Mental and Emotional Well-being

Mental and emotional well-being is essential to overall health. Positive mental health allows people to realize their full potential, cope with the stresses of life, work productively, and make meaningful contributions to their communities. Early childhood experiences have lasting, measurable consequences later in life; therefore, fostering emotional well-being from the earliest stages of life helps build a foundation for overall health and well-being. Anxiety, mood (e.g., depression) and impulse control disorders are associated with a higher probability of risk behaviors (e.g., tobacco, alcohol and other drug use, risky sexual behavior), intimate partner and family violence, many other chronic and acute conditions (e.g., obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, HIV/STIs), and premature death.[295]

KEY FACTS

- Many mental health and emotional disorders are preventable and treatable. Early identification and treatment can help prevent the onset of disease, decrease rates of chronic disease, and help people lead longer, healthier lives.[296]
- A child experiencing mental health issues is more likely to have problems in school and is at greater risk of entering the criminal justice system.[297] About one in five youths experience a mental, emotional, or behavior disorder at some point in their lifetime.[296]
- In a given year, less than half of people diagnosed with a mental illness receive treatment. The unmet need for mental health services is greatest among underserved groups, including elderly persons, racial/ethnic minorities, those with low incomes, those without health insurance, and residents of rural areas.[296]
- More than 34,000 Americans die every year as a result of suicide—approximately one suicide every 15 minutes.[237] Suicide rates are highest among American Indian/Alaska Native youth.[298] Risk factors for suicide include alcohol or substance abuse, isolation, extreme emotional stress, history of child maltreatment, and mental health conditions such as depression.[296]
- Racial discrimination is associated with chronic stress and can lead to negative health outcomes such as high blood pressure and depression.[299]
- Family and community rejection of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth, including bullying, can have profound and long-term impacts (e.g., depression, use of illegal drugs, and suicidal behavior).[300]

Recommendations: What can be done?

Positive mental and emotional well-being depends on many factors, including quality relationships with family and friends, employment in a positive workplace environment, the ability to participate and contribute to the community, and the ability to access appropriate mental health services when needed.

1 Promote positive early childhood development, including positive parenting and violence-free homes.

The early years of life are crucial to a child's social, emotional, and cognitive development.[301] Positive parenting practices (e.g., spending time interacting with children, communication and supportive supervision, appropriate disciplinary actions, lack of alcohol and other drug abuse in the home, and lack of violence directed to children and others) reduce the likelihood of child maltreatment and of the emergence of child behavioral problems.[302] Family interventions (e.g., home visitation, parenting training), and comprehensive center-based early childhood development programs (e.g., Head Start) reduce the development of aggressive and antisocial behaviors in children (e.g., bullying) and their associated problems, such as substance abuse and delinquency.[303] Such programs also improve parent-child interactions and promote healthy development and well-being in both parents and children.[304]

2 Facilitate social connectedness and community engagement across the lifespan.
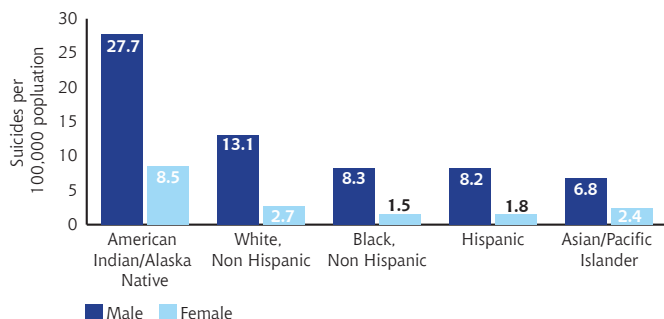Safe shared places for people to interact (e.g., parks, faith-based and community organizations) foster healthy relationships and positive mental health among community residents and help prevent depression and suicide.[305] Supportive relationships, such as family connections, long-term friendships, and meaningful connections between youth and adults including students and teachers or coaches, build resilience and well-being.[306] Adolescents who feel more connected to their families, schools, and society are less likely to have suicidal thoughts or behavior.[307] Creating safe, supportive, and healthy schools also promotes student attendance and academic achievement.[308] Support for older adults who choose to remain in their homes and communities and retain their independence ("aging in place") helps promote and maintain positive mental and emotional health. Increasing accessibility and employment opportunities for people with disabilities helps improve social connectedness, life satisfaction, and sense of fulfillment.[309]

3 Provide individuals and families with the support necessary to maintain positive mental well-being.
Enhancing problem-solving and coping skills and improving relationships supports mental and emotional well-being.[310] Social developmental strategies (e.g., enhancing social and life skills, positive peer-bonding) can enhance self-esteem, help people handle difficult social situations, and empower people to seek help when needed.[311]

In addition, regular physical activity enhances thinking, learning, and judgment skills, reduces risk of depression, and helps people sleep better, especially as they age.[312] Community wide programs and policies can increase public awareness of mental health concerns (e.g., depression, warning signs for suicide) and encourage people to identify and address mental health needs.[313]

The Suicide Rate Is Highest among Males in All Population Groups

Suicides per 100,000 population

	Male	Female
American Indian/Alaska Native	27.7	8.5
White, Non Hispanic	13.1	2.7
Black, Non Hispanic	8.3	1.5
Hispanic	8.2	1.8
Asian/Pacific Islander	6.8	2.4

