

Building Sustainable School Mental Health Systems

Jennifer Treger

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Public Health Advisor

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

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Jennifer Treger, M.S.
Mental Health Promotion Branch
Division for Children and School Mental Health
Center for Mental Health Services
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Learning Objectives



Participants will understand current data on adolescent mental health and substance use.



Participants will identify and describe the core strategies related to building school mental health systems and examine how each strategy influenced school communities.



Participants will learn how AWARE and TISS grantees built partnerships and implemented strategies such as embedding clinicians, expanding referral networks, and coordinating access to mental health services.



Participants will describe effective approaches for sustaining school-based mental health initiatives.

SAMHSA School Based Mental Health Grants

Project AWARE: Advancing Wellness and Resiliency in Education

Start date: 2014

TISS: Trauma Informed Services in Schools

Start date: 2023

Project AWARE

Project AWARE is a program to develop a sustainable infrastructure for school-based mental health programs and services. With this program, SAMHSA aims to promote the social and emotional development of school- aged youth and prevent youth violence in school settings.

Purpose

- **Build collaborative partnerships** with the Education Agencies (State, Local, and Tribal), the State Mental Health Agency (SMHA), community-based providers, school personnel, community organizations, families, and school-aged youth.
- **Implement mental health related promotion, awareness, prevention, intervention, and resilience activities** to ensure that students have access and are connected to appropriate and effective behavioral health services

Goals

- **Increase awareness** of mental health, substance use, and co-occurring issues among school-aged youth.
- **Increase mental health literacy** of individuals who interact with school-aged youth.
- **Promote and foster resilience** building and mental health well-being for all school-aged youth.
- **Provide positive behavioral health supports**
- **Connect school-aged youth** who may have behavioral health issues **and their families** to needed services.
- **Increase and improve access** to school and community-based AWARE grant activities and services.

TISS

The purpose of TISS (School-Based Trauma-Informed Support Services) program is to increase student access to evidence-based and relevant trauma support services and mental health care by developing innovative initiatives, activities, and programs to link local school systems with local trauma-informed support and mental health systems.

PURPOSE

This program will create and/or improve systems to identify, refer, and provide early intervention, treatment, and support services for students who need specialized support.

GOALS

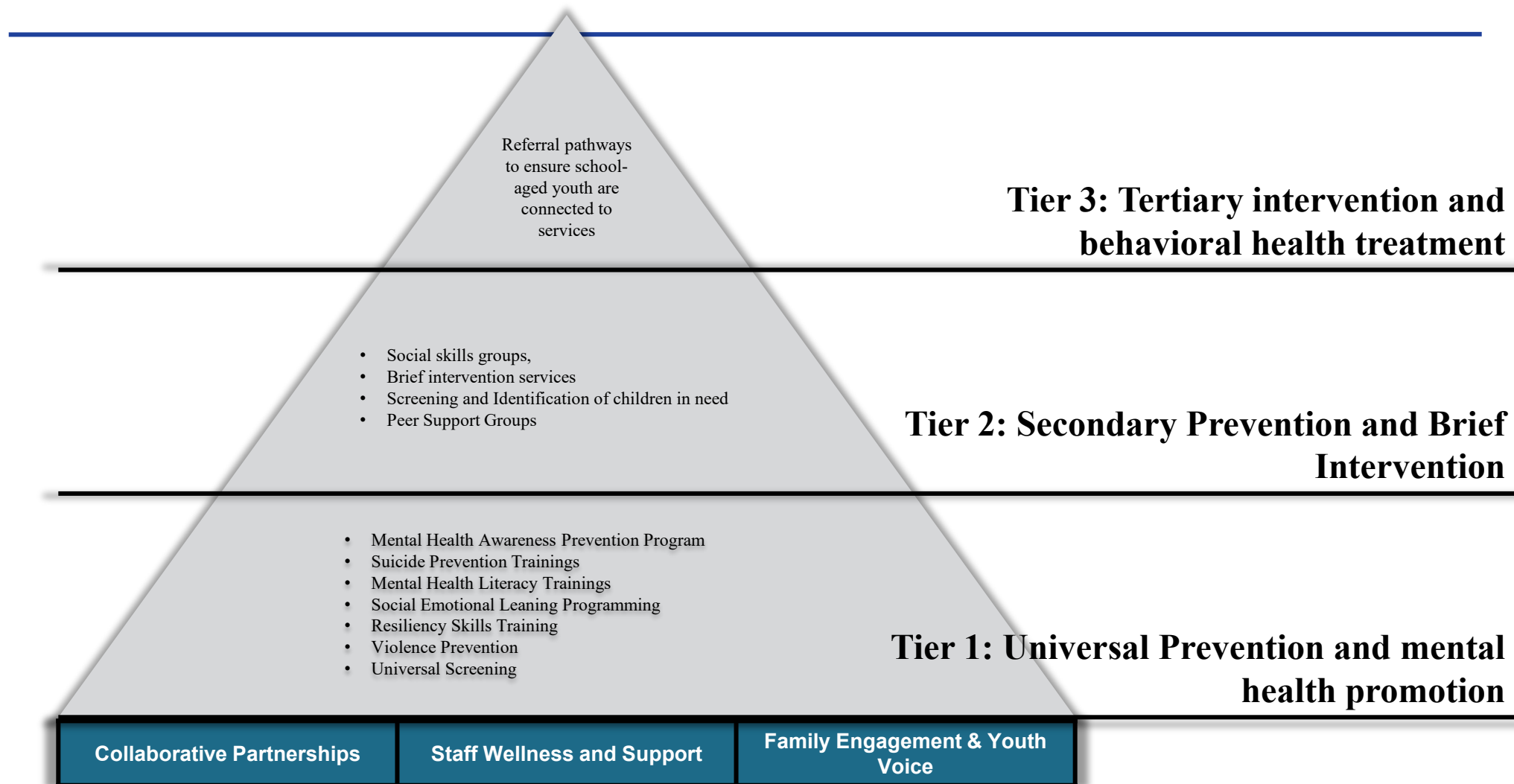
Develop collaborative partnerships with local/ community trauma-informed and mental health services systems.

