



2022-2023 CHAIR'S INITIATIVE

STRENGTHENING YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

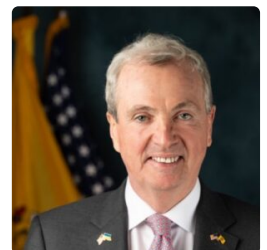
The United States faces a nationwide youth mental health crisis. The roots of this crisis existed before COVID-19, but the pandemic has both exacerbated and highlighted the scope of the challenges in addressing this issue. The time is right and the need has never been more apparent to discuss proven and innovative solutions for states.

Strengthening Youth Mental Health: A Governor's Playbook

Even before the pandemic turned the world upside down, our young people were struggling with a mental health crisis that has only grown more serious in recent years. Yet we have reason to feel optimistic that we can reverse these trends and help our children.

Over the past year, we have spent countless hours meeting with those on the front lines of this crisis, and we have seen innovative approaches, thoughtful programs, and effective models across the country. Together, they form the basis of this playbook that states, policymakers, and stakeholders can use to address youth mental health challenges.

These are issues that impact every community – urban, suburban, and rural, east, west, north, and south. There are no geographic boundaries or political party lines. As Governors, one of our most important and sacred responsibilities is protecting the health and well-being of our state's children. Mental health is just as important as physical health, and while many are unfamiliar with the signs and symptoms of mental illness, we're encouraged by the extensive efforts taking place across the country to raise awareness and reduce stigma. As more and more people know it's okay to say they're not okay, we know we're seeing significant progress.



But this crisis is too deep and complex for any state or organization to solve on its own. It requires partnership from everyone, especially the folks on-the-ground in our communities – young people, parents, caregivers, educators as well as business, community, and faith-based leaders to work together. The pages of this playbook contain examples of successful policies and initiatives that use this all-hands approach to address youth mental health needs, and it is our hope that more states will implement similar policies.

We want to extend our deepest thanks to everyone who shared their expertise in helping to create this playbook. We are especially grateful to those who shared their lived experience. Throughout my year as Chair, this Initiative has honored the need to listen to youth voices and perspectives to collaboratively find more effective ways to meet the mental health needs of our youth.

Our kids deserve better, and we can do better. It will not be easy, but this playbook offers a path to ensuring young people can get the help they need when they need it. Together, we can help our youth and our communities heal.

— **New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy, NGA Chair**



If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide or experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis, 988 provides 24/7 connection to confidential support. There is Hope. Just call or text 988 or chat [988lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org)

Bubba Wallace Promotes Youth Mental Health Awareness



Executive Summary

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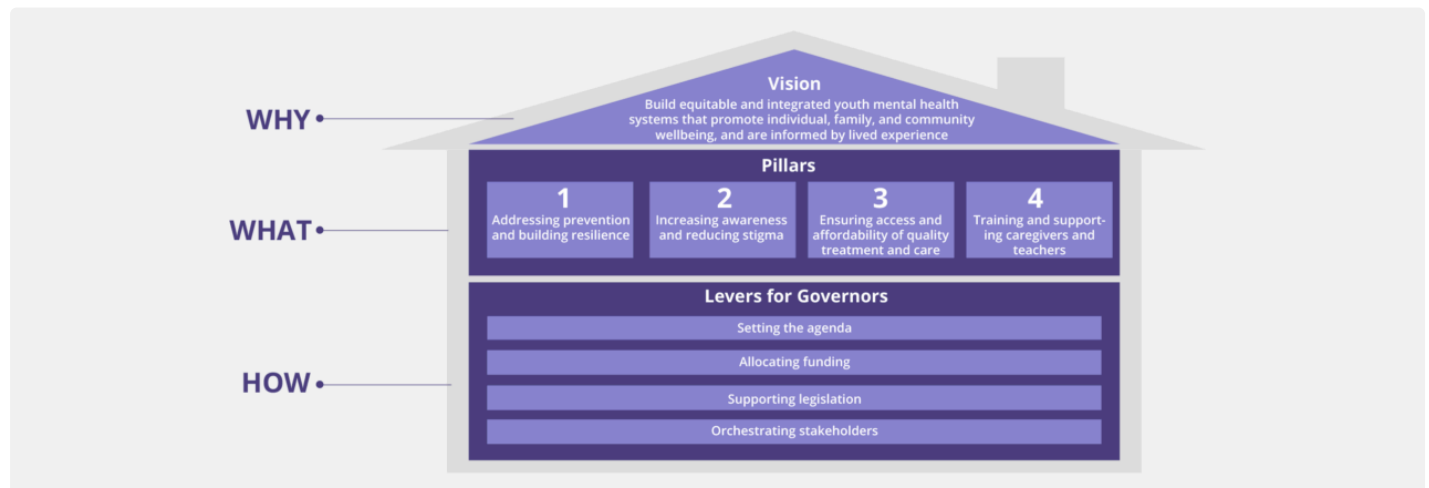
Across the country, on social media, in pop culture, around kitchen tables and in state capitols, the focus on youth mental health has become increasingly common. Governors and policymakers at all levels of government and on both sides of the aisle are continuing to seek to make positive impacts on youth mental well-being and the systems that support young people. As Chair of the National Governors Association (NGA), New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy sought to harness the bipartisan efforts and national focus on youth mental health and made Strengthening Youth Mental Health the focus of his year-long NGA Chair's Initiative. The Strengthening Youth Mental Health Initiative brought together close to 500 people, including youth, Governors and other experts, in four convenings held across the country to discuss the current state of youth mental health systems and advance best practices and implementable, impactful solutions for states. *Strengthening Youth Mental Health: A Governor's Playbook* is a culmination of those discussions as well as more than 50 learning calls with national experts.

