

Governor Phil Murphy

# Governor Murphy Announces Release of New Jersey Youth Mental Health Strategic Plan

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*Recommendations Mark Culmination of Murphy Administration's Work to Strengthen Youth Mental Health in New Jersey*

**TRENTON** – Governor Phil Murphy today announced the release of the [New Jersey Youth Mental Health Strategic Plan](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jo8rqn/7ys5259b/r6fcwdb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!PlgdD7VnOEthnJ0hEUj8qb3kFfcmDDgVfOzT9AIW628xVFmcJllyo3FVvLE) ([https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jo8rqn/7ys5259b/r6fcwdb\\_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!PlgdD7VnOEthnJ0hEUj8qb3kFfcmDDgVfOzT9AIW628xVFmcJllyo3FVvLE](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jo8rqn/7ys5259b/r6fcwdb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!PlgdD7VnOEthnJ0hEUj8qb3kFfcmDDgVfOzT9AIW628xVFmcJllyo3FVvLE)) a roadmap to sustain progress across the State's continuum of youth mental health supports. The plan shares strategies that are already underway and highlights additional opportunities to foster youth resiliency, reduce stigma, facilitate care delivery, and support caregivers.

"Youth mental health has been a defining priority of my Administration – and was a key focus during my time as Chair of the National Governors Association," **said Governor Murphy**. "Our children are facing increasing isolation and social pressure brought on by our ever-changing digital landscape and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It's up to us to meet this moment with action and provide proper resources to support their complex mental health needs."

As Chair of the National Governors Association from 2022 to 2023, Governor Murphy raised national attention to the youth mental health crisis and consolidated best practices from across the country in [Strengthening Youth Mental Health – A Governor's Playbook](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jo8rqn/7ys5259b/7ygcwdb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!PlgdD7VnOEthnJ0hEUj8qb3kFfcmDDgVfOzT9AIW628xVFmcJllyo3FVvLE) ([https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jo8rqn/7ys5259b/7ygcwdb\\_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!PlgdD7VnOEthnJ0hEUj8qb3kFfcmDDgVfOzT9AIW628xVFmcJllyo3FVvLE](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jo8rqn/7ys5259b/7ygcwdb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!PlgdD7VnOEthnJ0hEUj8qb3kFfcmDDgVfOzT9AIW628xVFmcJllyo3FVvLE)). The New Jersey Youth Mental Health Strategic Plan builds upon that work—highlighting strengths honed since the COVID-19 pandemic and offering strategies to expand prevention, early intervention, and crisis response through collaboration among government, schools, health care providers, and community members.

Key recommendations in the strategic plan to sustain the work of the Murphy Administration into the future include:

- Responding to the evolving threat to youth mental health from technology and social media by preparing students to become responsible digital citizens, ensuring a distraction-free education through a bell-to-bell cell phone ban in K-12 schools, adopting recommendations from the report of the NJ Commission on the Effects of Social Media on Adolescents, and offering safe and accessible digital platforms to seek mental health supports.
- Expanding upstream prevention interventions by preparing community members, family, and educators to recognize the signs of mental health concerns and to help youth build resilience.
- Promoting insurance coverage and offering a robust suite of covered services under NJ FamilyCare to provide affordable treatment options.
- Ensuring warm handoffs for youth in transition periods – either returning to school after residential treatment or transitioning to college or employment.
- Including youth voice and lived experience by meeting youth where they are and engaging youth in program planning and feedback.
- Expanding the behavioral health workforce by creating a pipeline for peer support training and offering education incentives for those looking to serve in mental health professions.
- Tailoring supports and services to best meet the complex mental health needs of specific populations including LGBTQ+ youth, New Americans, college students, and youth with disabilities.
- Continuing collaboration and sharing resources and best practices among community partners, health care providers, schools, and government entities.