Increase awareness of the impact of trauma on children, youth, and families.

Implement specialized instructional support for school support personnel, such as teachers, teacher assistants, school leaders, and mental health professionals.

Create a system for the identification, screening, referral, and provision of treatment and support services to students and their families.

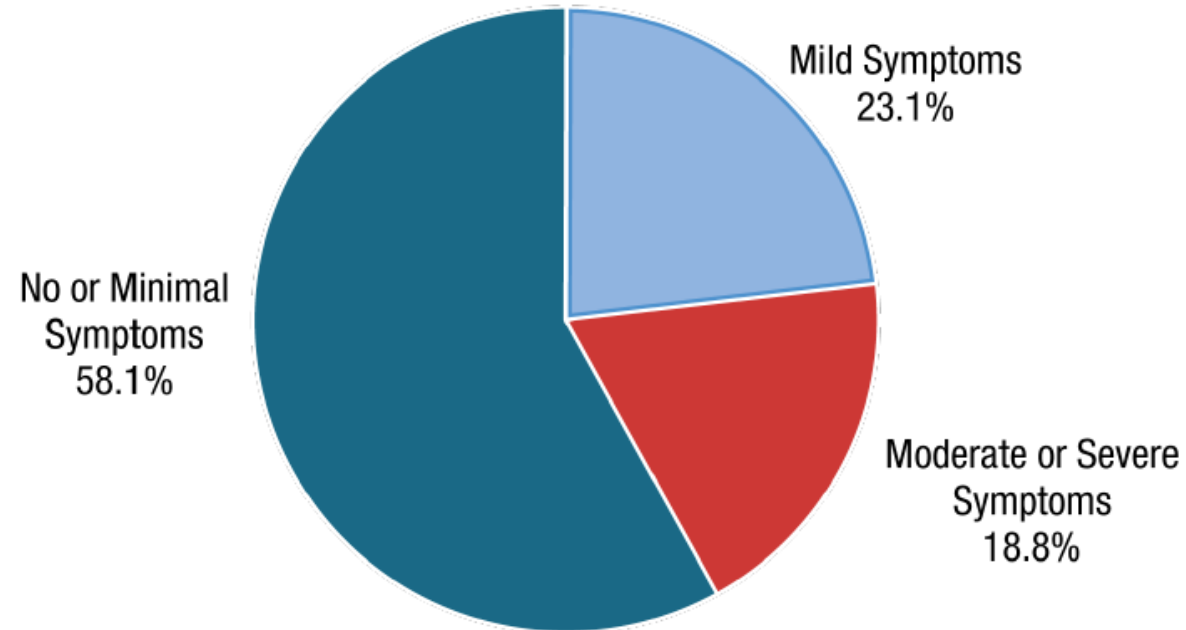
Three-Tiered Public Health Model



Why This Matters?

NNR.45

Generalized Anxiety Disorder Symptom Severity in the Past 2 Weeks: Among Adolescents Aged 12 to 17; 2024



Note: Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) symptom severity is based on the GAD-7 scale. GAD-7 scores indicate the following: 0 to 4 = no or minimal symptoms of GAD, 5 to 9 = mild symptoms, 10 to 14 = moderate symptoms, 15 to 21 = severe symptoms. The Moderate or Severe category includes respondents with a GAD-7 score of 10 or greater.

Why This Matters?

