

Children's Mental Health Services Further Devastated by Pandemic

The limited access to children's behavioral health care services in New York only has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 crisis, according to a [new report](#) from the Center for New York City Affairs at the New School.

The report noted that, even before the pandemic, suicide was the second-leading cause of death in the state for teens ages 15 to 19 and the third-leading cause of death for children ages 5 to 14. Additionally, despite federal and state laws requiring insurance companies to make mental health care more affordable and easier to obtain, doctors and advocates report that greater investment and reimbursement is needed to adequately address children's behavioral health needs, it found.

Covid-19-induced stressors, such as grief, death and financial instability, will only increase unmet needs, said Abigail Kramer, a senior editor at the center and author of the report. Emergency department physicians have already seen an uptick in seriously mentally ill children in recent weeks, and many of those conditions could have been headed off earlier if the appropriate resources had been available and accessible in the community.

"There is a real fear among the professionals that serve these kids," Kramer said.

Investment in outpatient clinics as well as mental health supports in schools when children return to the classroom would help to address some of that concern, she said. And greater reimbursement from insurance companies would better support financially taxed mental health providers.

Kramer said children of color and those in low-income families are being hit the hardest by trauma, including poverty, housing insecurity, grief and loss, during the pandemic.

It's critical to keep the importance of greater access to children's behavioral health care services at the forefront, even in the face of anticipated budget cuts in many areas, she said.

"There is an enormous amount of evidence to say that, if we invest in mental health care for kids, there is a payoff in the short, medium and long term," Kramer said.