Governor Murphy enacted several laws this month in accordance with the strategic plan:

- [S3695/A4882](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jo8rqn/7ys5259b/nrhcwdb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!PlgdD7VnOEthnJ0hEUj8qb3kFfcmDDgVfOzT9AIW628xVFmcJllyo3) ([https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jo8rqn/7ys5259b/nrhcwdb\\_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!PlgdD7VnOEthnJ0hEUj8qb3kFfcmDDgVfOzT9AIW628xVFmcJllyo3](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jo8rqn/7ys5259b/nrhcwdb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!PlgdD7VnOEthnJ0hEUj8qb3kFfcmDDgVfOzT9AIW628xVFmcJllyo3)) requires all school districts in New Jersey to adopt policies creating a bell-to-bell ban on cell phones and personal internet-enabled devices. Creating a distraction-free educational environment has proven to improve student academic success and wellbeing.
- [A1715/S3184](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jo8rqn/7ys5259b/3jicwdb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!PlgdD7VnOEthnJ0hEUj8qb3kFfcmDDgVfOzT9AIW628xVFmcJllyo3) ([https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jo8rqn/7ys5259b/3jicwdb\\_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!PlgdD7VnOEthnJ0hEUj8qb3kFfcmDDgVfOzT9AIW628xVFmcJllyo3](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jo8rqn/7ys5259b/3jicwdb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!PlgdD7VnOEthnJ0hEUj8qb3kFfcmDDgVfOzT9AIW628xVFmcJllyo3)) public institutions of higher education to invite the Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey onto their campuses to provide students with important information on the risks associated with gambling, access to compulsive gambling counseling services, and details about self-exclusion programs and other available support resources.
- [A3016/S4050](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jo8rqn/7ys5259b/jcjcwdb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!PlgdD7VnOEthnJ0hEUj8qb3kFfcmDDgVfOzT9AIW628xVFmcJllyo3) ([https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jo8rqn/7ys5259b/jcjcwdb\\_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!PlgdD7VnOEthnJ0hEUj8qb3kFfcmDDgVfOzT9AIW628xVFmcJllyo3](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jo8rqn/7ys5259b/jcjcwdb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!PlgdD7VnOEthnJ0hEUj8qb3kFfcmDDgVfOzT9AIW628xVFmcJllyo3)) clarifies that mental health and suicide resource centers, including the 9-8-8 crisis hotline centers, may place follow-up calls, texts, or chat messages to minors aged 16 years and older identified at high risk of health by suicide without the need for parental authorization.
- [A1657/S2380](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jo8rqn/7ys5259b/z4jcwdb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!PlgdD7VnOEthnJ0hEUj8qb3kFfcmDDgVfOzT9AIW628xVFmcJllyo3) ([https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jo8rqn/7ys5259b/z4jcwdb\\_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!PlgdD7VnOEthnJ0hEUj8qb3kFfcmDDgVfOzT9AIW628xVFmcJllyo3](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jo8rqn/7ys5259b/z4jcwdb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!PlgdD7VnOEthnJ0hEUj8qb3kFfcmDDgVfOzT9AIW628xVFmcJllyo3)) permits a student assistance coordinator, school counselor, or school psychologist or other mental health professional working in a school district to refer, or help facilitate the referral of, a student to an individual or practice licensed to provide professional counseling, for mental health assessments and services.

An interagency team, including the New Jersey Departments of Education, Children and Families, Health, and Human Services and the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, as well as two youth advisors with lived experience, developed the strategic plan with technical assistance from the NGA Center for Best Practices.

This Strategic Plan cements the legacy of the Murphy Administration in prioritizing the mental health of New Jersey's youth while building robust and sustainable supports to help them thrive. Key youth mental health accomplishments include:

- Established the New Jersey Statewide Student Support Services (NJ4S), using a hub-and-spoke model to provide prevention and intervention support to students, families, and school staff throughout the state. Since the launch of NJ4S in September 2023, 591 schools are receiving services through the program.