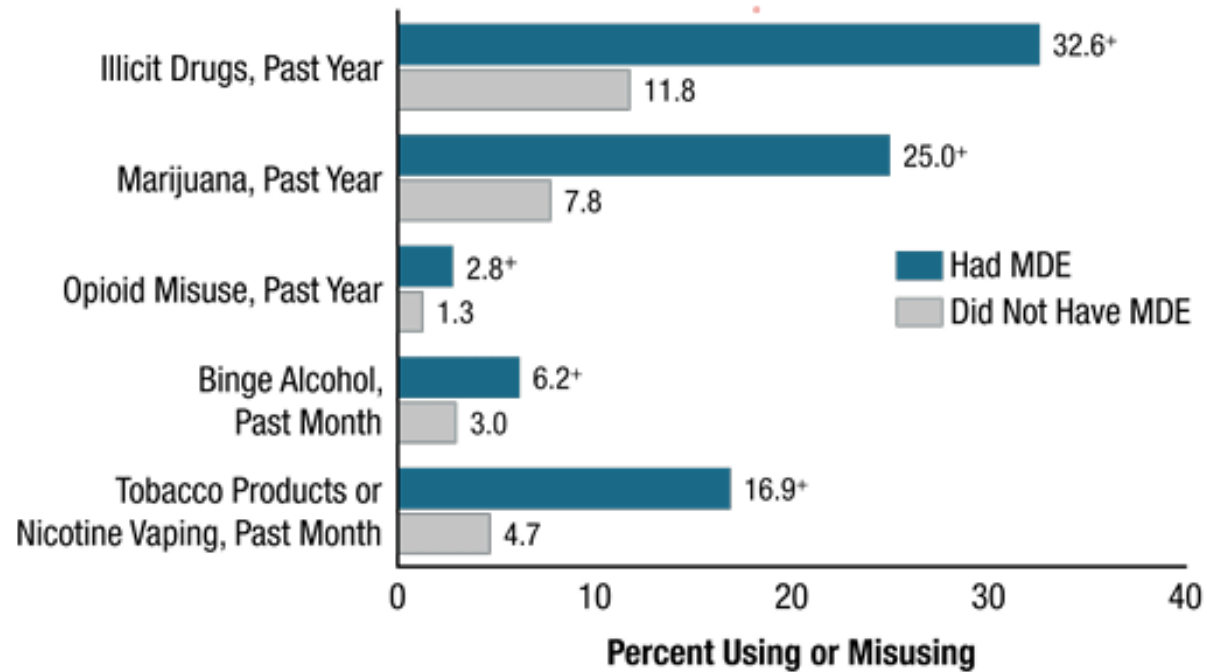
YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY DATA SUMMARY & TRENDS REPORT: 2013–2023

The Percentage of High School Students Who:*	2013 Total	2015 Total	2017 Total	2019 Total	2021 Total	2023 Total	Trend (All Years Available)	2-Year Change (2021–2023)
Experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness	30	30	31	37	42	40		
Experienced poor mental health†	–	–	–	–	29	29	–	
Seriously considered attempting suicide	17	18	17	19	22	20		
Made a suicide plan	14	15	14	16	18	16		
Attempted suicide	8	9	7	9	10	9		
Were injured in a suicide attempt that had to be treated by a doctor or nurse	3	3	2	3	3	2		

Why This Matters?

NNR.55

Past Year or Past Month Substance Use: Among Adolescents Aged 12 to 17; by Past Year Major Depressive Episode (MDE) Status, 2024



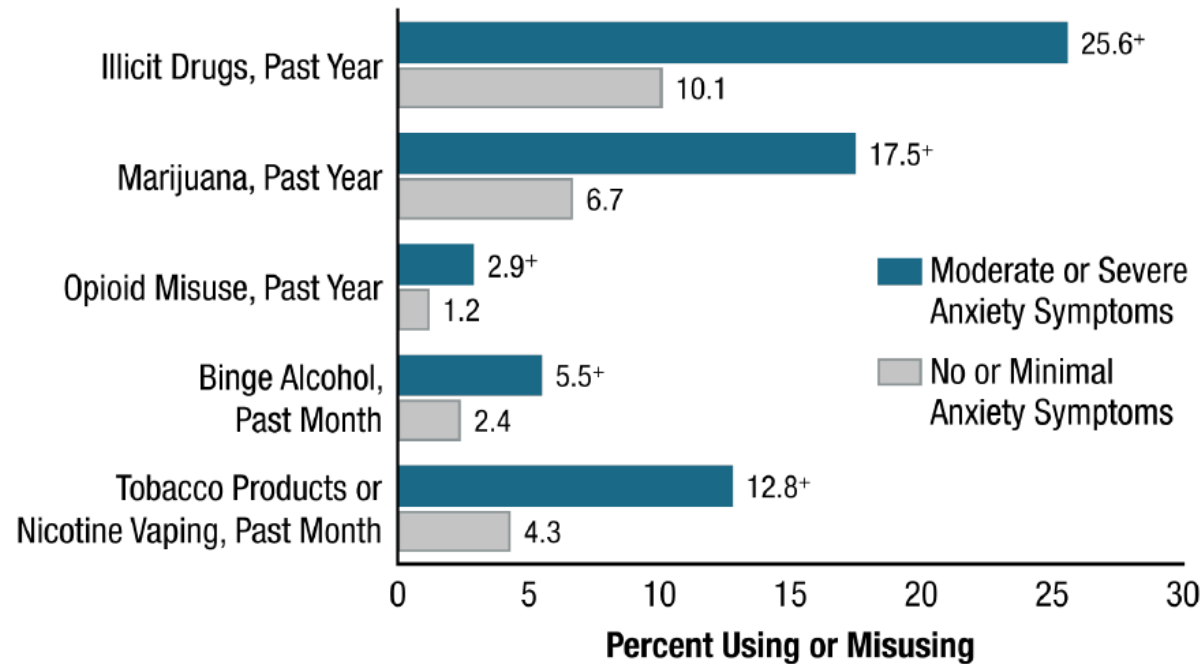
+ Difference between this estimate and the estimate for adolescents without MDE is statistically significant at the .05 level.

