




Children's Hospitals:  
Where Healing Begins and Hope Grows

# Prioritizing Mental Health for Texas Kids

Children in Texas are struggling with serious mental health issues. Suicide attempts, suicidal ideation, and self-injury are among the most common mental health conditions seen in children's hospitals' emergency departments. A recent study by Texas A&M University Health found that nearly 50% of all Texas hospital stays for children aged 5-17 are for psychiatric conditions. Half of all mental health conditions appear by age 14,<sup>1</sup> so intervening with a child early can literally mean the difference between life and death.

-  Nationwide, suicide is the second leading cause of death in 10- to 24-year-olds.
-  In 2021, 22% of high school students seriously considered attempting suicide, and one in 10 attempted suicide at least once during the past year.
-  One in three children in Texas experience a mental health disorder each year.<sup>2</sup>

## Children's mental health needs will continue to increase with Texas' growing population.

By 2050, almost 23% of Texas' population will be under age 18 – a 43% increase in the under-18 population.<sup>3</sup>

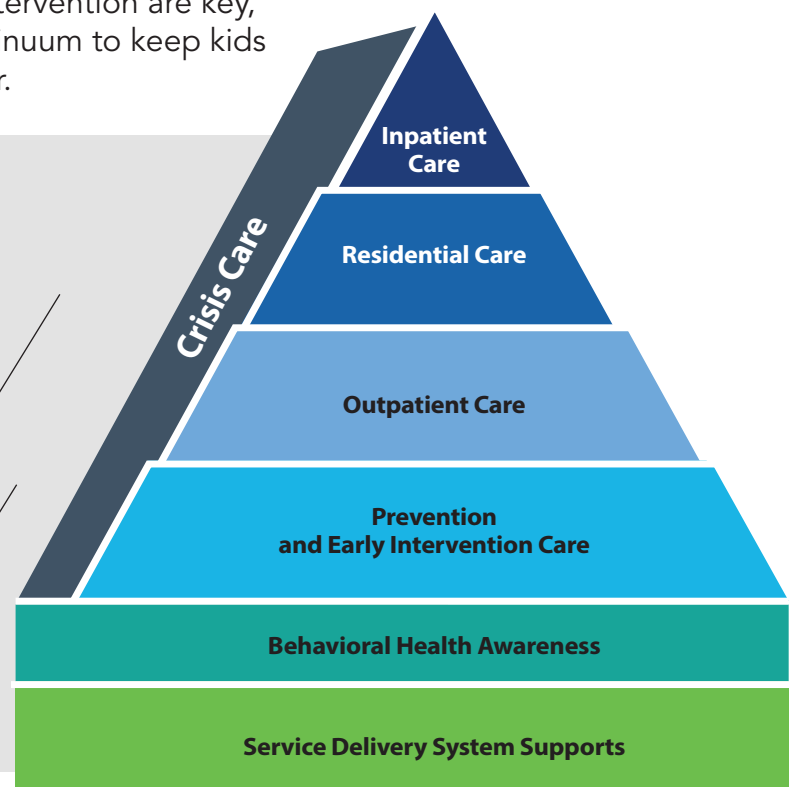
Texas needs a comprehensive continuum of care to ensure that kids can readily get the care they need when they need it. Prevention and early intervention are key, and the state must build out the rest of the continuum to keep kids out of crisis and to treat any crisis that may occur.

### Behavioral Health Services Continuum of Care for Children<sup>4</sup>

The continuum of care is a tiered model of behavioral health services and supports for children and caregivers.



Services range in intensity from prevention and early intervention care through inpatient care, with crisis care available at any time of need.

Levels of care are supported by a foundation of awareness and service delivery system supports.



## Texas should invest in the mental healthcare continuum to help kids stay out of crisis.

One vital part of the solution is for Texas Medicaid to cover intensive outpatient programs (IOPs) and partial hospitalization programs (PHPs), which are optional benefits. PHPs and IOPs serve children who do not need 24-hour hospitalization but do need more intensive services than traditional outpatient treatments, like seeing a counselor or psychologist for an hour a week. PHPs and IOPs provide ongoing treatment for multiple days a week and several hours a day while supporting the child in living at home and participating in school.

-  An IOP provides more intensive, structured outpatient services for children who need more time in treatment than traditional therapy can provide or are being stepped down from a more intensive program or inpatient stay. Typically, a child is in an IOP from three to four hours a day for three to five days a week.
-  A PHP is a day treatment program for children who are (1) at risk for inpatient hospitalization, (2) being discharged and stepped down from psychiatric inpatient care, or (3) need more intensive services than are provided in an outpatient setting. A PHP is usually five hours a day, five days a week.

These programs are often more cost-effective than hospitalizations and can help children move smoothly out of an inpatient setting or prevent a hospital stay altogether. They also help prevent readmissions to a hospital if a child has another crisis while waiting to get in to see a counselor or psychologist and help keep kids close to home when it matters most.



<sup>1</sup>Lifetime Prevalence and Age-of-Onset Distributions of DSM-IV Disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication, Arch Gen Psychiatry, June 2005, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/208678>

<sup>2</sup>Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, <https://mmhpi.org/work/children-youth/>

<sup>3</sup>Olga Garza et al., "Young Texans: Demographic Overview," Comptroller Texas, February 2020, <https://comptroller.texas.gov/economy/fiscal-notes/archive/2020/feb/texans.php#:~:text=Texas%20is%20growing%20fast%2C%20and,the%20U.S.%20lives%20in%20Texas.>

<sup>4</sup>Children's Behavioral Health Strategic Plan, Statewide Behavioral Health Coordinating Counsel, Dec. 2024, <https://bhec.texas.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/6.-Childrens-Behavioral-Health-Strategic-Plan-Stubblefield.pdf>.