approximately 8% of all Nevada youth experienced a major depressive episode and of those only 31% received treatment.
- The Clark County Children's Mental Health Consortium has found that nearly 20% of elementary students in the Clark County School District (CCSD) needed mental health services, but only 30% of these students were getting the help they needed.
- A study in 2009 found that 30% of high school students in CCSD reported experiencing symptoms of depression.
- In the 2012-2013 school year, CCSD reported implementing 778 suicide intervention protocols.
- Nevada is ranked within the top five states for suicide rates.
- Nevada's children with mental health issues are less likely to receive treatment when compared to children in peer states.

## U.S. Facts and Statistics

- Depressive disorders affect up to 11% of children and adolescents, and major depressive disorder is the main cause of disability among adolescents and young adults in the U.S.
- Anxiety disorders affect between 8-12% of children and adolescents in any given year.
- Only about 20% of children and adolescents with mental health problems receive treatment.
- Adolescents with untreated mental health issues have a school dropout rate of 50%.

## Nevada's Recent Actions to Date

- In the years between 2009 and 2011, Nevada reduced its mental health care budget by more than 28%, ranking at 5<sup>th</sup> in the nation for the highest cuts to mental health care.
- The Nevada Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS) oversees state-funded child and adolescent mental health services, including both inpatient and outpatient treatment.
- The *Wraparound in Nevada* (WIN) program is designed to coordinate mental health services and to help parents and other caregivers access mental health treatment for children.
- During 2013, the Nevada Legislature and Governor Sandoval approved a pilot program in the Washoe County School District and the Clark County School District to screen students for mental health problems.

## Considerations for Future Directions

Successfully addressing the mental health needs of Nevada's children and adolescents will require ongoing collaboration between the state's public school systems and state and local community mental health organizations. Both school-based mental health initiatives and wraparound services show promise in helping Nevada's children and adolescents. Key issues for policymakers to consider include:

- Expanding mental health prevention and mental wellness programs in Nevada's schools and integrating them into the K-12 curriculum.
- Continuing permanently the pilot mental health assessment and identification programs in Washoe County and Clark County school districts and expanding this initiative to all of Nevada's public schools.
- Expanding school-based intervention programs to help children and adolescents experiencing mental health issues.
- Hiring mental health professionals as regular school staff in Nevada's public schools to provide direct mental health services to students.
- Continuing the collaborations among Nevada's public schools, state and local organizations, and community-based resources and utilizing a coordinated wraparound services model to help ensure the continuity of mental health care for Nevada's youth.

## Statewide Benefits of Future Action

- Most mental health problems can be effectively treated with appropriate identification, assessment, and intervention by mental health professionals.
- Nevada's children and adolescents needing mental health services may best be served through a combination of school-based mental health initiatives and coordinated wraparound services that draw on community programs and support.
- Improving child and adolescent mental health services in Nevada's schools and in state and local organizations can help provide all of Nevada's youth with a promising future and strengthen the health of the next generation of Nevadans.

## Implications of Status Quo

- The majority of Nevada's children and adolescents experiencing mental health issues will not receive appropriate treatment.
- Nevada will continue to rank among the highest states for prevalence of depression and suicide.

- School dropout rates for Nevada's children and adolescents with mental health issues will continue to exceed 50%.
- The state of Nevada will continue to receive grades of "D" or "F" by the National Alliance on Mental Illness regarding the access and provision of mental health services available to Nevadans.

## Selected Resources

- Denby, R., Owens, S., & Kern, S. (2013). How are the children: Challenges and opportunities in improving children's mental health (Social Service Series No. 1). Las Vegas, NV: The Lincy Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.unlv.edu/sites/default/files/24/Lincy-HowAreTheChildren.pdf> *Highlights the current status of child and adolescent mental health in southern Nevada and reviews changes in mental health service delivery as a result of the Affordable Care Act.*
- Hurwitz, L., & Weston, K. (2010). Using coordinated school health to promote mental health for all students. Retrieved from National Assembly of School-Based Healthcare website: <http://www.sbh4all.org> *Provides an overview of the rationale and evidence base for providing school-based mental health services to children and adolescents.*
- University of California, Los Angeles, Center for Mental Health in Schools: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/> *Comprehensive website providing information and resources on school-based mental health services.*

## UNLV Contacts for Additional Information/Background

This summary represents a portion of work and research from a faculty member in the UNLV College of Education. For more information or to receive a copy of a comprehensive paper on this topic, please contact:

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