



# Fact Sheet: Strategies to Improve California's System for Supporting Youth Mental Health

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The coronavirus pandemic created a perfect storm of stress, anxiety, and trauma that amplified preexisting challenges to young people's mental health. To make matters worse, California has long struggled to support children's mental and emotional health adequately.

To address COVID's impact on young people's mental well-being and achieve lasting improvements in children's mental health care, the Little Hoover Commission calls on California to establish centralized leadership to promote sustained coordination, collaboration, and accountability around mental health.

In its 2021 report, [\*COVID-19 and Children's Mental Health: Addressing the Impact\*](#), the Commission identifies ways in which California can ramp up its efforts to provide crucial mental health supports to the state's youth:

- Establish a single point of overall leadership for children's mental health. The Governor and Legislature should also initiate a review process to examine the creation of a new Department of Behavioral and Mental Health, with coequal focus on children's mental health.
- Set overarching and unifying statewide goals for child mental health based on key metrics related to overall mental well-being, access to care, and quality of services.
- Support accountability around outcome goals by awarding competitive funding to counties and health plans that effectively and efficiently implement successful reforms/programs and reach identified benchmarks.

- Promote coordination around children's mental health care and services by increasing support and technical assistance to counties, health plans, and other mental health providers.
- Leverage the Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative to encourage local educational agencies to develop comprehensive, actionable plans for coordinating student mental health services, using and sharing data, and integrating new and existing funding to create sustainable mental wellness programs.
- Mitigate risks associated with developing the Behavioral Health Initiative's virtual platform by establishing a clear timeline for the development, testing, and piloting of the program, with vigorous oversight at every stage of development.

Once implemented, these recommendations will help California better address the mental health needs of the state's youth.

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