



# Addressing the Adolescent Mental Health Emergency

## Executive Summary

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Community-based programs and organizations play a critical role<sup>1</sup> in the care and development of adolescents. Now, more than ever, the need for community programs serving the mental health and well-being needs of adolescents is critical. As evidenced by our expansive network of grantee partners of The Upswing Fund for Adolescent Mental Health (Upswing), there are many organizations across the country directly providing mental health and well-being support to adolescents in culturally responsive ways. We share examples of culturally responsive care in our first report, [An Investment in the Future of Adolescent Mental Health](#). However, many systemic challenges hinder the growth of community-based organizations and, by extension, the expansion of culturally responsive mental health care for adolescents at a time when support is undeniably at an all-time high.



Over the past few months alone, a national emergency was declared on the state of child and adolescent mental health and the U.S. Surgeon General released a Public Advisory<sup>2</sup> highlighting an urgent need for addressing youth mental health challenges. The time to act is now, but the question remains, what can I do?

In the report that follows, we present action-oriented recommendations for relevant stakeholders across four areas that prevent adolescents of color and LGBTQ+ youth from getting the culturally responsive care that they need: funding community-based programs, building community partnerships, building and sustaining a mental health care workforce, and measuring the mental health and well-being of adolescents.

Across these challenges, some common recommendations arise.

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## For Funders

**Be willing to fund direct service organizations in this time of particularly acute needs.** Testing and supporting models of care for adolescents of color and LGBTQ+ youth can ultimately inform approaches to scale. Funding general operations can help close gaps in costs that aren't reimbursable by insurance, including the time and effort needed to build community partnerships, provide holistic and non-clinical wrap-around care, and train and retain high-quality staff.

**Offer partnership beyond the check.** Facilitate access to networks and funders to help build fundraising capacity, acknowledging the disproportionate challenges diverse leaders experience in accessing those spaces and capital. As a partner, also seek out ways to relieve administrative burden so grantees can focus on mission-critical work. This looks like application and reporting processes that are a light lift and allowing grantees to define and share progress using their own measures of impact. To learn more about steps you can take, use [this guide](#) from the Trust-Based Philanthropy Project.

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## For Community-Based Organizations

**Leverage partnerships** to increase organizational impact and set expectations with funders on the time needed to develop them.

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## For Higher Education, Training Institutions, and State Licensure Associations

**Center cultural responsiveness** as a core value of curriculum and licensing standards to better prepare new professionals to serve the needs of diverse communities. Also, intentionally recruit and support diverse students to, and through, training programs.

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## For Policymakers

**Expand insurance reimbursement policies and Medicaid eligibility** to allow for the reimbursement of critical coordination and wrap-around services.

In the spirit of taking action towards closing gaps in mental health care for adolescents of color and LGBTQ+ youth, we urge funders, policymakers, professional associations, community-based organizations, and all others who share in our goal to improve the mental health and well-being of youth to read on.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Settapani, C.A., Hawke, L.D., Cleverley, K. et al. "[Key attributes of integrated community-based youth service hubs for mental health: a scoping review.](#)" International Journal of Mental Health Systems 13, no. 52 (2019). DOI: 10.1186/s13033-019-0306-7

<sup>2</sup> United States. Public Health Service. Office of the Surgeon General. "[Protecting Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory.](#)" (2021).

