

The Hennepin County Youth Mental Health & Wellness Dashboard

February 2013

At any given time, between 14 and 20 percent of children, youth, and young adults are experiencing some type of mental health or social emotional disorder. Youth with mental health disorders are more likely to have less supportive social relationships, poorer academic performance and higher rates of school drop-out, increased likelihood of involvement in the juvenile justice system, and higher rates of substance use. In addition, these poor outcomes can have consequences that persist into adulthood, leading to lower levels of employability and subsequent income levels, housing stability, and higher rates of alcohol and substance use.

While mental illness itself cannot be prevented, mental health symptoms and outcomes can be improved when problems are identified early and appropriate interventions are provided. An important part of addressing the mental health needs of youth is to ensure the appropriate array of services is in place to treat youth with diagnosed mental health problems. However, more can be done to enhance the effectiveness of mental health services and to further support the mental health and wellness of all children and youth. The Hennepin County Youth Mental Health and Wellness Dashboard is intended to provide local stakeholders with a framework that can be used to guide efforts to address the various individual, family, school, and community factors that contribute, both positively and negatively, to youth mental health outcomes.

About the project

The Hennepin County Youth Mental Health and Wellness Dashboard was a project commissioned by the Hennepin County Children's Mental Health Collaborative (HCCMHC). The dashboard uses a

public health, population-focused perspective to provide local stakeholders with a set of key indicators to better understand the mental health problems experienced by youth, and the ways in which youth mental health is promoted or negatively impacted by neighborhood conditions, school environments, and family characteristics. This work was guided, in part, by a recent monograph published by the Georgetown University National Technical Assistance Center on Children's Mental Health, *A Public Health Approach to Children's Mental Health: A Conceptual Framework*.

About the dashboard

What is the Hennepin County Youth Mental Health and Wellness Dashboard?

The dashboard is a set of county-level indicators that describe the mental health needs of youth in Hennepin County, as well as individual, family, school, and community factors that are known to contribute to youth mental health and wellness. The dashboard is intended to provide local stakeholders with information that can guide efforts to promote positive mental health among all Hennepin County youth.

The dashboard was developed with the following key concepts in mind:

- **Mental health is more than simply the absence of mental illness.** Positive mental health refers to having high levels of overall life satisfaction, a sense of purpose, strong relationships with others, and sense of belonging. Mental health and mental illness are related to one another. However, by considering them as separate, but overlapping, constructs, it allows stakeholders to consider the needs of youth more holistically and to identify strategies to support positive mental health for all youth.

- **Mental health can be addressed through population-level interventions.** Although treatment for mental illness is individualized to address specific symptoms and consumer needs, broader interventions can be used to promote positive mental health, reduce the stigma associated with mental illness, and improve access to mental health services.
- **A number of risk and protective factors can increase the likelihood of youth developing a mental health disorder or influence the severity of mental health symptoms.** A well-established body of literature demonstrates a variety of individual/family characteristics and features of school/neighborhood environments contribute to mental health outcomes.
- **“Upstream” social determinants also influence mental health and wellness.** The environments in which youth live, learn, and play are also influenced by underlying social and economic conditions, such as concentrated poverty. As a result, some youth experience higher levels of stress or less access to resources than others. While these resulting disparities are often pervasive, they are modifiable.

What does the dashboard tell us about youth mental health and wellness in Hennepin County?

The dashboard shows that while many Hennepin County youth are supported by their family, school, and community, some children experience negative events and live in environments that can contribute to poor mental health outcomes.

- **Not all youth are getting the mental health services they need.** Overall, 15 percent of 9th-grade students reported having a long-term mental health problem. However, only 43 percent of these youth received mental health treatment in the past year.
 - **Some youth could be better supported by their community.** Ninth-grade students are more likely to be highly involved in school (61%) than community activities (40%). It is unclear whether this suggests youth prefer to be involved in schools, or a reflection of a lack of community resources and activities that are available to youth.
- However, there is room for some youth to have

stronger school and community connections; only 26 percent of youth receive “strong levels” of support from non-family, caring adults.

- **More work could be done to identify children with potential mental health problems.** Mental health screening occurs in a variety of child-serving systems. While most children are screened through the county’s juvenile justice (82%), child protection (71%), and early education (75%) systems, screening in primary care is not well-documented. Further, these existing data sources only describe how many children are screened; it is not possible to determine which youth are not being screened and the degree to which screening leads to appropriate follow-up care.
- **Most youth in Hennepin County feel supported and are not experiencing the adversities that may result from unsafe neighborhoods or family violence; yet some youth do experience serious trauma.** A majority of youth (89%) feel safe in their neighborhoods and receive strong support from their family (93%) and peers (78%). However, 28 percent of youth have experienced some type of adverse experience, such as witnessing/experiencing family violence, and 6 percent of youth have experienced three or more of these negative experiences in their lifetimes.
- **Nearly one in five youth live in, and experience the chronic stress associated with, poverty.** When families struggle financially, children and youth are more likely to experience a number of stressors that can contribute to poorer mental health outcomes, such as family conflict, divorce, abuse, housing instability, and poor health care.
- **Across most indicators, racial and socioeconomic disparities are evident.** Although the dashboard itself includes only county-level indicators, a deeper look at these data show that across most measures, youth of color and youth from lower-income households tend to have fewer supports and more risk factors present in their lives. (These data are presented in the full technical report prepared by Wilder Research.)

