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FOUNDATION



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FACT SHEET COMPILED BY JENI STARR

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**APS MENTAL HEALTH SERIES:  
FROM RESISTANCE TO RESILIENCE**

**POLITICS  
& POLICY**

## **How can politics and policy affect mental health?**

Mental health does not discriminate by political party and people are affected by mental health conditions regardless of political stances.

To look at how politics affect access to mental health services, Mental Health America (MHA) combined Gallup data with their own system of Access to Care Rankings. The result was that the top ten states with the best access to mental health care were almost evenly split among Democratic leaning, Republican leaning, and competitive states. In their Access to Care rankings, MHA ranks Kansas 22nd and Missouri 36th in access to care out of 50 states and the District of Columbia.<sup>(1)</sup>

Decisions made at the Federal, State, and Local policy level affect access to mental health care. According to the World Health Organization, "A mental health policy is an official statement by a government or health authority that provides the overall direction for mental health by defining a vision, values, principles and objectives, and by establishing a broad model for action to achieve that vision."<sup>(2)</sup>

### **Federal, State, and Local Mental Health Access**

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) is an example of Federal policy that affects access to mental health care, though it is one of many. As of 2014, under the ACA, most individual and small group health insurance plans are required to cover mental health services, including substance use disorder services. The ACA also expanded Parity. This means that health insurance must provide mental health and substance abuse treatment as equally as other medical or surgical care.<sup>(3)</sup>

At the state level, neither Missouri nor Kansas has accepted federal Medicaid expansion. Medicaid expansion would provide more access to coverage and care for people with mental illness. A bipartisan Medicaid expansion bill failed in the 2020 legislative session in Kansas. It is estimated that 150,000 Kansans would become eligible for Medicaid coverage under expansion.<sup>(4)</sup>

In Missouri, Medicaid expansion was approved as a ballot measure and will appear on the August primary ballot.<sup>(5)</sup> It is estimated that approximately 315,000 adults will be eligible to enroll in the program in Missouri if the measure passes.<sup>(6)</sup>

State laws also determine health insurance mandates, policies for state psychiatric hospitals, admissions for emergency psychiatric holds, and more.

At the local level, Jackson County, Missouri has a Community Mental Health Levy overseen by a Board of Trustees. This Levy generates funds for mental healthcare to provide a safety net. The board determines how funding is used.<sup>(7)</sup>

In Johnson County, Kansas the county government operates the Johnson County Mental Health Center which is licensed as a Community Mental Health Center. The leadership of this center reports to the Assistant County Manager and an Advisory Board appointed by the Board of County Commissioners.<sup>(8)</sup>

## Mental Health Crosses Party Lines

1 in 5 adults has a mental health condition.



will deal with a mental health condition at some point in their life.

### POLICIES HAVE AN IMPACT

Many decisions about how we address mental health occur at the state and local level--  
**more than anything else, where you live can ultimately determine your access to care.**



### Access to Care Rankings

- |                          |                    |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Vermont               | 27. Wyoming        |
| 2. Massachusetts         | 28. Hawaii         |
| 3. Maine                 | 29. Ohio           |
| 4. Connecticut           | 30. Illinois       |
| 5. Minnesota             | 31. Kentucky       |
| 6. New Hampshire         | 32. Nebraska       |
| 7. South Dakota          | 33. Utah           |
| 8. Rhode Island          | 34. West Virginia  |
| 9. Iowa                  | 35. Montana        |
| 10. Alaska               | 36. Missouri       |
| 11. District of Columbia | 37. Indiana        |
| 12. Pennsylvania         | 38. Virginia       |
| 13. Maryland             | 39. Oklahoma       |
| 14. Wisconsin            | 40. Arizona        |
| 15. Delaware             | 41. Louisiana      |
| 16. Colorado             | 42. Idaho          |
| 17. New Jersey           | 43. Florida        |
| 18. Michigan             | 44. Arkansas       |
| 19. New York             | 45. South Carolina |
| 20. North Dakota         | 46. Texas          |
| 21. Oregon               | 47. Georgia        |
| 22. Kansas               | 48. Tennessee      |
| 23. New Mexico           | 49. Mississippi    |
| 24. Washington           | 50. Alabama        |
| 25. California           | 51. Nevada         |

■ Democratic Leaning ■ Competitive ■ Republican Leaning

### YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

No matter the party or place, mental health affects us all.  
**Make sure officials at all levels are held accountable for improving access to care.**