Note: Adolescent respondents with unknown MDE data were excluded.

Why This Matters?

NNR.56

Past Year or Past Month Substance Use: Among Adolescents Aged 12 to 17; by Severity of Anxiety Symptoms in the Past 2 Weeks, 2024

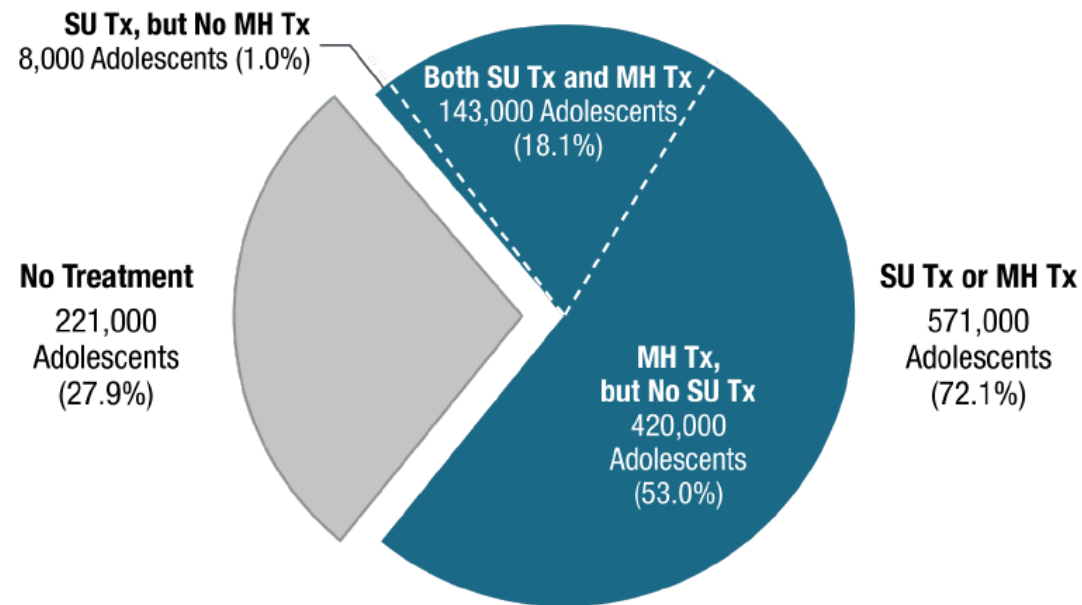


+ Difference between this estimate and the estimate for adolescents with no or minimal anxiety symptoms is statistically significant at the .05 level.

Note: Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) symptom severity is based on the GAD-7 scale. GAD-7 scores indicate the following: 0 to 4 = no or minimal symptoms of GAD, 5 to 9 = mild symptoms, 10 to 14 = moderate symptoms, 15 to 21 = severe symptoms. The Moderate or Severe category includes respondents with a GAD-7 score of 10 or greater.

Why This Matters?

NNR.79 Receipt of Substance Use Treatment or Mental Health Treatment in the Past Year: Among Adolescents Aged 12 to 17 with Past Year Substance Use Disorder and Major Depressive Episode (MDE); 2024



792,000 Adolescents with a Substance Use Disorder and MDE

MH Tx = mental health treatment; SU Tx = substance use treatment.

Note: Adolescents with unknown past year MDE data were excluded.

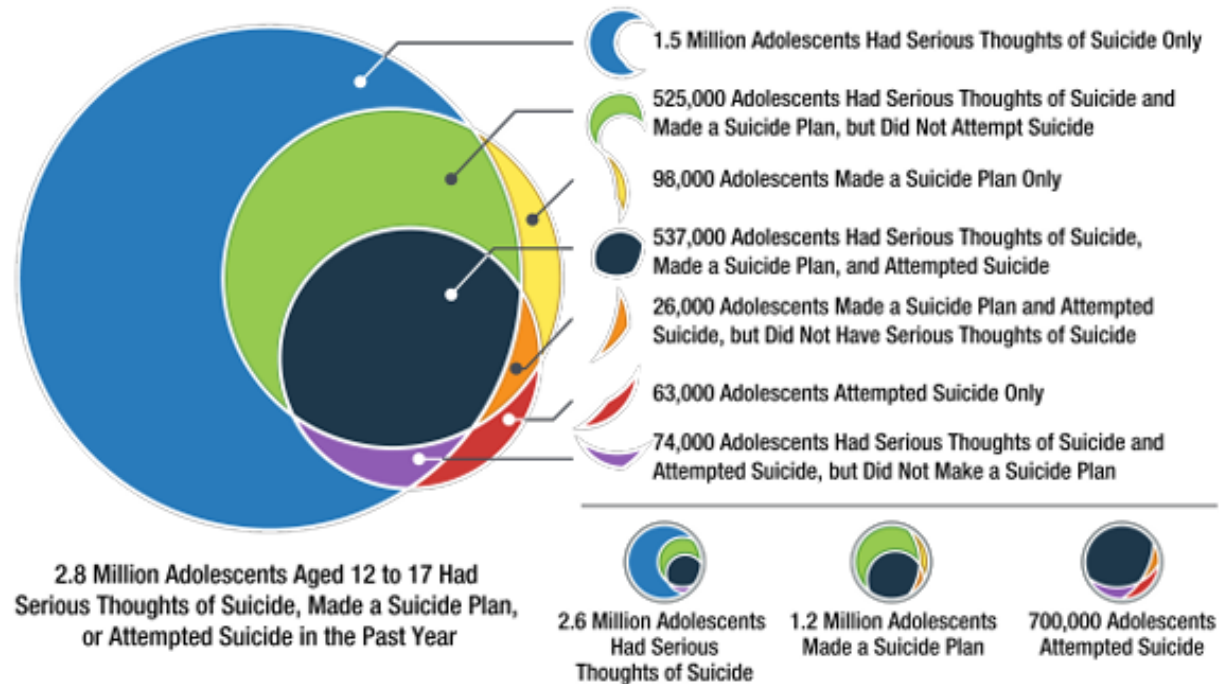
Note: Substance use treatment includes treatment for drug or alcohol use through inpatient treatment/counseling; outpatient treatment/counseling; medications for alcohol use disorder or opioid use disorder; telehealth treatment; or treatment received in a prison, jail, or juvenile detention center.