The *Playbook* is intended to serve as a tool for states to further impactful policy solutions that strengthen youth mental health. Nationally, the current state of youth mental health is often labeled as a crisis – youth have not

been provided the tools and resources they need to thrive, young people often do not know where to go to begin to understand their mental health needs and they face a mental health care system that is often inaccessible and unaffordable when they do need it. Young people are not alone in their efforts to support their own mental and emotional health. Parents, caregivers, educators, peers and other youth-facing adults want to support the mental well-being of the youth in their lives but face similar barriers to understanding what they need and how to help them. The *Playbook* provides states with actionable solutions to address each of these concerns.

The Strengthening Youth Mental Health Initiative consists of four pillars that address the core challenges to a system that supports youth and helps their mental well-being. Altogether, the four pillars address the continuum of youth mental health, helping states to address the needs of youth in crisis today, while ensuring that systems focus on holistically supporting youth mental well-being to help future generations succeed. The four pillars are:

1. **Addressing prevention and building resilience:** Supporting youth with the necessary tools to respond to stressors and challenges, reducing the risk of mental health conditions, and proactively identifying and managing existing conditions to prevent crises.
2. **Increasing awareness and reducing stigma:** Promoting awareness of mental health knowledge and resources, and decreasing the social, self and structural stigma around youth mental health challenges.
3. **Ensuring access and affordability of quality treatment and care:** Removing the barriers to care, including unaffordable costs, lack of insurance coverage and a depleted workforce to ensure that high-quality, trauma-informed and culturally relevant care is accessible to youth in appropriate places, spaces and timeframes to meet their needs.
4. **Training and supporting caregivers and educators:** Expanding training and supports so that those caring for and interacting with youth daily have the understanding and tools to identify mental health needs to access relevant supports.



The opportunities noted in the *Playbook* are not exhaustive of all potential actions that Governors can take to address youth mental health in their states, but are instead a representative collection of replicable, implementable and impactful solutions that are already underway across the country. The ultimate goal of the *Playbook* is to help Governors understand the best practices and ideal status of youth mental health systems and then to provide examples and context for how to adapt and implement them in their states.

Further, the *Playbook* recognizes there is a vast diversity of youth identities and experiences that interact with mental health outcomes in unique ways. The Strengthening Youth Mental Health Initiative deliberately does not define an age range or limit the focus of policy opportunities to specific types of youth to empower Governors to determine the target audiences for the mental health programs in their states across their unique backgrounds, experiences and stages of life.

Finally, while the *Playbook* can be utilized as a standalone resource, it is not the only support available to states in conjunction with this effort. The *Playbook* represents the culmination of Governor Murphy's Chair's Initiative, but the Strengthening Youth Mental Health effort will continue on beyond his time as NGA Chair. In addition to the representative sampling of state efforts included in the *Playbook*, a more comprehensive database of Governor's collective efforts can be found at: www.nga.org/youthmentalhealth. The NGA and Strengthening Youth Mental Health partners also remain accessible for technical assistance for implementation of the *Playbooks* recommendations as well as guidance on additional efforts Governors can pursue to Strengthen Youth Mental Health in their states across the country.