**ASK QUESTIONS. RAISE AWARENESS. USE YOUR VOTE.**

MHA  
 Mental Health America  
 #B4Stage4

## **Politics, Policy, and Stigma**

The stigma of mental illness can be affected by politics and policy. Stigma is defined by the Mayo Clinic as “when someone views you in a negative way because you have a distinguishing characteristic of personal trait that’s thought to be, or actually is, a disadvantage (negative stereotype).”<sup>(9)</sup>

Stigma can be increased by politicians and policies. For example, it is not uncommon for politicians to blame mental illness for gun violence. After two mass shootings in 2019, President Donald Trump addressed the nation by saying, “Mental illness and hatred pulls the trigger, not the gun.”<sup>(10)</sup>

The American Psychiatric Association followed the President’s remarks by stating, “It is important to note that the overwhelming majority of people with mental illness are not violent and far more likely to be victims of violent crime than perpetrators of violence. Rhetoric that argues otherwise will further stigmatize and interfere with people accessing needed treatment. Individuals can also be emboldened to act violently by the public discourse and divisive rhetoric.”<sup>(11)</sup>

In 2008, the US Supreme Court endorsed prohibition of gun ownership by “felons and the mentally ill” because of their special potential for violence. However, according to the National Center for Health Statistics, fewer than 5% of gun-related killings in the United States were perpetrated by people diagnosed with mental illness from the years 2001-2010.<sup>(12)</sup>

Conversely, when politicians use their influence to share positive messages about mental health stigma can be reduced. For example, Former Missouri Secretary of State Jason Kander very publicly dropped out of the Kansas City mayoral race in 2018 citing the need to focus on his mental health. After taking time off and sharing his story of therapy and healing, he is leading the national expansion of the Veterans Community Project.<sup>(13)</sup>

## **Mental Health and the Political Climate**

The political climate in the United States can also increase stress and affect mental health. The American Psychological Association publishes a yearly report titled *Stress In America*. In the 2019 report, 56% of U.S. adults cited that the 2020 presidential election was a stressor – more than one year before the election. This is up from 52% during the last presidential election in 2016. In the same report, 38% of adults reported feeling the country is on the path to being stronger than ever. However, this differs among varying political affiliations with 62% of Republicans, 35% of Independents, and 25% of Democrats agreeing with the statement that the country is on the path to being stronger than ever.<sup>(14)</sup>

Politics can affect both feelings and relationships. A study conducted in 2019 and published in the journal *PLoS ONE* reported that among those surveyed, 38% agreed that “Politics has caused me to be stressed”, 26.4% agreed, “I have become depressed when a preferred candidate lost”, and 20% reported that “Differences in political views have damaged a friendship I valued.”<sup>(15)</sup>

# MENTAL HEALTH IN THE UNITED STATES

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ISSUES AFFECT MILLIONS OF ADOLESCENTS AND ADULTS IN THE UNITED STATES.



## 1 MENTAL ILLNESS



ABOUT 1 IN 5 ADULTS AGED 18 OR OLDER HAD A MENTAL ILLNESS

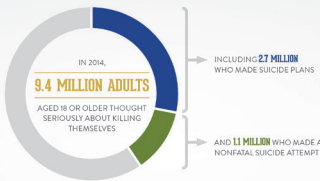


## 2 MAJOR DEPRESSIVE EPISODE

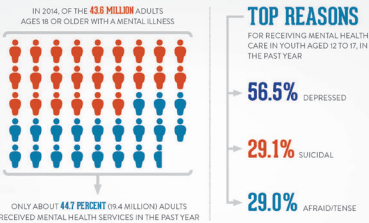


OVER 1 IN 10 ADOLESCENTS (11.4%) HAD A MAJOR DEPRESSIVE EPISODE IN THE PAST YEAR

## 3 SUICIDE



## 4 TREATMENT<sup>2</sup>



### SOURCE

Data, except as otherwise noted: Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality (2015). Behavioral Health Trends in the United States: Results from the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/>

<sup>1</sup> Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality (2015). Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors Among Adults: Results from the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/>

<sup>2</sup> Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality (2015). Receipt of Services for Behavioral Health Problems: Results from the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/>

For further reading:

Mental Health In America – Election Year: Mental Health and Politics <https://www.mhanational.org/issues/mental-health-america-election-year-mental-health-and-politics>

Laws and Regulations Pertaining to Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services <https://www.samhsa.gov/about-us/who-we-are/laws-regulations>

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SAMHSA's mission is to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities.  
1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4772)  
1-800-458-5232 (TDD)  
[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)



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