

Mental Health Issues Among Indiana Youth

Mental health includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being, and the combination of these factors influences how individuals think, feel, and act. Additionally, mental health helps to determine how individuals handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is a crucial aspect of overall well-being. Children who experience prolonged or frequent poor mental health may have trouble developing key coping and social skills and are at an increased risk of many long-lasting physical health conditions like diabetes, heart disease, and stroke.¹

Indiana's Mental Health America's National 2024 rankings:

23rd for youth at risk for depression

13th for youth at risk for PTSD

24th for youth at risk for suicidal ideation

19th for youth at risk for Psychosis-like experiences

Source: Mental Health America

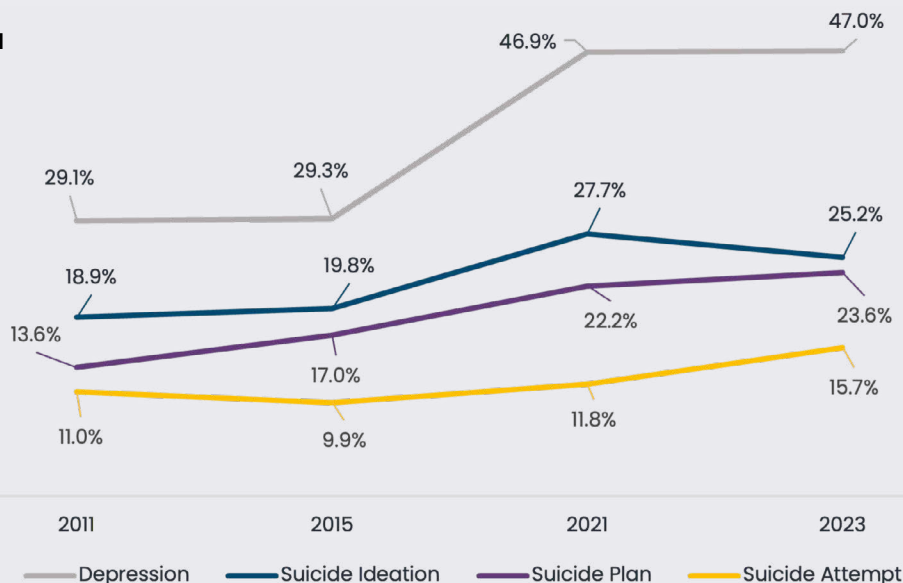
According to the 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), depression is widespread, with 47% of high school students reporting they experienced it within the past year, in trend with the 2021 survey (46.9%). Among Indiana's 9th to 12th graders, a third of students reported poor mental health "most of the time or always," an increase from the previous survey year (30.7%). The survey indicated a rise in the number of high school students that made a suicide plan (23.6%) and who actually attempted suicide (15.7%) from the previous year; 11.8% and 22.2% respectively.²

Suicide has been one of the **top three causes of death** for Indiana children between the ages of **10 to 19** for at least the **past seven years**.

Source: Indiana Department of Health

Students in Grade 7th–12th Reported Mental Health, Indiana: 2011 – 2023

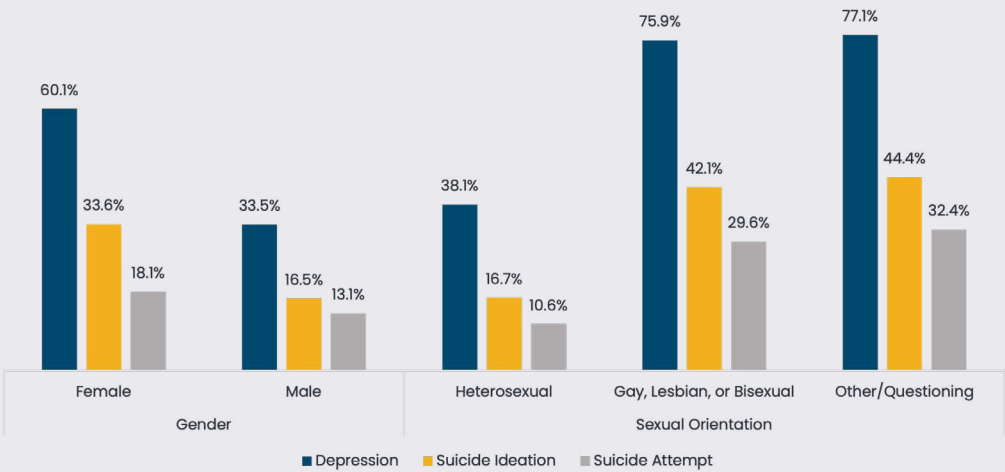
Source: Indiana Department of Health, Youth Risk Behavior Survey



