



HEALTHY KIDS, SAFE SCHOOLS, STRONG COMMUNITIES

A COUNTY-WIDE INITIATIVE TO EXPAND MENTAL HEALTH
SERVICES TO PROMOTE POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR
CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We can make our schools and communities safer, our law enforcement more effective, and see better outcomes for youth and families. This vision is possible, if children’s mental health needs are identified early, and addressed with a strong continuum of services delivered by a healthy ecosystem of providers.

Far too often, youth with mental health needs end up (re)entering foster care, dropping out of school, encountering law enforcement, becoming homeless, or requiring hospitalization or other inpatient treatment. To prevent these poor outcomes and unnecessary human and financial costs, more services are needed for both the highest needs youth and in prevention and early intervention activities.

Across California there is a timely and critical opportunity to promote safe, stable families, schools and communities due to substantial state and federal fiscal incentives for counties to expand funding for the federal entitlement for children’s mental health services, known as Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT).

Expanding Contra Costa County’s funding for children’s mental health would address unmet needs by providing more children and youth with mental health services, and would support a healthy ecosystem of service providers able to

offer timely, accessible, and effective services to youth and families.

A 10% expansion of EPSDT in fiscal year 2017-2018 would mean roughly a \$2.6 million dollar increase in state-reimbursable expenses (at virtually no cost to the County), plus a \$2.6 million dollar increase in federal financial participation, for a total expansion of \$5.2 million for children’s mental health services. Based on Contra Costa spending per EPSDT beneficiary, an additional \$5.2 million would serve roughly an additional 500 to 700 children and adolescents per year.

Stakeholders across the County are mobilizing behind this initiative, including children and families, law enforcement, philanthropy, service providers, and state-level advocates. By seizing this timely opportunity to expand services, Contra Costa will ensure that children are healthier, that schools are safer, and that communities are stronger.



THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

The Consequences of Unmet Children's Mental Health Needs

Mental health is a critical component of each child's ability to learn, grow and thrive. Unfortunately, many children—approximately one in five youth nation-wide—struggle with mental health problems that negatively impact their health and well-being. Given that over 70% of mental disorders onset prior to the age of 25, childhood and adolescence a critical time in which to identify and address mental health needs before more costly and restrictive interventions are required.¹ However, estimates suggest that 75-85% of children and youth in need of mental health services do not receive them.² This remains true in Contra Costa County, where only 8% of Medi-Cal eligible children receive EPSDT specialty mental health services.³

Untreated mental health needs can lead to lifelong challenges for youth, and have stark consequences for families and communities:

SCHOOL EXPULSIONS AND DROP-OUT

Children in preschool and elementary school with mental health needs experience rates of suspension and expulsion three times greater than those of their peers without mental health needs.⁴ This pattern only increases with age, as roughly 44% of youth in high school with mental health problems drop out of high school.⁵ One in 10 youth who drop out of high school were institutionalized (often in jails or prisons), as compared with 1 in 33 of those who do not drop out.⁶



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SUICIDE

Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among 10 – 24 year olds.⁷ Indeed, a nationwide survey of high school youth across the U.S. found that 16% of students reported seriously considered suicide, 13% reported creating a plan, and 8% reported attempting to take their own life in the 12 months preceding the survey.⁸ Only 29% of youth expressing suicidal ideation receive mental health services.⁹

CRIMINAL JUSTICE INVOLVEMENT

Roughly 70% of youth in the juvenile justice system have a diagnosable mental health disorder.¹⁰ More than 90% of justice-involved youth have been exposed to trauma, or Adverse

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Childhood Experiences (ACEs)—which include different types of abuse, neglect and household dysfunction.

PLACEMENT INSTABILITY AND HOMELESSNESS

Over 80% of children and youth involved in the child welfare system have mental health problems.¹¹ Youth in foster care with mental health needs are less likely to experience permanency and are more likely to be placed in residential care in order to access needed services.¹² Estimates suggest that over 50% of foster youth will experience homelessness after exiting care.

Increase in Population Requiring Services

As a result of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), Medi-Cal coverage for undocumented children, and state-wide litigation on behalf of youth in the child welfare system, **the number of youth eligible for EPSDT Specialty Mental Health Services is rising dramatically.** EPSDT is a federal entitlement that provides comprehensive and preventative health care services to low-income children and adolescents under 21 who are enrolled in full-scope Medi-Cal and have a mental health diagnosis requiring treatment. EPSDT Specialty Mental Health Services can include assessment, plan development, therapy, rehabilitation, collateral services, case management, medication support services, crisis services, psychiatry services, psychology services, Therapeutic Behavioral Services, In-Home Behavioral Services, and Intensive Care Coordination.

