



## Children Mental Health Prevalence, Needs & Barriers

### Prevalence & Need

- Mental illness and disorders affect 1 in 5 children during the course of a year. These children and teens have a diagnosable mental disorder.<sup>1</sup>
- Severe mental illness that causes functional impairment affects 1 in 10 of our children and teens.<sup>2</sup>
- Although mental illness and disorders affect so many of our children and teens aged 6 to 17, 79% of them do not receive mental health care.<sup>3</sup>
- Of all youth who are diagnosed with a mental illness, 1 in 8 has co-occurring substance abuse problems.<sup>4</sup>
- Eighty percent of people with multiple mental health and substance abuse disorders report onset before age 20.<sup>5</sup>

### Barriers to Meeting Needs

- System of delivering mental health and substance abuse services is fragmented. Too many different systems with confusing access points keep children, youth and families out of care. The lack of coordination between education, juvenile justice and child welfare systems further complicates the process of access to services for children with co-occurring disorders.<sup>6</sup>
- Gaps in health insurance, private and public limit coverage for mental health services and substance abuse treatment.<sup>7</sup>
- A record of punishment instead of treatment for children and teens who have mental illnesses keeps barriers to care strong. Youth with co-occurring disorders often are incarcerated rather than treated. Youth with serious mental illnesses make up 25% of the population in the juvenile justice system, and their numbers are increasing.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> DHHS; 1999

<sup>2</sup> Blueprint for Change; Research on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Report of the National Advisory Mental Health Council's Workgroup on Child and Adolescent Mental Health NIH Publication No... 01-4896, 2001

<sup>3</sup> Katoaka, S.H., Zhang, L., & Wells, K.B. 2002. Unmet need for mental health care among U.S. children; Variation by ethnicity and insurance status. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 159, 1548-1555.

<sup>4</sup> The Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the uninsured, 2003

<sup>5</sup> DHHS, 2000

<sup>6</sup> DHHS, 2002

<sup>7</sup> DHHS, 2002

<sup>8</sup> DHHS, 2002

- Knowledge about what services work for children and youth affected by mental illness is limited and insufficient<sup>9</sup>. We do know that programs designed for adults do not meet the needs of children.
- Stigma – children and teens are particularly sensitive to the intense stigma that surrounds mental health and substance abuse issues. This stigma prevents care.

### **Consequences of Unmet Need**

- If children and youth are not provided adequate and available mental health care services, mental health and substance abuse can persist and lead to school failure, poor employment and eventual adult issues including homelessness and poverty.<sup>10</sup>
- 90% of children who commit suicide have a mental disorder.<sup>11</sup>
- Untreated mental illness can cause youth to be involved with the juvenile justice system- 66% of boys and 75% of girls in juvenile detention have at least one mental disorder, according to one study.<sup>12</sup>

### **What to do to Help**

- Be aware of the mental health and substance abuse issues that affect our children and youth.
- Support the National Federation of Families for Children's' Mental Health b making a donation or becoming a member [www.ffcmh.org](http://www.ffcmh.org).
- Find and support a Federation Chapter in your state or community
- Help us spread these four core messages:

**1. Mental Health is essential to overall health and well being**

**2. Serious emotional and mental health disorders in children and youth are real and treatable**

**3. Children and youth with mental health challenges and their families deserve access to services and supports that are family driven, youth guided and culturally appropriate.**

**4. Stigma associated with mental illness should no longer exist.**

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<sup>9</sup> DHHS, 2002

<sup>10</sup> President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003

<sup>11</sup> DHHS, 1999

<sup>12</sup> President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003