Student reported mental health data reveals gender and sexual orientation disparities. Trending in line with the 2021 YRBS data, female students were twice as likely to report mental health challenges compared to their male counterparts in 2023. Also consistent to the previous year survey, LGBTQ+ students continued to report significantly higher rates of poor mental health, suicidal ideation, and actual suicide attempts than their heterosexual peers.³

**Students in Grade 9th–12th
Reported Mental Health by
Gender and Sexual Orientation,
Indiana: 2023**

Source: Indiana Department of
Health, Youth Risk Behavior Survey



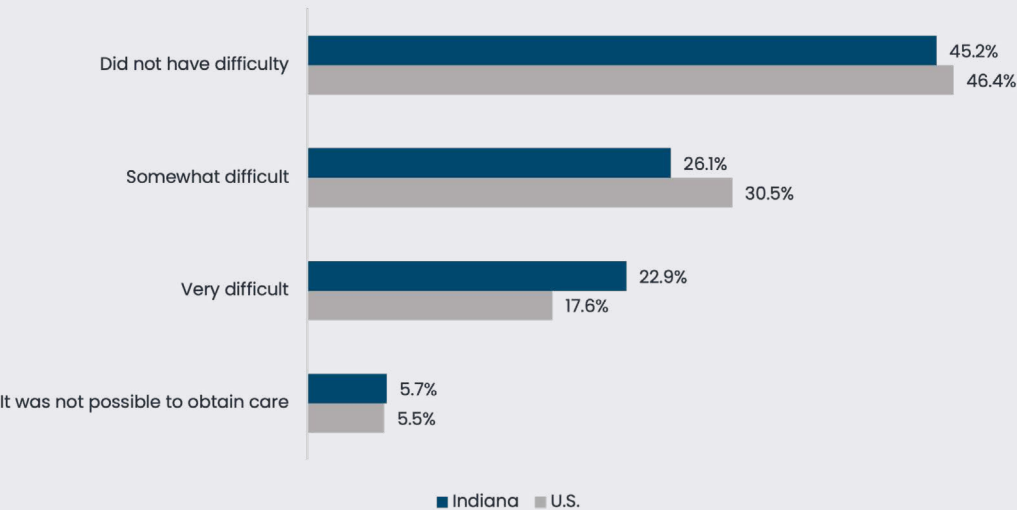
Barriers to accessing necessary care prevent many Indiana children from receiving the treatment they need. The Mental Health America (MHA) 2024 State Report highlights an increase of 10.8 percentage points from the previous year of Indiana youth who experienced major depression but did not receive the necessary treatment (66.4%).⁴ Additionally, the National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH) reveals that over a quarter of Indiana parents (27.6%) reported they found it very difficult or impossible to access mental health treatment for their children in 2022, higher than the national average (24%).⁵

Indiana is ranked **42nd** nationally for **youth with major depression** that did not receive any mental health treatment in **2024**, a major drop in ranking from the previous year (27th).

Source: Mental Health America

**Parent of Children 3–17 Years
Reported Difficulties Obtaining
Mental Health Care, Indiana :
2021–2022**

Source: National Survey of
Children’s Health, Indicator 4.18



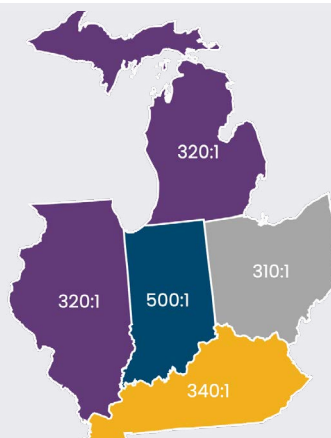
Contributing to the challenge is the shortage of mental health providers. Indiana has one of the highest provider-to-population ratios in the country, with one provider for every 500 residents as of 2023. While this is an improvement on the previous year (530:1), it is still well below the neighboring states and national ratio (320:1).⁶

91 of Indiana's **92** counties had a mental **health provider shortage** in **2022**, seeing no change from 2021.

Source: Indiana Department of Health

Mental Health Provider Ratio: 2023

Source: County
Health Rankings



How Can Youth-Serving Organizations Support the Mental Health of Indiana Youth?

To improve mental health among adolescents and increase access to mental health supports, youth-serving organizations can implement a variety of strategies that promote positive mental health outcomes among the youth they serve. Though many of the resources below are geared toward schools and teachers, the practices and recommendations are applicable to anyone working with youth, including youth workers and youth-serving organizations, to support youth mental well-being beyond the classroom.

Training and Capacity Building

- **Staff Training and Awareness:** Staff with direct interaction with youth should be trained to recognize signs of mental health issues, trauma, and stress in youth. This can be achieved through training programs such as [Youth Mental Health First Aid](#) from the National Council for Mental Wellbeing or providing similar [resources](#) from UCLA's Pritzker Center's [School Wellbeing Toolkit](#).
- **Youth Peer Mentorship:** Introduce quality mentorship programs that allow older or experienced youth to become peer mentors. Cross-age peer mentorship programs provide mentors with a sense of responsibility with adult oversight and have shown [promising positive outcomes](#) among mentees. These programs are used by MENTOR and the National Mentoring Resource Center, who provide [guides](#) for youth peer mentorship.

Promote Mental Health Literacy

Mental health literacy and education can be implemented within an organization's programs, helping to teach youth how to manage stress, practice self-care, and recognize early signs of mental health issues. To properly increase mental health literacy and reduce stigma among students, program and youth-facing staff need adequate education and curriculum. Mental Health Literacy has numerous resources provided in [their toolbox](#) to increase literacy around mental health, as well as [guides](#) to both **learn** and **teach** mental health literacy. The CDC acknowledges the importance that increasing literacy plays in improving adolescent mental health and provides several [resources and strategies](#) aimed at increasing literacy among students.



Internal Policy and Resource Development

Clear policies that prioritize youth mental health, including access to services, crisis response plans, and policies that protect youth from discrimination, bullying, and violence are important components in addressing youth mental health. These policies can be based and rely on national standards like [these guidelines](#) from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Internal policies and responses to youth suffering from mental health issues should also include procedures to coordinate with families or caregivers to utilize mental health resources here in Indiana. The Department of Mental Health and Addiction (DMHA) in Indiana provides several services for youth through [Indiana System of Care](#). While Mental Health First Aid can be valuable in addressing immediate mental health needs or crises, youth-serving organizations should have clearly defined procedures to work with the child's guardian in providing long-term mental health care. These procedures can range from ensuring that parents and youth are aware of services like the [988 Lifeline](#) or [Youthline](#), connecting families to a local [NAMI Indiana Affiliate](#), or providing information on DMHA's Child Mental Health Wraparound Services.

Citations

1. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (2020). [What is mental health?](#)
2. Department of Health (2024). [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#).
3. Department of Health (2024). [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#).
4. Mental Health America (2023). [The State of Mental Health in America](#).
5. National Survey of Children's Health (2022). Indicators [4.4](#) and [4.4a](#).
6. County Health Rankings (2024). [Indiana](#).