Note: Mental health treatment includes treatment/counseling received as an inpatient or as an outpatient; use of prescription medication to help with mental health; telehealth treatment; or treatment received in a prison, jail, or juvenile detention center.

Why This Matters?

NNR.66

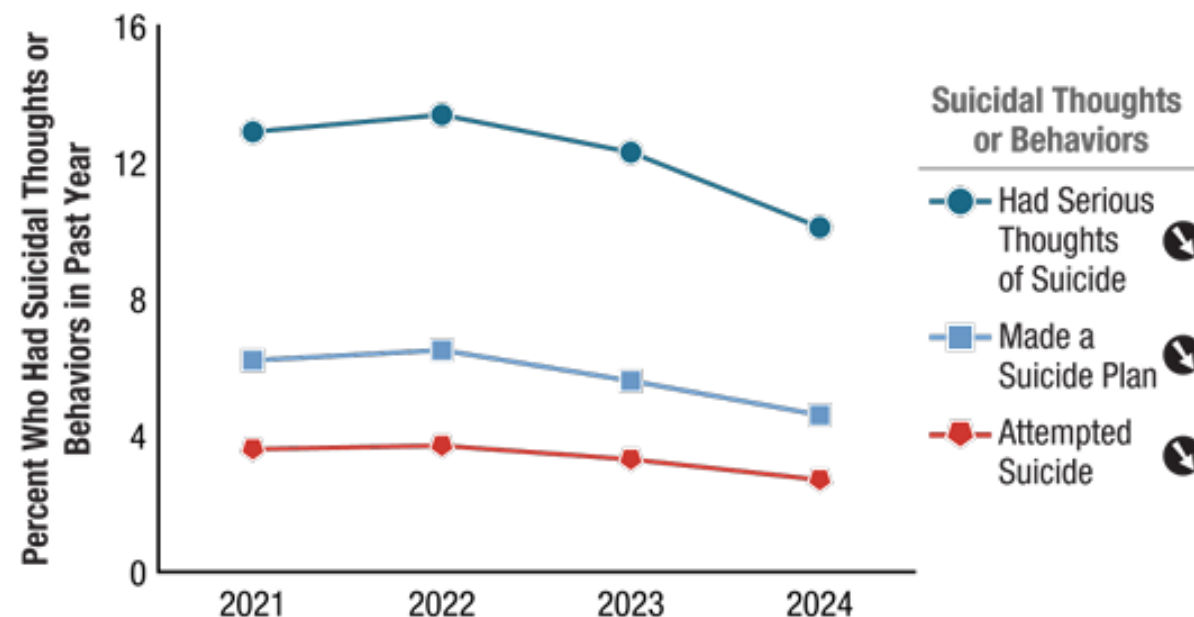
Adolescents Aged 12 to 17 Who Had Serious Thoughts of Suicide, Made a Suicide Plan, or Attempted Suicide in the Past Year; 2024



Why This Matters?

NMR.68

Had Serious Thoughts of Suicide, Made a Suicide Plan, or Attempted Suicide in the Past Year: Among Adolescents Aged 12 to 17; 2021-2024



Suicidal Thoughts or Behaviors	2021	2022	2023	2024	Trend
Had Serious Thoughts of Suicide	12.9	13.4	12.3	10.1	Decreased
Made a Suicide Plan	6.2	6.5	5.6	4.6	Decreased
Attempted Suicide	3.6	3.7	3.3	2.7	Decreased

Note: Estimates for 2021 may differ from previously published estimates because the 2021 analysis weights were updated to facilitate between-year comparisons.

