

Children & Families Can't Wait

How to Support Children's Behavioral Health

BY THE NUMBERS

60-70%

of youth with mental health needs have at least one co-occurring condition (e.g., substance use, developmental disability, trauma exposure).



Youth with complex needs often touch **3-5 systems** simultaneously (child welfare, Medicaid, schools, courts).



Between **50 & 80%** of children in foster care meet criteria for a MH disorder.



Thousands of children come into child welfare or juvenile justice systems every year just to access behavioral health care.



Between **50 & 75%** of youth in justice facilities have one or more psychiatric disorders.



1. WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Too many children & families are struggling to access timely, appropriate behavioral health services & support. Instead of receiving early support, families often encounter underfunded systems that are complex, disconnected & difficult to navigate where services are fragmented across agencies & access depends on eligibility, diagnosis, or system involvement rather than need.



Needs don't become complex overnight—we must intervene earlier!

This is not a failure of families— it is a failure of systems to work together.

THIS RESULTS IN:



Children experiencing worsening behavioral health needs



Families facing unnecessary barriers & stress



Systems becoming less efficient & more costly



Children, families & communities facing life-long negative outcomes

2. WHAT WILL IT TAKE?

To be more responsive to families' needs, systems must:



Coordinate across agencies & sectors—creating seamless access for families & reducing duplication of existing resources



Partner with families & communities as key drivers of solutions



Clarify roles & responsibilities across systems leading to more appropriate referrals & maximizing the impact of existing resources



Share data & information leading to improved continuum of services & better outcomes for children & families



This requires shared investment—of time, energy, resources, and accountability—across systems

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3. WHAT DIFFERENCE WILL IT MAKE?

When systems work together, children & families are supported earlier & more effectively. This means:



Children remain safely in their **homes, schools & communities**



Families receive **timely, coordinated services & support early** when they begin to need them



Communities have **stronger, more accessible** services



There is reduced reliance on **crisis systems & out-of-home placements**



Systems **support resilience, stability & long-term well-being**

The solution is in the community—when we work together.

4. WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?

Everyone has a role to play in strengthening coordination & improving outcomes for children & families.



POLICYMAKERS & SYSTEM LEADERS

- Support cross-system coordination & early intervention efforts
- Align policies & funding to expand access to community-based services



PROVIDERS & PRACTITIONERS

- Strengthen partnerships & referral pathways across systems
- Work collaboratively to meet the full needs of children & families



COMMUNITY LEADERS & ORGANIZATIONS

- Build local partnerships that connect families to services & supports
- Raise awareness & help reduce stigma around behavioral health



FAMILIES & YOUTH

- Share your experiences to help improve systems
- Advocate for accessible, coordinated, community-based services & support

Now is the time to act.

About the Children's Behavioral Health Collective

The Children's Behavioral Health Collective is a group of national organizations representing different systems, with the goal of leveraging our collective impact to foster resilience, health & wellbeing for children, youth & families with behavioral health needs, through system transformation, cross-sector collaboration & solutions grounded in data, evidence & lived experience.

CBHC Children's Behavioral Health Collective