Hennepin County Youth Mental Health and Wellness Dashboard

	Description of key measure	Most recent data available
Youth demographics	Number of youth (age 0-17) living in Hennepin County ^a	261,345
	Percentage of non-White youth (age 0-17) living in Hennepin County ^b	44%
	Percentage of foreign-born youth (age 0-17) living in Hennepin County ^b	6%
Mental health problems	Percentage of 9 th -grade students self-reporting high levels of emotional distress. ^c	15%
	Among 9 th -grade students who self-reported having a long-term mental/emotional health problem, the percentage of students who reported they received mental health treatment during the past year. ^c	43%
Mental health and wellness: Protective factors	Percentage of 9 th -grade students who have used at least one drug ten or more times in the past year ^c	9%
	Percentage of 9 th -grade students who self reported having been treated for a substance use problem ^c	3%
	Percentage of 9 th -grade students "highly involved" in school academic or extracurricular activities ^c	61%
	Percentage of 9 th -grade students "highly involved" in community activities ^c	40%
	Percentage of 9 th -grade students with "strong levels" of peer support ^c	78%
	Percentage of 9 th -grade students with "strong levels" of family support ^c	93%
	Percentage of 9 th -grade students with "strong levels" of non-family adult support ^c	74%
	Percentage of uninsured youth (age 0-17) (2010) ^b	6%
	Percentage of parents who rate their child's health as "very good" or "excellent" ^d	89%
	Percentage of 9 th -grade students reporting: ^c one or more adverse experiences three or more adverse experiences	28% 6%
Mental health and wellness: Risk factors	Rate of determined maltreatment cases, per 1,000 ^e	4.7
	Rate of out of home placements, per 1,000 ^e	9.1
Mental health and wellness: Risk factors	Percentage of 9 th -grade students reporting being teased or excluded by other students at least once a week ^c	9%
Social determinants	Percentage of children (age 0-17) living in poverty (2010) ^a	19%
	Percentage of 9 th -grade students who feel safe in their neighborhoods ^c	89%
System capacity	Percentage of eligible youth (age 0-18) screened for mental health concerns through the Juvenile Justice system ^f	82%
	Percentage of eligible youth (age 0-18) screened for mental health concerns through the Child Welfare system ^g	71%
	Percentage of children screened for mental health concerns through the Hennepin County school district by age 5 ^h	75%

^a U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census (2010)

^b Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (2008-10); analysis by Wilder Research.

^c 2010 Minnesota Student Survey, analysis by Minnesota Department of Health

^d 2010 Hennepin County SHAPE – Child Survey, analysis by the Hennepin County Human Services and Public Health Department

^e Minnesota Department of Human Services Child Welfare Report, 2011

^f Compiled by Hennepin County Department of Community Corrections and Rehabilitation and reported to the Minnesota Department of Human Services; not publicly available through existing reports, 2010

^g Children and Community Services Act Annual Performance Report, Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2011

^h Minnesota Department of Education, Early Learning Services: Early Childhood Screening Completion Reports, 2010-11

How can the dashboard be used to guide future planning and decision-making?

In many ways, the value of any dashboard does not come through its completion, but through its utilization. The following set of questions could be considered as the Collaborative and other Hennepin County stakeholders begin to convene conversations to inform how to best use the data included in the dashboard:

- What should the future look like, in terms of how Hennepin County supports the mental health and well-being of youth? Which areas should be prioritized?
- How can stakeholders from different fields work together to better address some of the underlying economic, social, and familial issues that contribute to poorer youth outcomes?
- What interventions are currently in place to treat mental health problems/support the mental health and well-being of all youth?
- How can current interventions and programs be expanded to not only address the individual needs of the child, but to support families, build community connections, and strengthen neighborhoods?
- What additional research is needed in order to better understand factors that contribute to poor mental health outcomes, as well as ways that the community can support positive mental health and wellness?

How can the dashboard be applied to neighborhoods within Hennepin County or to other areas of the state?

While the dashboard focuses on reporting county-level indicators, the same framework can be used to consider how to support the mental health and well-being of youth within a more targeted geographic area, such as a neighborhood, city, or school district. The dashboard items from the Minnesota Student Survey, for example, can be analyzed at a school or school district level to guide local efforts to improve the mental health and well-being of youth. Although not all data sources can be used to guide these more local decision-making efforts, key items from the dashboard can be incorporated into surveys administered to residents of a neighborhood or participants in a program.

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For more information

This summary presents highlights of *The Hennepin County Youth Mental Health and Wellness Dashboard*. For more information about this report, contact Melanie Ferris at Wilder Research, 651-280-2660. Authors: Melanie Ferris, M.P.H.

FEBRUARY 2013