Program Data



Project AWARE Fiscal Years 2020-2025



1,153,000+
Individuals trained



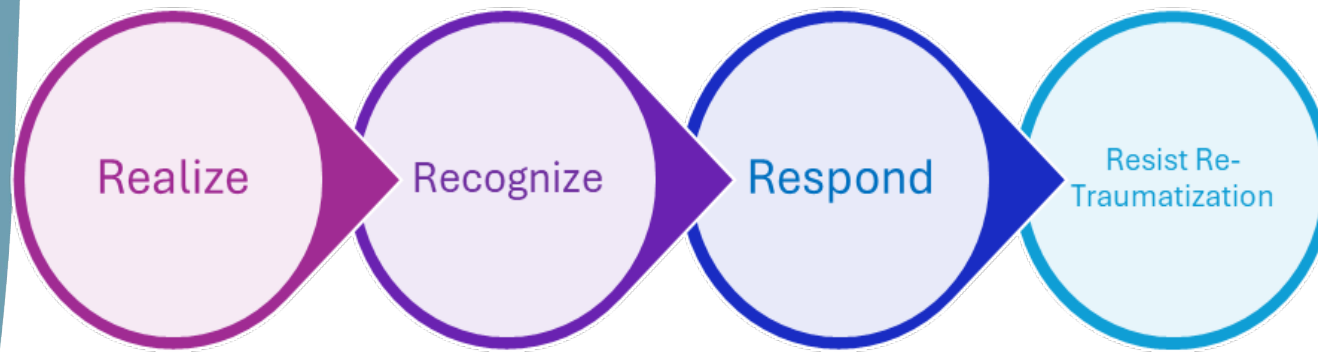
793,000+
Individuals screened for services



328,000+
Individuals referred to services

TISS Fiscal Years 2023-2025

SAMHSA's Trauma-Informed Approach



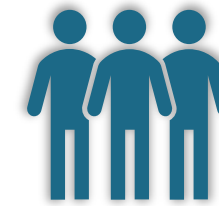
Realize the widespread impact of trauma and understand potential paths for recovery

Recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system

Respond by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices

Resist re-traumatization of children, as well as the adults who care for them

This figure is adapted from: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (2014). SAMHSA's concept of Trauma and Guidance for a trauma-informed approach, HHS publication no. (SMA) 14-4884. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.



45,000+
Individuals trained



190,000+
Individuals screened for services



14,000+
Individuals referred to services

Common Core Strategies Implemented

- Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)
- School-Based Services
- Workforce Development
- Partnerships
- Technology & Data Systems
- Sustainability

MTSS Framework

Importance of Implementation:

Provide a structured continuum of care

Impact of the strategy:

Improved school climate

Reduced behavioral incidents & dropouts

Increased engagement

Takeaways from the Grantees:

Embed into policy for sustainability

Leadership buy-in and support is critical

School-Based Mental Health Services

Importance of Implementation:

Reduce barriers, provide early support

Impact of the strategy:

Increased service utilization

Reduced wait times and absenteeism

85% referred; 89% served within 3 months

Takeaways from the Grantees:

On-site providers are essential, Telehealth expands reach

Especially critical in rural/tribal areas

Workforce Development

Importance of Implementation:

Equip staff to support student well-being

Promoting earlier identification of mental health concerns

Impact of the strategy:

Increased confidence in crisis response

Better identification and referral

Takeaways from the Grantees:

Ongoing training is key

Train-the-trainer models sustain impact

Partnerships

Importance of Implementation:

Broaden support systems

Impact of the strategy:

Expanded the range of supports available

Improved family engagement

Streamlined referrals

Takeaways from the Grantees:

Strong partnerships improve sustainability

Collaboration enhances service delivery

Technology & Data Systems

Importance of this strategy:

Identification of students needs earlier

Improved coordination of referrals and services

Impact of the strategy:

Faster referrals and response

Stronger accountability and tracking

Takeaways from the Grantees:

Data dashboards enable real-time decisions

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) is essential

Sustainability

Importance of the strategy:

Maintain impact beyond funding

Impact of the strategy:

Continued access to services

Stronger systems and workforce

Takeaways from the Grantees:

Start planning early

Diversify funding via “braiding funding”

Embed practices into systems

Engaging youth, families, and community members

The STANDUP Act

The STANDUP Act: signed into law on March 15, 2022

Directs SAMHSA to prioritize Project AWARE grantees that implement evidence-based suicide awareness and prevention training policies for students in grades 6–12.

Policies must be:

- Evidence-based

- Coordinated with existing school-based suicide prevention resources

- Inclusive of help-seeking information for students

- Supported by periodic retraining

Applicants to Project AWARE receive five additional points if they have created or will implement such a student training policy.

They must also track and report training data such as number of student trainings and help-seeking reports.

The STANDUP Act

41 Project AWARE grantees implemented school-based student suicide awareness and prevention training policies

Grantee Examples:

1. A grantee implemented training for all high school students. Training delivered in classroom settings provided space for discussion and allow staff to respond to students needing support during or after the session. The grantee aligns its policy with statewide suicide prevention requirements and publicly posts student suicide prevention plans per state law.

Focus areas include:

- Building student coping skills for managing distress
- Increasing resilience and emotional regulation
- Creating opportunities for immediate student–adult connection when concerns arise

2. A grantee requires annual suicide awareness and prevention training for all secondary students. Implements the training across secondary schools. Ensures universal training, consistent messaging, and repeated exposure to help-seeking skills every year.

