

What Can Western Massachusetts Do to Promote Youth Mental Health?

December 6, 2023



**PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTE
OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS**
PARTNERS FOR HEALTH EQUITY

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Youth Mental Health Roadmap for Western MA



Social Connection



SEL-Skills Building



Social Media



Destigmatizing & Normalizing



Community-Clinical Linkages

Health Equity
Data Driven
Youth and Family Centered

"Always keep in mind that it is important to find out directly from youth what is impacting them, what challenges they are facing, keep them in the forefront, keep them in the decision-making process."

-mental health provider



Policy Priorities to Advance School Based Behavioral Health

December 6, 2023



About the Campaign

THE CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH CAMPAIGN is a large statewide network that advocates for policy, systems, and practice solutions and shared responsibility among government and institutions to ensure that all children in Massachusetts have access to resources to prevent, diagnose, and treat mental health issues in a timely, effective, and compassionate way.

THE CMHC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE consists of six partner organizations:

- Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
- Boston Children's Hospital
- Parent/Professional Advocacy League
- Health Care For All
- Health Law Advocates
- Massachusetts Association for Mental Health

A Comprehensive Approach

To advocate meaningfully for children, we must first acknowledge the nesting structures within which they reside. Supporting children's behavioral health requires us to advocate for children at home with their families, in their schools and within the context of the broader community.



A Comprehensive Approach: School

Promoting strategies to strengthen behavioral health supports in school and remove barriers that prevent children with behavioral health challenges from reaching their full potential.

- An Act Establishing a Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health Implementation Coordinating Council | [H1979](#) Rep. Decker
- An Act relative to MassHealth Reimbursement for Schools | [S794](#) Sen. Moran
- A Resolve Relative to the Reimbursement for School-Based Care | [H1194](#) Rep. Garlick
- An Act Relative to the Promotion of Mental Health Education | [H497](#) Rep. Higgins & Rep. Kilco
- An Act Relative to Mental Health Education | [S240](#) Sen. Collins



An Act Establishing a Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health Implementation Coordinating Council ([H1979](#) Rep. Decker)

This bill addresses root causes of inequitable access to **Comprehensive School Behavioral Health (CSBH)** by establishing systems and protocols for ensuring the behavioral health needs of all students, their families, and school staff are supported. This bill has two key elements:

1. **Establishment of a school based behavioral health implementation coordinating council.** Chaired by the Department of Mental Health, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Behavioral Health for Integrated Resources for Children Project at UMass, *the council is responsible for developing a 3-year plan for the statewide implementation of CSBH.* This State-level planning effort must include guidance and support to districts, as well as clear goals and benchmarks for monitoring and evaluating key elements of CSBH implementation.
2. **Implementation of CSBH in each school district within three years.** The bill requires each school district to implement a CSBH system using a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) framework within three years. MTSS is an evidence-based, systemic practice that supports a rapid response to students' needs.



An Act relative to MassHealth Reimbursement for Schools ([S794](#) *Sen. Moran*)

A Resolve Relative to the Reimbursement for School-Based Care ([H1194](#) *Rep. Garlick*)

This bill would require municipalities to **direct school Medicaid reimbursement dollars back to schools for health services and related administrative activities**. Ensuring schools receive the full benefit of school Medicaid reimbursement would increase participation in the program, maximize federal funds, and expanding access to health services - including behavioral health - for all students.

- Cities and towns have discretion over Medicaid funding—MassHealth cannot direct how it is spent.
- School health staff often cite this as the reason Medicaid documentation isn't worth the effort.
- Each district has a unique situation with their municipality and superintendents and/or school committees may have to advocate year after year.
- New and forthcoming state and federal efforts include new flexibilities and opportunities intended to reduce administrative burden for schools and to increase access to school-based health services for children and youth.



An Act Relative to the Promotion of Mental Health Education ([H497](#) Rep. Higgins & Rep. Kilcoyne)

An Act Relative to Mental Health Education ([S240](#) Sen. Collins)

This bill aims to provide students with information to understand their own mental health, skills to build and strengthen their own resilience, and resources to provide them additional support when they need it.

- Requiring mental health education appropriate for developmental stages at each grade level will help students understand, value, and protect their mental health.
- Studies of several mental health education programs indicate that they are effective in improving knowledge about mental health and may help to decrease stigma and increase students' willingness to ask for and receive help for mental health problems.
- The need is greater than ever. Most children and adolescents experience positive mental health, and it is a normal part of development for them to experience a wide range of emotions. However, youth have been particularly vulnerable to poor mental health outcomes stemming from COVID-19. Isolation, changes in routine, anxiety and uncertainty associated with the virus, financial and food insecurity, and parental stress all negatively impacted child mental health. This puts youth at risk for mental health and substance use challenges that left unaddressed can create lifelong difficulties.
- At least thirteen states have enacted laws to support schools in providing mental health education and resources to their students, including New York, New Jersey, Maine, Florida, Virginia, Illinois, and California.



Get involved!

- Stay up-to-date with our newsletter and action alerts: <https://tinyurl.com/cmhc-alerts>
- School Based Behavioral Health Summit on December 14 at Regis College: <https://tinyurl.com/schoolbh>
- Join us for a series of lunch & learns in January! Details TBA soon.
- Most importantly: make sure your legislators hear from you!



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www.childrensmentalhealthcampaign.org

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