▶ Introduction

▶ Pillar 1: Addressing Prevention and Building Resilience

▶ Pillar 2: Increasing Awareness and Reducing Stigma

▶ Pillar 3: Ensuring Access and Affordability of Quality Treatment and Care

▶ Pillar 4: Training and Supporting Caregivers and Educators

▶ Way Forward and Supporting Next Steps

▶ Acknowledgements

▶ Additional Resources

[Download the Playbook](#)

Strengthening Youth Mental Health: Training And Supporting Caregivers And Educators

In response to rising rates of mental health distress among young people, NGA Chair New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy introduced his NGA Chair's Initiative last July. Through the Strengthening Youth Mental Health initiative, Governors from across the nation are collaborating to develop bipartisan solutions.

The fourth and final roundtable of the National Governors Association **2022-2023 Chair's Initiative on Strengthening Youth Mental Health was held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on May 18, 2023**. NGA Chair

New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy and First Lady Tammy Murphy were joined by Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro and First Lady Lori Shapiro, Delaware Governor John Carney and state representatives from Louisiana, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. Conversation centered on the role states can play to enable and equip a wide range of caregivers and educators with training and tools to support youth mental health.

The roundtable opened with a conversation with Goldie Hawn, Academy Award winning actress and founder and CEO of the Hawn Foundation. The Hawn Foundation's signature program, **MindUP**, aims to help children and their families better understand the brain science behind resiliency and develop tools to manage emotions and stress. Ms. Hawn spoke on the importance of teaching youth that they can have agency over their mental health and providing them the tools to do so.

State Policy Solutions Discussed At The Roundtable Include:

- ▶ **Educator And Community Training And Support**
- ▶ **Caring For The Caregivers**



Governors Lead Roundtable On Access And Affordability Of Care

During a **two-day roundtable event** in Detroit, held April 19-20, 2023, Governor Murphy and Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer held discussions with First Spouses, private sector leaders, and policy and subject matter experts focused on the role of states in ensuring access and affordability of quality youth mental health treatment and care. New Jersey First Lady Tammy Murphy, North Carolina First Lady Kristin Cooper and North Dakota First

Lady Kathryn Burgum spoke at the event, which also focused on expanding access and quality of care for **maternal and infant health**.

“Every single kid deserves to have their mental health supported. As governors, we’re committed to ensuring that the young people in our states – and every state – can access the mental health support they need to thrive.”

Governor Phil Murphy and Governor Gretchen Whitmer (Detroit News)

State Policy Solutions Discussed At The Roundtable Include:

- ▶ **Access And Affordability**
- ▶ **Workforce Development**
- ▶ **System Alignment And Innovation**

Youth Mental Health: Promoting Access And Affordability Of Quality Treatment And Care



2023 NGA Winter Meeting

NGA Chair New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy opened the the 2023 NGA Winter Meeting with **a plenary session on Strengthening Youth Mental Health**. In response to rising rates of mental health distress among young people, Governor Murphy first introduced his NGA Chair’s Initiative in July of 2022. Through the Strengthening Youth Mental Health initiative, Governors from across the nation are collaborating to develop bipartisan, state solutions.

Governor Murphy and Utah Governor Spencer Cox provided opening remarks before turning the discussion over to moderator Dr. Alfiee Breland-Noble, Founder, The AAKOMA Project.

Addressing Youth Mental Health



The panel, consisting of Governor Murphy, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, Dr. Richard Besser, CEO, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Reina Chiang, a college student and founder of the nonprofit, “u matter apparel,” and First Lady Tammy Murphy discussed elevating and expanding the national conversation around youth mental health and the close link between youth mental health and maternal and infant health. **Watch the full session.**

“As leaders, one of the most important and sacred responsibilities is protecting the health and well-being of our kids, and for far too long, mental health and well-being of our young people has been overlooked, and the consequences are impossible to miss. From small towns to big cities, America’s youth mental health crisis is playing out in homes, schools, hospitals and beyond.”