Key Themes Across Suicide Prevention

- **Expanded Suicide Prevention Education**

Evidence-based programs implemented across grade levels; broad student participation in programs

- **Strengthened Systems & Infrastructure**

Districts developed aligned policies, crisis-response protocols, screening tools, to support consistent, sustainable practices

- **Increased Staff Capacity & Training**

Large-scale professional learning in trauma-informed care, suicide prevention training and mental health literacy built confidence and readiness among educators and counselors.

Key Themes Across Suicide Prevention

- **Student Voice & Leadership**

Youth councils, PSA film programs, clubs, and leadership labs empowered students to lead stigma-reduction efforts and create supportive peer cultures

- **Early Identification & Connection to Care**

Universal screenings, improved referrals, and strong community partnerships increased linkage to mental health services and timely supports

- **Community Engagement & Awareness Campaigns**

Mental health fairs, expos, pop-up events, and county/state campaigns expanded awareness and mobilized thousands of students, families, and community members.

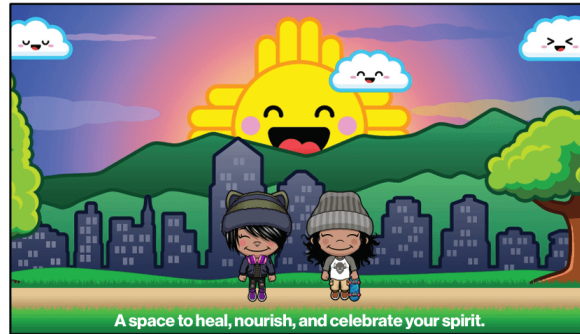
- **On-Demand Resources**

Virtual assets, open educational resources, grief supports, and tiered strategies ensured accessible, equitable tools for high-risk populations and broader communities.

Examples of Awareness Campaigns

988 NM Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Free, Private & Confidential Support 24/7



A space to heal, nourish, and celebrate your spirit.

call or text
988
ANYONE.
any struggle.
anytime.

New Mexico's 988 is the 24/7 free and confidential lifeline for **emotional, mental, or alcohol and substance use support**, made available to all New Mexicans through the Behavioral Health Services Division of the New Mexico Health Care Authority.

If you are overwhelmed by life or emotions and you don't know where to turn, 988 is here to listen and get you private one-on-one support from a caring, understanding and non-judgmental person.

Please remember that **YOU MATTER!** Your presence in this world is needed. There is no shame in asking for help.

Release what is weighing heavy on your heart and spirit:

- Family or relationship struggles
- Grief, loss, or feeling alone
- Pressure from work or school
- Alcohol or substance use
- Concerns about money or housing
- When your spirit feels heavy or unsafe

988 is here for you! Visit 988NM.org for more information.



Facebook icon: 988 NM Crisis Support
Instagram icon: @988NMCrisisSupport

November 2025 Native American Heritage Month



Youth Focus Group Student Perspectives



Youth Focus Group Findings

-  **Student Perspectives on School Climate and Safety** 
-  **Resources Supporting Positive School Climate & Student Mental Health** 
-  **Student, Family, and School Community Engagement** 
-  **Student-Reported Outcomes and Satisfaction** 
-  **Student Recommendations for Improvement** 

Student Perspective on Climate and Safety

1 Belonging and Recognition

2 Physical & Emotional Safety

3 Youth Representation

Belonging and Recognition

- Belonging grows through **supportive relationships** and being **recognized for contributions** beyond academics.
- **Student-led events** and clubs foster community-building but need consistent adult support to last.
- **Bullying and peer pressure** strain belonging and discourage help-seeking.
- Uneven or **delayed recognition** leaves students feeling undervalued and less engaged.

"...we are always out here after school...always in some type of honors class or AP class. And there's just no recognition for it, how we get our lives done and how we get our school work done and everything. I just want something that was recognized from us and from others that would be more healthy for our mental health."



Student Perspective and Climate and Safety

1 Belonging and Recognition

2 Physical & Emotional Safety

3 Youth Representation

Physical & Emotional Safety

- Students link safety to **clear physical security** (e.g., protocols, security staff) and **emotional safety** through accessible, trusted adults and calm spaces.
- **Anonymous reporting** options exist, **but privacy concerns** (e.g., visible boxes, fear of gossip) reduce use and trust.
- **Academic pressure** contributes to stress, sleep loss, and burnout; heavy grade focus increases anxiety.

"I also like our security guard, whenever something happens, whenever something actually happens in the school...I feel very safe knowing that they can lock down certain parts of the school...if there's a problem in one part of the school they can...isolate it from the rest of the school. I feel very safe knowing that."