As children and youth in Contra Costa are already experiencing delays and gaps in service provision, it is critical to expand services now. Further, Contra Costa County's community-based providers have received only one rate reimbursement increase of 3% in 14 years, and must be better supported in their efforts to sustainably provide high quality services for all children and families. **Expanding EPSDT provides an opportunity to both increase service access for children, and also ensure a healthy ecosystem of providers who are able to effectively address unmet mental health needs.**

The extraordinary loss of life and potential that comes from failing to address these mental health needs in a timely and effective manner is shouldered first and foremost by each individual young person and their family we fail to serve, but also by our teachers, classrooms, police officers and first responders, emergency rooms, and communities as a whole.

THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The Benefits of Early Intervention

Timely, easily accessible and developmentally appropriate interventions can prevent many mental health problems entirely, and reduce the long-term severity and impact of more serious mental illness. This makes it **in the best interest of the community to address these needs early.**

Prevention and early intervention activities offer significant cost savings in the public interest. Indeed, a study by the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University found that “investments in the earliest years of life produce the greatest returns. Most of those returns, which can range from \$4 to \$9 per dollar invested, benefit the community through reduced crime, welfare, and educational remediation, as well as increased tax revenues on higher incomes for the participants of early childhood programs when they reach adulthood.”¹³

Investments in delinquency-prevention programs and diversion alternatives to the juvenile justice system are shown to save \$7 to \$10 for every dollar invested, and significantly reduce crime.¹⁴ Community-based crisis services reduce the overall cost of care by 75%, an average of \$40,000 per child per year.¹⁵ For example, the average cost of mobile crisis services is 23% less per case than when law enforcement is involved as the first responder to a mental health crisis.¹⁶

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THE RIGHT TIME FOR INVESTMENT

The timing for EPSDT expansion is opportune. In addition to rising EPSDT-eligible populations that the county is legally obligated to serve, the state is committed to ensuring that the EPSDT entitlement is fully funded, and more specifically, **the state prioritizes covering County costs that exceed the county mental health realignment funding base for EPSDT and Drug Medi-Cal.** Indeed, over the past two fiscal years (FY14 and FY15), Contra Costa County has exceeded its base allocation for EPSDT and Drug Medi-Cal, and has been made whole by the state. **Virtually 100% of County expenditures on EPSDT are reimbursed by the state and federal governments, which means there is essentially zero cost to counties in expanding investment in children's mental health.**

There is currently little competition for the priority use of growth funds (which totals over \$160 million), making this the right time to take advantage of growth funding. While there is a legitimate concern about what would happen if every single county expanded and growth funds were exhausted before each county was fully reimbursed, it is highly unlikely that every county will expand, particularly in the immediate future. As such, there is a significant incentive for counties to expand *now*, when there is significant growth funding available and few counties availing themselves of it.

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THERE IS OVER \$160 MILLION IN STATE GROWTH FUNDING, WITH PRIORITY FOR REIMBURSING COUNTIES WHO EXPAND CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES. A 10% EXPANSION IN CONTRA COSTA COULD SERVE AN ADDITIONAL 500-700 KIDS PER YEAR.

THE BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Service Enhancement through Expansion

Contra Costa County's existing continuum of care for children and adolescents requires expansion and enhancement in order to address the unmet mental health need county-wide. The following key enhancements to the children's continuum of care would save considerable public dollars, promote public safety, and invest in youth health and wellbeing:

- (1) **Community-based crisis services** to reduce the use of law enforcement as the primary mental health responder in the community, enhancing the availability of Mobile Response Teams, crisis stabilization, and crisis residential treatment options for youth.
- (2) **Enhanced alternatives to keep children and adolescents in school and out of court**, using Therapeutic Behavioral Services, Wraparound/In-Home Behavioral Services, and probation-focused evidence-based practices to address truancy and delinquency.
- (3) **Prevention and early intervention services in early childhood and in schools**, to identify and address mental health needs early through integrated, multi-tiered and data-driven services for all children ages 0-17.

Children and youth are in need of increased access to mental health services, and the county must come together to meet those needs and ensure that providers have the necessary resources to provide the highest quality services. There is powerful and exciting momentum — among county leadership, the provider community and other stakeholders— across Contra Costa County to collaboratively identify creative and responsive solutions to the barriers that prevent children from accessing the services to which they are entitled.

Contra Costa County can experience substantial cost savings, enhanced public safety and improved outcomes for children and youth with mental health needs by ensuring that all children and youth receive the mental health services they need to grow and thrive. We must come together to nurture healthy kids, to cultivate safe schools, and to build strong communities, throughout Contra Costa County.

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