



SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH

Ensuring early access to mental health support and resources for children and families through schools

Supporting Student Wellbeing

Wellbeing for all Californians begins in childhood, and the Commission's efforts begin in schools. These efforts stem from the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) through its Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) component, which mandates that the State and counties work together to prevent interrupted learning and early exit from school due to mental health needs. Concurrently, the Mental Health Student Services Act (MHSSA) provides grants for partnerships between county mental health agencies and local education agencies to deliver school-based mental health services to young people and their families. These partnerships support awareness and outreach to identify early signs of mental health challenges, reduce stigma and discrimination, and increase access to care.

Goal/Opportunity

Mental health disorders are the most common and disabling medical conditions impacting children. Up to one out of every five children has a diagnosable mental disorder. Among the 9.6 million children in California, roughly 1.8 million may need mental health services and supports.

The Commission's work seeks to leverage schools to strengthen ways that we can prevent mental health needs, support education, address stigma, and increase pathways to effective services when an early intervention is necessary. A critical element of school mental health work is meeting kids where they are, whether it is in school, or another environment where they feel safe.

Supporting these children includes implementing a continuum of early interventions and supports for improving mental health access and outcomes and increasing academic success among children and youth who exhibit social, emotional, and behavioral health challenges in school.

Additionally, the MHSSA seeks to foster partnerships between county mental health or behavioral health departments and local education entities to provide school-based mental health services to children, youth, and their families. The Commission awards and administers grants to provide support including services that are provided on school campuses, suicide prevention, drop-out prevention, placement assistance, continuum-of-care, and outreach to high-risk youth.

Background

The Commission in 2016 launched its Schools and Mental Health Project to explore opportunities to support the mental health needs of California's K-12 students.

In November of 2020, the project published the Every Young Heart and Mind: Schools as Centers of Wellness report, which was the result of more than 20 community meetings.

In Fiscal Year 2019-20, the State adopted the MHSSA, which made \$75 million available for the Commission to distribute to support partnerships between schools and mental health agencies and providers. The Commission and the State have since expanded financial support for such programs, now in its third phase. Subsequent funding has allowed the Commission to expand this investment to more than \$250 million and support school mental health statewide.



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Expected Outcomes

School entities and health systems can effectively help children “to live, work, and thrive” by partnering to make schools into centers of wellness and healing and by robustly engaging with families in that pursuit.

MHSSA partnership programs should include the following goals:

- 1 Preventing mental illnesses from becoming severe and disabling
- 2 Improving timely access to services for underserved populations
- 3 Promoting recognition of early signs of potentially severe and disabling mental illnesses
- 4 Reducing stigma associated with the diagnosis of a mental illness or seeking mental health services
- 5 Reducing discrimination against people with unmet mental health needs
- 6 Preventing negative outcomes in the targeted populations