Governor Phil Murphy



Governor Murphy And Governor Polis Join Forces To Tackle Youth Mental Health Crisis

The second roundtable of the 2022-2023 NGA Chair's Initiative: Strengthening Youth Mental Health **was held on January 24-25, 2023, in Santa Monica, California.** During the two-day roundtable, NGA Chair New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy and Colorado Governor Jared Polis held discussions with parents, physicians, pediatric psychologists, educators, policymakers and other mental health experts. Over the two days, roundtable discussions unpacked the Initiative's second pillar focusing on themes of building a foundation of diversity and equity in addressing stigma, reducing the stigma of mental health and seeking help, and increasing awareness around youth mental health.

Compared to previous generations, young people today are much more open to talking about mental health and want to play an active role in reducing the stigma surrounding mental health challenges to promote mental wellbeing. Throughout the convening, the young leaders in attendance shared impassioned stories of both their own mental health struggles and the many ways in which youth are organizing to break the stigma. Despite this progress, stigma continues to be a major barrier to young people reaching out for help. Although half of mental health disorders begin by age 14, treatment is often delayed by a decade or more as youth and their families grapple with feelings of fear and shame. Stigma is a reality across different settings: cultural disconnects or generational divides within the home can make it difficult to talk about mental health, and misconceptions continue to pervade attitudes in educational settings, places of worship, and workplaces. Bias, conscious or unconscious, within the healthcare system, can also have a stigmatizing effect on those who need respect, understanding, and support from providers.



Solutions To Break The Stigma And Support The Conversation Around Mental Health

Governors can increase awareness and reduce stigma by supporting:

- **Existing community-based mental health organizations' awareness-building efforts:** Ensuring funding and other resources get to organizations with deep knowledge of their communities' mental health challenges
- **Targeted anti-stigma campaigns with a focus on storytelling:** Developing efforts driven and co-designed by young people, that reach young people on social media, and are focused on diverse populations, including youth of color and Indigenous youth, LGBTQIA+ youth, youth involved in the foster care system, etc. Governors can also humanize mental health by using their platforms to share their personal journeys with mental health
- **School mental health curriculums:** Growing capacity for mental health literacy for youth and their families by implementing age-appropriate awareness of the spectrum of mental health, bolster mental wellbeing, and encourage youth to seek help, as well as adopting family engagement plans and public-private partnerships to tap into the knowledge and support of thought leaders in the private or nonprofit sector
- **Suicide stigma reduction:** Normalizing discussing suicide and suicidal ideation, making them less “scary” and unbroachable topics by training youth peers, as well as the adults who live and work with youth, on appropriate and compassionate responses to someone who is experiencing intrusive thoughts can help to reduce the silence around suicide
- **Sensitivity training for adults interacting with youth:** Enabling sufficient support, care, and treatment for youth experiencing mental health challenges through bias, sensitivity, and cultural responsiveness training for healthcare professionals, educators, and others
- **The power of peer networks:** Recognizing a recent Active Minds survey that found that 67% of young adults first tell a friend they are feeling suicidal before telling anyone else – supporting the development of a diverse mental health workforce of peer supporters and community health workers to complement a workforce that is able to provide culturally competent care when and where families need it at the level that is needed; including through trainings on mental health identification and crisis management

- **Crisis services that meet youth where they are:** Protecting young people's privacy and enabling trust through innovative services such as anonymous text lines or apps and in building youth-specific crisis response systems including home-crisis models
 - **Delivery systems improvements to promote trust and safety:** Addressing the experience patients have when they seek care after breaking the stigma of seeking help, including addressing the trust gap between patients and the health care system
 - **Increased awareness of people working in programs that support the well-being needs of youth:** increasing awareness of youth mental health among all state systems and agencies that touch the lives of youth and their families, including public health staff, human services staff, youth employment systems, out of school time staff, justice, or housing and child welfare systems
 - **Safe and supportive school environments:** Implementing mental health awareness and stigma-reducing tools in schools such as anti-bullying measures and adding information on seeking mental health (988) to student IDs, utilizing yearly school climate improvements surveys to understand current youth needs; incorporating trained peers into campus programming; and considering alternatives to exclusionary discipline
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Governors And States Meet On Prevention And Resilience In Youth Mental Health

On October 18-19, 2022, in Salt Lake City, Utah, National Governors Association (NGA) Chair New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy and NGA Vice Chair Utah Governor Spencer Cox held the first of four roundtables to discuss the 2022-2023 NGA Chair's Initiative: Strengthening Youth Mental Health. A strong state contingent was represented, including Alabama, Arkansas, Minnesota, New Mexico, and Pennsylvania. States were joined by over fifty community leaders, academic experts, and representatives from partner organizations and funders.