- Partnered with Uwill to provide college students at 45 New Jersey colleges and universities with free, 24/7 access to virtual mental health services, including teletherapy, crisis connection and wellness programming, as well as access to a diverse network of licensed and qualified mental health providers who have received multicultural competency training.
- Launched the 2NDFLOOR Youth Helpline mobile app, which provides 24/7/365 confidential and anonymous support via phone, text, and its website for New Jersey youth ages 10-24 years. Since its launch, the app has been downloaded more than 5,000 times and is actively used by youth in all 21 New Jersey counties.
- Launched and bolstered the 9-8-8 system of care to ensure New Jerseyans in crisis have someone to call, someone to respond, and somewhere to go.
- Deployed the SAFE NJ Program, an initiative to provide trauma-informed mental health and safety resources to schools across New Jersey. The program includes a trauma-informed Anonymous Reporting System, direct connections for students to New Jersey-based licensed mental health counselors through a partnership with the 2NDFLOOR Youth Helpline.
- Rebalanced the Children's System of Care rates for the first time in 15 years to significantly invest in providing care management and connections to behavioral health services to youth under the age of 21 years, at no charge to families, regardless of insurance status.
- Allocated \$17 million for workforce loan redemption, benefiting eligible mental health and addiction professionals and helping retain providers in high-need communities.
- Published the Comprehensive School-Based Mental Health Resource Guide to assist schools in developing, implementing, and evaluating mental health supports and services.
- Issued the [Prevent Suicide NJ Toolkit](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jo8rqn/7ys5259b/fxkcwdb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!PgdD7VnOEthnJ0hEUj8qb3kFfcmDDgVfOzT9AIW628xVFmcJllyo3) (https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jo8rqn/7ys5259b/fxkcwdb\_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!PgdD7VnOEthnJ0hEUj8qb3kFfcmDDgVfOzT9AIW628xVFmcJllyo3) a youth-led, mental health and resilience-focused suicide prevention toolkit providing safe-messaging guidance and customizable materials for school-based campaigns.

"The pervasive mental health epidemic affecting young people has resulted in a whole-of-government approach – a collaboration of state agencies, system partners and individuals with lived experience to assess and identify ways we can enhance the programs and services available to help meet the growing mental health needs of youth and their families," said **Department of Children and Families Commissioner Christine Norbut Beyer**. "I applaud Governor Murphy for his commitment to this cause, the investments made during his tenure toward building the state's behavioral health workforce, prevention services, and the efforts made over the last two years in developing this critical roadmap designed to guide our work moving forward and to keep young people safe, healthy, and connected."

"The Youth Mental Health Strategic Plan is an important step in supporting students across New Jersey," said **Department of Education Commissioner Kevin Dehmer**. "Educators are often the first to notice when a student may be struggling, and schools play a key role in connecting students and families to the help they need. This plan strengthens those connections so every student can get the right support to succeed."

"New Jersey has been a leader in building a strong network of youth mental health resources and services to ensure that adolescents and young adults can access the prevention, treatment, and crisis intervention care that they need to thrive," said **Acting Department of Health Commissioner Jeff Brown**. "This strategic plan is a pivotal milestone in charting a sustainable path forward and outlining the shared responsibility of parents and caregivers, clinical providers, and youth to support one another through mental health challenges."

"Youth mental health has been a priority of the Murphy Administration since day one," said **Department of Human Services Commissioner Sarah Adelman**. "This plan highlights some of our achievements thanks to robust interagency coordination resulting in a stronger youth mental health system shaped by the young people themselves and responsive to today's challenges. There remain opportunities to continue to support our youth, including strengthening and diversifying the behavioral health workforce, expanding prevention and resilience-building in our communities, and addressing the evolving impacts of technology and social media. Together with comprehensive, affordable coverage through NJ FamilyCare, these efforts promote seamless support during critical transitions and deliver tailored care for vulnerable youth in crisis."

"Student mental health and well-being are essential to college completion," said **Angela Bethea, Acting Secretary of Higher Education**. "After the pandemic, OSHE found over 70 percent of New Jersey students were experiencing worsening levels of stress and anxiety. As part of the Murphy Administration's multi-agency response, we expanded and diversified access to care. Now, students across 45 campuses statewide benefit from free, 24/7/365 teletherapy alongside on campus counseling services. Together with expanded community provider partnerships, peer networks, and training for faculty and staff, more students are getting the support that fits their needs, from prevention resources to crisis intervention. Today's recommendations build on our proven strategies to strengthen youth mental health statewide."

## