

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.



ACCESS TO CARE

What is Helping

- FQHCs providing integrated behavioral health services
- Telehealth Expansion

What is Hurting

- Youth behavioral health provider shortages
- Long waitlists
- Distance to care



CARE COORDINATION

What is Helping

- Growing school-provider partnerships for care coordination and referral

What is Hurting

- Difficulty coordinating post-hospitalization follow-up care
- Referral challenges
- Limited case-management support



PREVENTION & EARLY INTERVENTION

What is Helping

- Existing school-based prevention programs
- Community education & awareness efforts

What is Hurting

- Limited early intervention services
- Needs reach crisis-level before being addressed



YOUTH ENGAGEMENT & SUPPORTIVE SPACES

What is Helping

- Existing mentorship, recreation, library-, & faith-based groups provide support

What is Hurting

- Safe, structured after-school and community spaces are limited



SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

What is Helping

- Strong community networks, local nonprofits, & family support initiatives

What is Hurting

- Poverty, stigma, & family stress affects youth mental health
- Transportation in rural areas

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).

