



The Coalition to Advance Mental Health in Iowa for Kids (CAMHI4Kids) represents more than 70 statewide organizations urging policymakers to listen to Iowans and invest in fixing the patchwork of services that is putting our children’s mental health and well-being at risk. A fully funded children’s behavioral health system will allow families to know where to turn when they need help and will allow Iowans to access the same array of services regardless of where they live. Mental health is connected to social, emotional, and cognitive development and is a foundation for a healthy life, healthy community, and healthy state. When we ensure children’s mental health needs are met, they are more likely to do better in school, graduate and more likely to be healthy, productive adults in our community.

House File 690 provided a great start and framework for a system to support children’s mental health in Iowa; now we need to provide adequate and sustainable funding for it. Our children are our future. Tapping into their potential is vital to our state’s well-being. As Iowans, if we choose to invest in a fully-funded children’s behavioral health system, we are choosing to invest in the things that make our communities stronger and ensure that every child meets their fullest potential.

As a first step to fund a comprehensive children’s mental system, CAMHI4Kids asks the Legislature to:

- 1) Ensure adequate, predictable, and sustainable funding for Iowa’s mental health system across the lifespan.
 - a. Ensure sustainable regional funding for mental health services across the state.
 - b. Increase Medicaid provider reimbursement rates to give Iowans better access to essential services and address workforce shortages.
- 2) Expand access to policies and programs that support prevention, early identification and early intervention for children’s social-emotional development so that we can mitigate long-term, chronic, and expensive health conditions later in life.
 - a. Ensure that all children receive EPSDT-covered screenings and treatment.
 - b. Expand programs that have proven successful and cost efficient, such as the 1st Five Healthy Mental Development Initiative and System of Care.
- 3) Fully fund children’s mental health crisis services, including the statewide hotline and costs associated with providing local mobile crisis services (training, capacity, dispatch, etc.).

Four Components of an Effective Children’s Behavioral Health System



Behavioral Health Services for Children Must Be Family-Centered

The role of the family is especially important in influencing children’s health — strong, supportive relationships with a caregiver are the foundation for a young child’s physical and mental well-being.”² Children must be treated and supported within the context of their family, home, school and community through a culturally responsive lens. A child’s health is directly impacted through a combination of genetic, environmental and social factors.



Early Brain Development is Critical to Future Mental Health

The first years of a child’s life represent a critical opportunity when the brain has the most potential to build strong foundations for cognitive, social and emotional health. Children begin to develop essential skills like problem-solving and self-control. Genes provide the basic blueprint, but experiences shape the brain architecture. Exposure to adverse experiences such as community violence or parental substance abuse can damage brain architecture.



Prevention & Early Intervention in Childhood is a Cost Effective Return on Investment

The impact of prevention is greater in a children’s system. While adult health care often focuses on health maintenance and managing illness, the focus of early intervention services for children is preventive and skill building (habilitative). “While the overall costs of health care for children are small compared to the adult population, they are a critical investment that may result in substantial savings over the lifespan.”³ Many of the nation’s most pressing and costly health issues are rooted in childhood.²



The Stakeholders & Funding Streams for a Children’s Behavioral Health System are NOT the Same as Adults

Key partners such as the education system, the juvenile court system, and child care services play a critical role in supporting children’s mental health. A children’s behavioral health system must include varied and strategically aligned funding sources to address Iowa’s current patchwork of services across the state. Sufficient investment in a children’s behavioral health system is essential to ensure every child meets their full potential, and that Iowa’s future workforce and economy thrives.

² Brundage, S. Shearer, C. “Plan and Provider Opportunities to Move Towards Integrated Family Health Care” United Hospital Fund (2019) <https://bit.ly/2Ibum09>

³ http://www.nihcm.org/pdf/Attachment_B_-_APA_Article_FCMH.pdf