


YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH IN WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA

Insights from the 2024 WNC Healthy Impact Online Key Informant Survey (n = 283)

Youth mental health in North Carolina remains a serious concern. A regional survey of key informants across WNC identified assets and barriers across five key themes (below). Key informants report that behavioral health workforce shortages, limited behavioral health infrastructure, insufficient school-based mental health staffing, and geographic barriers to care are major drivers of unmet need among youth.

 <p>ACCESS TO CARE</p> <p>What is Helping</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> FQHCs providing integrated behavioral health services Telehealth Expansion <p>What is Hurting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth behavioral health provider shortages Long waitlists Distance to care 	 <p>CARE COORDINATION</p> <p>What is Helping</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Growing school-provider partnerships for care coordination and referral <p>What is Hurting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulty coordinating post-hospitalization follow-up care Referral challenges Limited case-management support 	 <p>PREVENTION & EARLY INTERVENTION</p> <p>What is Helping</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing school-based prevention programs Community education & awareness efforts <p>What is Hurting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited early intervention services Needs reach crisis-level before being addressed 	 <p>YOUTH ENGAGEMENT & SUPPORTIVE SPACES</p> <p>What is Helping</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing mentorship, recreation, library-, & faith-based groups provide support <p>What is Hurting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safe, structured after-school and community spaces are limited 	 <p>SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH</p> <p>What is Helping</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong community networks, local nonprofits, & family support initiatives <p>What is Hurting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poverty, stigma, & family stress affects youth mental health Transportation in rural areas
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What Key Informants Told Us

“Families sometimes travel two to six hours to access inpatient mental health care.”
— Healthcare Provider

“Kids are discharged from psychiatric hospitals with no psychiatrist available for follow-up care.”
— Healthcare Provider

“The majority of our youth are living in poverty situations.”
— Community Leader

“We desperately need services for early intervention before youth reach the point of hospitalization.”
--Community Leader

“There aren’t enough providers to meet the demand. Many students are being waitlisted for months.”
--Healthcare Provider

The Youth Data Gap

Key informants and community partners identify a **long-standing (and worsening) youth data gap in WNC**. Existing statewide data shows...

57.6%
of NC children ages 3-17 report difficulty obtaining mental health care.
(NCIOM & NC Child, 2025)

30%
of NC high school students report their mental health is “not good most of the time.”
(CDC, n.d.)

9.5%
of NC high school students report attempting suicide.
(KFF, n.d.)

Access the full report, including methodology, on the WNC Health Network website at [Resources - WNC Health Network](#).

Please direct questions or comments to Erin Braasch, Executive Director (Erin.Braasch@wnchn.org).

