



Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc.

Summary of the 2021 Mental Health America Report: Addressing the Youth Mental Health Crisis



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According to the CDC's [2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#), 1 in 3 high school students reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness and 1 in 6 reported they had made a suicide plan in the past year. Both statistics represent a 40% increase over the previous decade. Early reports indicate mental health concerns among youth have increased throughout the pandemic.

The Mental Health Association of New York State, Inc. (MHANYS) was proud to be a national leader in mental health education, supporting the passage of a NYS law requiring schools to include mental health instruction in the K-12 Health curriculum. Last month, MHANYS contributed to a report released by [Mental Health America \(MHA\), Addressing the Youth Mental Health Crisis, The Urgent Need for More Education, Services, and Supports](#), serving as a call to action for policymakers, school administrators, students, families and other mental health advocates to address the lack of education, supports, and services in schools.

As schools consider how to respond to the growing mental health needs of students and staff resulting from the pandemic, the time to act is now.

The MHA Report

In their report, MHA identifies three key policy areas for schools:

- comprehensive mental health education of students inclusive of help-seeking behaviors, mental health promotion strategies and peer support. MHANYS is proud to have led grassroots advocacy efforts to make NYS the first in the nation to require mental health instruction.
- early intervention and connection to mental health services that often begins with the expansion of mental health professionals in schools, stronger school-community partnerships and improved access especially for students of color;
- the provision of excused absences for mental health problems on par with absences for physical health concerns.

Included in those recommendations is the involvement of students. Mental health education in NY was made possible in great part due to the involvement of students in our Mental Health Matters Days. Over the past 10 years, school involvement has grown from 3 or 4 schools each year to over twenty. We are continuously humbled and inspired by the advocacy efforts of youth.

Other recommendations in the report include:

- support states in advocating for mental health education, mental health services and excused absences, including training and assistance to ensure follow-up, evaluation and effective implementation;
- innovation and research in areas of screening and peer support; and
- coordinated, national strategy that includes data collection and measuring progress, specifically to promote equitable outcomes for LGBTQ+ and BIPOC youth policies.



Next Steps for MHANYS

Becoming the first state in the nation to establish mental health education in all of our schools is only the beginning. Consistent with Mental Health America's report, MHANYS has an aggressive legislative agenda to help confront the mental health crisis among our youth and our schools. The ongoing work of the School Mental Health Resource and Training Center (Resource Center), which has served schools as a clearinghouse to support the implementation of mental health education and as a platform for school personnel training. The Resource Center will need ongoing support from the Legislature and the Administration.

Through the Resource Center we have become acutely aware of the need and demand for mental health training for school personnel. MHANYS supports a legislative proposal to make training a requirement. Part of this training should center on the development of trauma-informed schools, an appreciation for adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and restorative justice principles. We are also aware of the need for enhanced school-based mental health services both through the hiring of more mental health professionals and through strengthened linkages between schools and community based mental health services providers including MHA affiliates that serve 52 counties in New York state.

As students become more mental health literate we hope to empower them with the ability to appropriately utilize legislatively promoted mental health based absences. We believe that raising mental health literacy will lead to diminishing stigma creating a school culture of wellness where students are comfortable exercising the right to use mental health days without shame or embarrassment.

The growing mental health crisis among our youth also cries out for more widely embraced suicide prevention policies. MHANYS supports legislation that will promote model policies, which will extend to the remaining third of New York schools that currently have no such policies. These policies help guide schools in prevention and postvention strategies to cope with the tragic realities that youth in our schools face every day.

To learn more about MHANYS legislative agenda for youth and schools we encourage the reader to visit [MHANYS Legislative Action Community](#) and review our [Legislative Briefing Book](#).