

# It's Time To Take Action for Youth Mental Health

## *A message from Jim Leonard, CEO, Magellan Behavioral Health of Pennsylvania, Inc.*

As we approach two years of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, the mental health of our youth has become a significant issue that requires everyone's attention. [This is an unprecedented moment in which our society can no longer afford to be indifferent or silent.](#)<sup>1</sup> Across the country, emergency departments are seeing an increasing number of children in emergency departments (EDs) for mental health-related care. From mid-March 2020 to October 2020, the CDC reported a 24% increase in mental health-related ED visits among children aged 5-11 years and a 31% increase in youth aged 12-17 years, compared with the same period in 2019.<sup>2</sup>

At Magellan Healthcare in December 2020, our team of experienced behavioral health professionals published a [full clinical monograph](#) concerning the prevention and treatment of problematic behaviors and various types of behavioral health challenges in children and adolescents. Through this work nationally and through our continued efforts here in Pennsylvania for more than 20 years addressing and advocating for the mental health of our youth, we are very supportive of last week's U.S. Surgeon General Advisory titled, "[Protecting Youth Mental Health.](#)" In particular, the section in the Advisory titled, '**What family members and caregivers can do,**' is quite relevant as we go through the holiday season. I encourage you to review the Advisory in full and find opportunities during the holiday season and beyond to share these areas of focus below (specific tactics and additional detail on pages 16-17 of the Advisory) to improve the resiliency and mental health of our youth.

### **What family members and caregivers can do<sup>3</sup>**

- Be the best role model you can be for young people by taking care of your own mental and physical health.
- Help children and youth develop strong, safe, and stable relationships with you and other supportive adults.
- Encourage children and youth to build healthy social relationships with peers.
- Do your best to provide children and youth with a supportive, stable, and predictable home and neighborhood environment.
- Try to minimize negative influences and behaviors in young people's lives.
- Ensure children and youth have regular check-ups with a pediatrician, family doctor, or other health care professional.
- Look out for warning signs of distress and seek help when needed.
- Minimize children's access to means of self-harm, including firearms and prescription medications.
- Be attentive to how children and youth spend time online.
- Be a voice for mental health in your community.



<sup>1</sup> - [https://www.magellanofpa.com/media/6612/121621\\_mglN-statement\\_surgeon-general-advisory.pdf](https://www.magellanofpa.com/media/6612/121621_mglN-statement_surgeon-general-advisory.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> - <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6945a3.htm>

<sup>3</sup> - <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf>