

Protecting the mental wellbeing of children is vital to reduce the negative impact on the health, quality of life, and potential opportunities of future generations. While this has always been the case, COVID-19 has shined increased light on

children living below 100% of the federal poverty level, more than 22% have a mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder.⁸ Payers are uniquely positioned to make great impact on the trajectory of mental health as children age.

Payer support of legislation that addresses early intervention, education, and access to care is essential to mitigate long-term physical and mental health conditions as children age. Additionally, the implementation of targeted, culturally sensitive programs across environments and in support of caregivers are needed. The following are recommendations for payers in this pursuit.



- » Strong Youth Strong Communities (SYSC) is an initiative focused on today's youth with the goal of positively impacting current and future communities. Led by the Centene Corporation, in partnership with the Pro Football Hall of Fame, and several national organizations including National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and National Council for Mental Wellbeing, SYSC events bring together a diverse group of partners to address the academic



Research indicates the pandemic has **increased suicide among teens**



- » Youth in foster care often face unique challenges in comparison to their peers. Research suggests online technology can assist children in foster care with learning and gaining educational skills that may be lacking due to frequent school and home disruptions.¹⁶ Centene along with partners AT&T, Connected Nation, Dell Technologies, and Intel have come together under the K-12 Digital Divide Program to bridge the Digital Divide among youth in foster care by enabling greater internet access. Within this initiative, more than 1,000 laptops and 2,200 hotspots will be donated to foster care agencies across Florida and Missouri. The foster care agencies will then work to distribute the devices to youth identified as having the greatest need. These technologies will facilitate greater ease of access to the internet for schoolwork, telehealth, behavioral health services, online tutoring, job searches, and other daily activities enabling the use of

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- » Primary care providers and pediatricians are increasingly called upon to provide guidance for not only physical health concerns, but mental health as well. Routine screenings that assess behavior



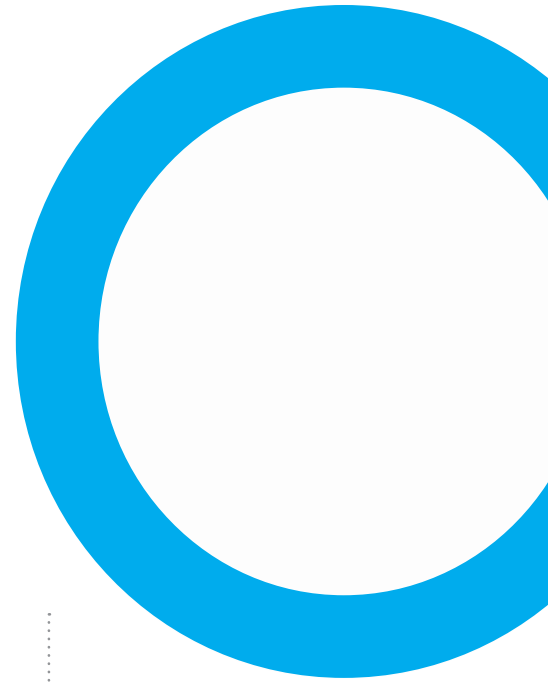
for seeking help with parenting challenges, substance misuse, and SDoH factors, payers can support caregivers and decrease long-term adverse impact on children in the household.

- » Across multiple states, Centene health plans have implemented community-integrated social services technology platforms to connect members with community benefit organizations. The platforms enable real-time information sharing and centralized access to community support systems, helping members access resources for improved health and quality of life.
- » For those already struggling to access nutritious food and other necessities, the COVID-19 pandemic caused additional hardship for individuals, families, and communities. In partnership with Feeding America®, Centene committed to donating one million meals per month, for 12 months, to feed communities struggling with food insecurity across the country. Over the years, this partnership has yielded a number of initiatives designed to equip food banks and health plans with best practice guidelines for meeting the needs of individuals experiencing food insecurity, including the development of medically tailored food boxes.
- » As a means of providing members and providers with information and resources surrounding children's mental health, Centene Advanced Behavioral Health has developed educational materials focused on the importance of mental wellbeing and its effect on overall health. The materials encourage parents and caregivers to take care of their own mental health, how to recognize signs of mental health concerns in children, promote the importance of routine doctor visits, and encourage them to reach out for assistance if needed.
- » Through a collection of proprietary books targeted to adult, teen, or youth audiences, Centene's My Route to Health series encourages health literacy, provides valuable health education, and supplies parents with resources to promote healthy conversations with their children. The books address a variety of health topics including the importance of healthy eating and exercise, bullying, and condition-specific care management for conditions such as diabetes and sickle cell disease. A dedicated parent/caregiver book accompanies the youth books to help educate caregivers on the topic at hand as well as emotional and developmental milestones, and to foster proactive, positive strategies for engaging the child on the issue. Also within the collection is a caregiver journal developed to provide tools, ideas, and insight for anyone caring for a loved one. It contains information from tips to organizing records to how to stay healthy while coping with the challenges of caregiving. These books, available to all health plan members at no cost, are used by Centene health plan case managers and community health workers when working one-on-one with members and are distributed at community events. The My Route to Health series has delivered over 1,000,000 printed books to children, including those in foster care.

FEDERAL & STATE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Prevention, access, and quality treatments are essential components to achieving improved mental health in children. This is inclusive of educational programs and increased funding for resources to help parents and caregivers address their mental health needs as well as provide stability in the home life of children. As one of the largest Managed Care Organization in the country, serving 1 in 15 individuals, Centene has gained insight and experience with the ongoing needs of populations facing barriers to mental health care. Policies and funding that support vulnerable populations are necessary to the delivery of care required to help our country heal from not only the pandemic's economic impact, but the undeniable influence it has had on the mental and physical health of our nation.

- » The Biden administration recently announced nearly \$85 million in funding for mental health awareness, training, education, and treatment. The funding includes \$10.7 million from the American Rescue Plan for the Pediatric Mental Health Care Access Program, which trains primary care providers to treat and refer children for mental health issues.¹⁹



- » TeleBH can improve member engagement and treatment results, reduce stigma concerns, increase provider access, and reduce social determinant barriers. Primary Care Providers and Pediatricians are the first, and sometimes only, point of care for mental health concerns. The use of TeleBH has the potential to address limited access to mental health specialists, specifically child and adolescent psychiatrists and psychologists; promote integrated care; and encourage appropriate prescribing patterns through physician consultations and virtual care appointments. Centene supports policy efforts that address appropriate long-term sustainability of TeleBH, increase alignment of regulation across state and federal levels, and eliminate regulatory barriers that may impede care delivery.

Summary

Early intervention, culturally inclusive education, and equitable access to mental healthcare is essential to safeguard the mental health of children and future generations. Payers are uniquely positioned to play a critical role in advancing mental healthcare delivery through continued support of innovative technology,