

2021 POLICY AGENDA

Children and youth with mental health and/or substance use needs are faced with fewer treatment options than adults. Behavioral health resources for young people of color are particularly limited. Black youth are more likely to receive poor quality health care when treatment is accessible and assessment tools are void of cultural nuances necessary to appropriately diagnosis a mental health condition¹.

The result is a disparate criminalization of minority youth. In FY 2018, the Department of Juvenile Services reported that over 70% of referrals were youth of color, and 85% of those individuals were in pre-trial detention placements². Of the 825 committed placements that year, over 80% (671) were youth of color³.

Disparities facing these young Marylanders have been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. Nearly 30% of parents report that their child's mental health is suffering due to social distancing and school closures⁴, making the need for targeted resources even more stark.

The Children's Behavioral Health Coalition (CBHC) will work in 2021 to ensure equitable access to high-quality behavioral health services and supports for children and youth. Our 2021 legislative priorities are:

INCREASE SCHOOL BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SUPPORTS TO IMPROVE STUDENT OUTCOMES.

While most young Marylanders have been spared from physical symptoms of the coronavirus, they have not been spared from the loneliness, depression, and anxiety that accompanies a prolonged state of isolation from friends, teachers, and community networks. Students with behavioral health concerns need access to school behavioral health supports now more than ever. **We must work to enhance school behavioral health services and improve academic outcomes.**

IMPROVE ACCESS TO AND DELIVERY OF QUALITY, CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE COMMUNITY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH RESOURCES FOR YOUTH OF COLOR.

The suicide rate of Black youth is growing faster than any other racial/ethnic group⁵. Data from the Maryland Behavioral Health Administration indicates a significantly lower rate of outpatient service use by Black youth, suggesting a disparity that could lead to this population going directly into higher-end services⁶. A lack of attention to the unique circumstances of minoritized youth is negatively affecting behavioral health outcomes for this population. **We must develop more appropriate community services and supports for minoritized youth with behavioral health needs and diversion programs that keep them away from the juvenile justice and child welfare systems.**

REMOVE BARRIERS TO BROADBAND TECHNOLOGY.

The COVID-19 public health emergency and virtual learning environment has highlighted a disparity in access to technology that prevents many children and youth from accessing needed behavioral health treatment. Low-income families without access to the internet or smartphones and families living in rural communities with poor broadband access are unable to take advantage of expanded telehealth flexibilities for their children. **We must take steps to identify and address gaps in the availability of tele-behavioral health services for youth.**

EXPAND ACCESS TO CRISIS RESPONSE SERVICES TO REDUCE EXTENDED STAYS AT EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS.

Many existing behavioral health crisis response systems do not offer a full continuum of care, and options are even more limited for children and youth. This leads many parents to turn to hospital emergency departments, but nearly 50% of young Marylanders who access psychiatric treatment via the emergency department are not admitted. **The state must develop a comprehensive crisis response system tailored specifically to the unique needs of children, adolescents, and young adults.**

¹ Congressional Black Caucus. Ring the Alarm: Crisis of Black Youth Suicide in America. <https://www.stevfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/FULL-TASKFORCE-REPORT.pdf>. 2019.

² Governor's Office of Crime, Control & Prevention. Maryland's Annual Disproportionate Minority Contact Plan FY 2019. March 14, 2019.

³ Id.

⁴ Gallup. U.S. Parents Say COVID-19 Harming Child's Mental Health. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/312605/parents-say-covid-harming-child-mental-health.aspx>. June 16, 2020.

⁵ Congressional Black Caucus. Ring the Alarm: Crisis of Black Youth Suicide in America. <https://www.stevfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/FULL-TASKFORCE-REPORT.pdf>. 2019.

⁶ Behavioral Health Administration. 2019 Report on Behavioral Health Services for Children and Young Adults, February 25, 2020