■ Male ■ Female

Source: Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS), CDC, 2009

4 Promote early identification of mental health needs and access to quality services.

Clinicians are key to identifying mental health needs as early as possible and making appropriate referrals.[314] Reducing the stigma associated with mental health services is important to improve access to and utilization of effective mental health treatment.[315] Identifying and integrating mental health needs into traditional health care, social service, community, and work-site settings is particularly important for youth and those who have experienced trauma.[316] Promoting stress identification and prevention in work sites can reduce job stress, promote health, and prevent injury.[317]

Actions
The Federal Government will
- Improve access to high-quality mental health services and facilitate integration of mental health services into a range of clinical and community settings (e.g., Federally Qualified Health Centers, Bureau of Prisons, Department of Defense, and Veterans Affairs facilities).
- Support programs to ensure that employees have tools and resources needed to balance work and personal life and provide support and training to help them recognize co-workers in distress and respond accordingly.
- Provide tools, guidance, and best practices to promote positive early childhood and youth development and prevent child abuse.
- Provide easy-to-use information about mental and emotional well-being for consumers, especially groups that experience unique stressors (e.g., U.S. Armed Forces, firefighters, police officers, and other emergency response workers).
- Research policies and programs that enhance mental and emotional well-being, especially for potentially vulnerable populations.

Partners Can
State, Tribal, Local, and Territorial Governments can
- Enhance data collection systems to better identify and address mental and emotional health needs.
- Include safe shared spaces for people to interact (e.g., parks, community centers) in community development plans which can foster healthy relationships and positive mental health among community residents.
- Ensure that those in need, especially potentially vulnerable groups, are identified and referred to mental health services.
- Pilot and evaluate models of integrated mental and physical health in primary care, with particular attention to underserved populations and areas, such as rural communities.

Businesses and Employers can
- Implement organizational changes to reduce employee stress (e.g., develop clearly defined roles and responsibilities) and provide reasonable accommodations (e.g., flexible work

Key Indicators	Current	10-Year Target
Proportion of primary care physician office visits that screen adults and youth for depression	Adults (19 years and older): 2.2%	2.4%
	Youth (12 – 18 years): 2.1%	2.3%
Proportion of children exposed to violence within the past year, either directly or indirectly (e.g., as a witness to a violent act; a threat against their home or school)	60.6%	54.5%
Rate of suicide attempts by adolescents	1.9 suicide attempts per 100	1.7 suicide attempts per 100
Proportion of persons who experience major depressive episode (MDE)	Adolescents (12 – 17 years): 8.3%	7.4%
	Adults (18 years and older): 6.8%	6.1%

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PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: Wellness Resources for the Military Community

Afterdeployment.org (http://www.afterdeployment.org) is a proactive Department of Defense program designed to help families and service members identify their own symptoms and access assistance before a mental health or stress-related problem becomes serious. Through anonymous online self-assessments, the program provides a non-threatening way for military families to gauge their emotional well-being while providing information on how and where to seek help.

schedules, assistive technology, adapted work stations).

- Ensure that mental health services are included as a benefit on health plans and encourage employees to use these services as needed.
- Provide education, outreach, and training to address mental health parity in employment-based health insurance coverage and group health plans.

Health Care Systems, Insurers, and Clinicians can

- Educate parents on normal child development and conduct early childhood interventions to enhance mental and emotional well-being and provide support (e.g., home visits for pregnant women and new parents).
- Screen for mental health needs among children and adults, especially those with disabilities and chronic conditions, and refer people to treatment and community resources as needed.
- Develop integrated care programs to address mental health, substance abuse, and other needs within primary care settings.
- Enhance communication and data sharing (with patient consent) with social services networks to identify and treat those in need of mental health services.

Early Learning Centers, Schools, Colleges, and Universities can

- Implement programs and policies to prevent abuse, bullying, violence, and social exclusion, build social connectedness, and promote positive mental and emotional health.
- Implement programs to identify risks and early indicators of mental, emotional, and behavioral problems among youth and ensure that youth with such problems are referred to appropriate services.
- Ensure students have access to comprehensive health services, including mental health and counseling services.

Community, Non-Profit, and Faith-Based Organizations can

- Provide space and organized activities (e.g., opportunities for volunteering) that encourage social participation and inclusion for all people, including older people and persons with disabilities.
- Support child and youth development programs (e.g., peer mentoring programs, volunteering programs) and promote inclusion of youth with mental, emotional, and behavioral problems.
- Train key community members (e.g., adults who work with the elderly, youth, and armed services personnel) to identify the signs of depression and suicide and refer people to resources.
- Expand access to mental health services (e.g., patient navigation and support groups) and enhance linkages between mental health, substance abuse, disability, and other social services.

Individuals and Families can

- Build strong, positive relationships with family and friends.
- Become more involved in their community (e.g., mentor or tutor youth, join a faith or spiritual community).
- Encourage children and adolescents to participate in extracurricular and out-of-school activities.
- Work to make sure children feel comfortable talking about problems such as bullying and seek appropriate assistance as needed.

KEY DOCUMENTS

- Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General
- Preventing Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders Among Young People: Progress and Possibilities

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: Triple P: Positive Parenting Program

Enhancing practical parenting strategies and strengthening parent-child relationships, the Positive Parenting Program (Triple P) incorporates community wide media strategies, outreach to primary care services and community agencies, and behavioral counseling into a system of parenting and family support. Systems of support, such as Triple P, contribute to reduced rates of child maltreatment, out-of-home placements, and child injuries.[318]