Student Perspective and Climate and Safety

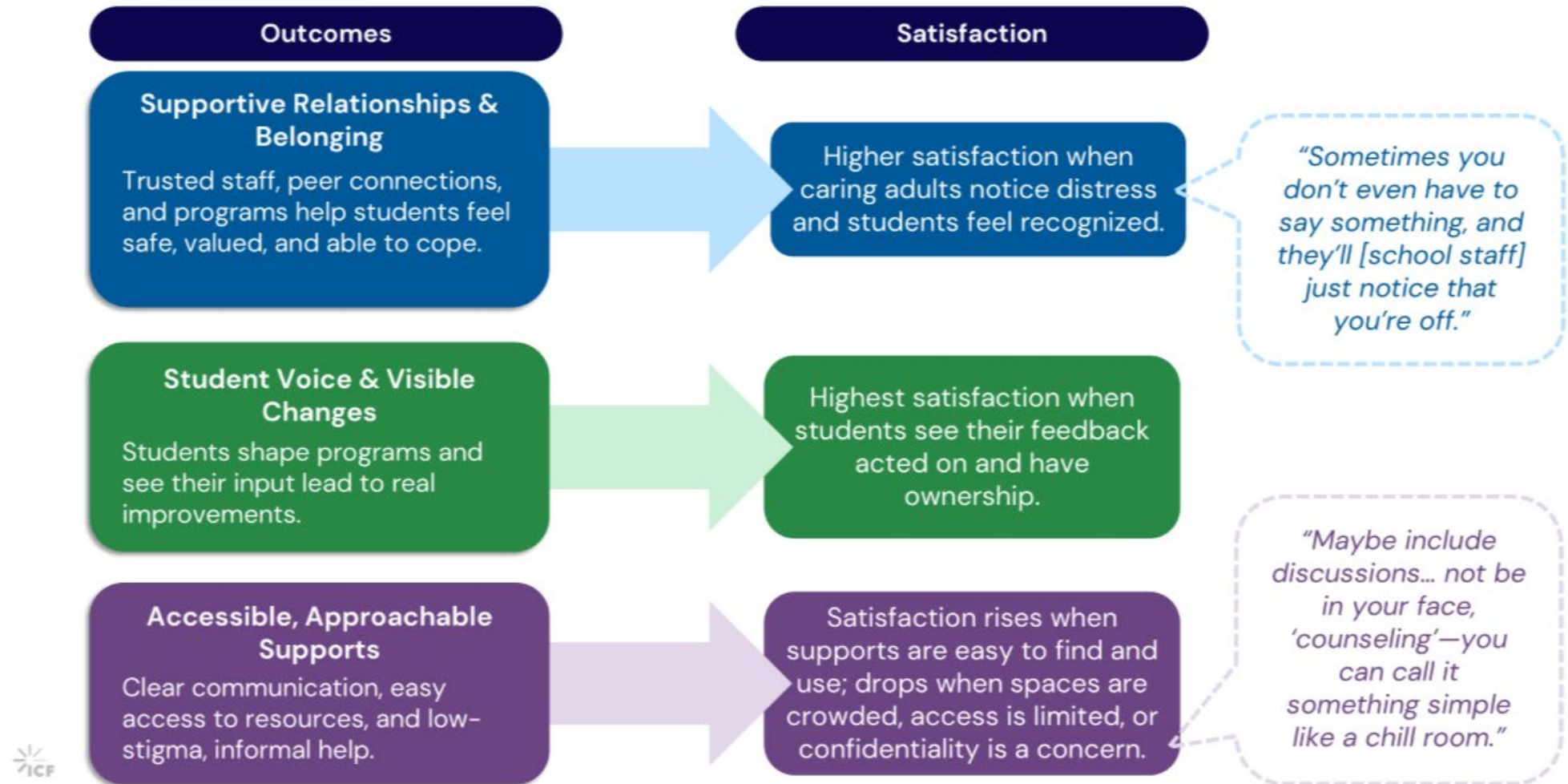


Youth Representation

- Students asked for **greater representation among teachers and counselors** so supports feel approachable and relevant.
- They noted uneven recognition of **religious observances** and asked for broader **curriculum coverage** of the world to build understanding.

"I also feel like something that happens for me trying to talk to [school staff name] or some of the other counselors is honestly a lack of representation"

Student Reports: Outcomes and Satisfaction



Key Takeaways

- Schools are critical hubs for mental health
 - Embed Mental Health Professional in Schools
- Integrated systems improve outcomes
 - Incorporate Professional Development for All School Staff
 - Create systems for referrals that connect students to care
- Partnerships and data drive success
 - Strengthen data systems for Continuous Improvement
 - Build Community Partnerships
- Incorporating Youth and family voice is critical
 - Engaging youth and families supported long term impact
- Sustainability must be intentional
 - Plan for sustainability from the start

Question and Answer



Resources

Project AWARE

<https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/children-and-families/school-health/project-aware>

TISS

<https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/children-and-families/school-health/tiss>

Contacts

AWARE GPO: Courtney McFadden MSW

Courtney.mcfadden@samhsa.hhs.gov

AWARE Program Coordinator: Jennifer Treger, MS

Jennifer.treger@samhsa.hhs.gov

TISS GPO: Jennifer Chan, MPA

Jennifer.chan@samhsa.hhs.gov

Acting DCSMH Director & Acting MHPB Chief: CAPT David Barry:

David.barry@samhsa.hhs.gov

Thank You!

SAMHSA envisions that people with, affected by, or at risk for mental health and substance use conditions receive care, achieve well-being, and thrive.



Grant Opportunities

[samhsa.gov
grants.gov](https://samhsa.gov/grants.gov)



988 Lifeline Toolkit

samhsa.gov/988toolkit



/samhsa



/samhsa



@samhsagov