



Executive summary

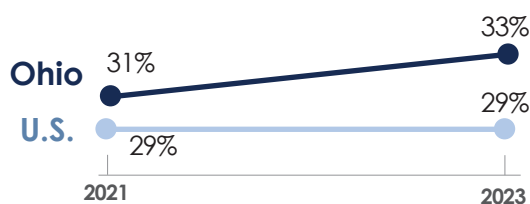
Connections between youth mental health and the juvenile justice system

Many experiences shape the mental health of children and youth, including relationships with family and peers, traumatic events and interactions with the juvenile justice system. By ensuring the health and well-being of children, juvenile justice policies can prevent delinquent behavior and improve community safety.

Figure 1. Poor youth mental health

Percent of high school youth who reported that their mental health was most of the time or always not good, Ohio and U.S., 2021-2023

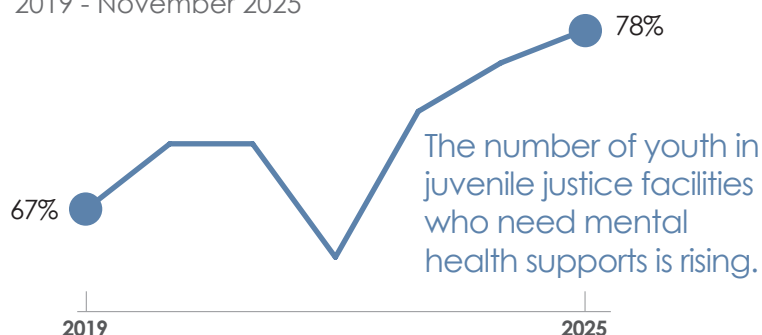
Youth mental health in Ohio has worsened in recent years, in contrast to the U.S. overall.



Source: Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System

Figure 2. Justice-involved youth who need mental health supports

Percent of youth in juvenile correctional facilities who are on the mental health caseload, Ohio, November 2019 - November 2025



Note: Youth on the mental health caseload have been assessed and identified as having a mental health condition requiring treatment or services

Source: HPIO analysis of Department of Youth Services Monthly Fact Sheets

3 Key findings for policymakers

1 Juvenile detention is harmful for youth mental health, resulting in higher rates of depression and suicidal ideation among justice-involved youth. Research finds that detention does not effectively deter delinquent behavior.

2 Some groups of young people, such as Black, Hispanic and LGBTQ+ youth, are unfairly overrepresented in the juvenile justice system. They are also more likely to have experienced trauma and discrimination, as well as poverty and a lack of neighborhood safety, compounding risk for poor mental health.

3 Strengthening crisis intervention, diverting youth from justice involvement and improving mental health treatment access within detention facilities are critical for reducing juvenile justice involvement and improving outcomes. Youth in DYS facilities need consistent access to evidence-based mental health treatment both while detained and after release.

Taking action

State policymakers can implement the following types of policies to improve mental health outcomes for at-risk youth, promote accountability, cultivate community safety and prevent justice involvement and delinquent behavior:



Strengthen crisis intervention

Increase diversion from the juvenile justice system

Improve mental health treatment access for youth in Department of Youth Services (DYS) facilities

Taking action

To improve mental health outcomes for at-risk youth and prevent justice involvement, while preventing delinquent behavior, promoting accountability and cultivating community safety, state policymakers can implement the following policies (a complete list of recommendations can be found in the [full report](#)):

Strengthen crisis intervention

State policymakers can:

- ▶ **Expand access to [Crisis Intervention Teams \(CIT\)](#) training specific to the needs of youth**, including resources provided by the [Ohio Criminal Justice Coordinating Center of Excellence](#), so that law enforcement agencies, community behavioral health treatment providers, school-based health teams, and other community organizations can better assist youth during behavioral health crises.

Increase diversion from the juvenile justice system

State policymakers can:

- ▶ **Require or incentivize commercial insurers to expand coverage** of community mental health services used for diversion, such as multisystemic therapy and functional family therapy, to better align with Ohio Medicaid benefits.

Improve mental health treatment access for youth in DYS facilities

State policymakers can:

- ▶ **Require individualized reentry planning** so that youth reentering their communities have continuous access to treatment, including health insurance enrollment and warm handoffs to community treatment providers, including access to evidence-based treatment modalities (e.g., [cognitive-behavioral therapy](#), [multisystemic therapy](#), [functional family therapy](#)).
 - a. Ensure that local juvenile justice, behavioral health and child-serving organizations are aware of the [new opportunity](#) to cover screening, diagnosis and enhanced case management services for Ohio youth in the 30 days prior to release from a juvenile justice facility ([CAA Section 5121](#)).
 - b. Pursue [CAA section 5122](#), which allows states to provide Medicaid coverage to eligible youth during pretrial detention.



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