The convening centered on practical solutions for the first of the initiative's four pillars: *prevention and resilience building*. Discussions forged connections across the public and private sectors, shared best practices across states and territories to amplify their impact, and aligned on ways that Governors can further support youth mental health.

Key themes on prevention and resilience were unpacked across three discussions that centered the voices of those with first-hand experience of youth mental health from different perspectives; focused on applying the brain and behavioral science of resiliency, specifically to provide opportunities to build and rebuild mental health in youth; and oriented the group towards practical and implementable solutions. Credentials spanning academia, government, business, and community service were interwoven with personal stories of delegates' lived experience.

Despite the immense challenge, the roundtable discussion coalesced around hope: evidence shows that prevention and resilience building in childhood and adolescence can fundamentally change the trajectory of a child and family's life. Given supportive environments and the right skillset, the effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and exposure to toxic stress can be successfully managed to prevent mental health challenges from developing or worsening. Strengthening youth mental health, starting with prevention and a focus on resilience, needs to be a key priority within all levels of government, and across all sectors of society.

- **More information and a read out from the Convening**
- **Governor Murphy and Governor Cox op/ed: The Wake-Up Call for Youth Mental Health**

Governors And States Meet To Talk Prevention And Resilience In Youth Mental Health



About The Initiative

Governor Phil Murphy's 2022-2023 Chair's Initiative is focused on four key pillars to address youth mental health:



Addressing Prevention And Resilience Building

Providing youth with the supports and tools necessary to cope with stressors and challenges, helping them to thrive and reduce likelihood of engaging in unhealthy or damaging behaviors.

Increasing Awareness And Reducing Stigma

Promoting awareness of mental health resources and foundational mental health knowledge by expanding easy access points to education, helplines and state services.

Insuring Access And Affordability Of Quality Treatment And Care

Addressing the barriers that prevent youth from accessing care including ensuring high quality care is available in the places, spaces, and timeframes that youth want and need, and that costs and lack of insurance coverage do not prevent access.

Training And Supporting Caregivers And Teachers

Examining not just the core issues around youth mental health, but also considering the impacts of youth mental health challenges, including the tie-in to academic recovery.

Expanding existing training and supports so that those caring for and interacting with youth daily have the tools and understanding to identify mental health needs and how to facilitate access to supports for youth

2022 Summer Meeting - Chair's Initiative: Strengthening Youth Mental Health



Improving Maternal And Infant Health

In addition, First Lady Tammy Murphy is leading an effort focused on maternal and infant health (MIH). This **has been a significant area of focus** in New Jersey throughout the Murphy Administration and this effort seeks to elevate and expand the conversation around maternal and infant health nationwide.

The four pillars of this effort are:

- **Centering Women's Voices in MIH Policy** – This area focuses on the importance of integrating the voices of mothers and women of color in the policymaking process, making sure they have a seat at the table before the table is even built.
- **Improving and Utilizing Maternal and Infant Health Data** – Improving data systems by incorporating qualitative data on maternal health experiences, linking state data and increasing accessibility to data to improve accountability.
- **Expanding Access and Quality of Care** – Identifying ways for states to ensure citizens have access to high quality maternal and infant care, including various MIH Medicaid policies that states can look to implement.
- **Elevating Innovative MIH Policies, Programs and Technologies** – Identify and highlight innovative and novel approaches to MIH policy, including highlighting effective programs and examining the role of technology to improve MIH outcomes.



[Learn More](#)

2022 Summer Meeting

2022 Summer Meeting Panel on Youth Mental Health & Maternal and Infant Health



Insights – Youth Mental Health & Maternal And Infant Health

NGA has collated a variety of resources from stakeholders to assist Governors and their staff with strengthening youth mental health, and improving maternal and infant health. These resources leverage the expertise of NGA partners to provide insights to assist with delivering specific program areas and cross-program tools and best practices.



Shifting Upstream: State Actions to Support School Mental Health Reporting and Adolescent Health

Addressing the US's youth mental health crisis requires a multi-pronged approach that includes highlighting and supporting the enable appropriate intervention earlier. Reports highlight the need for more support and resources in schools. Recommendations and examples of policy practices are provided to address the

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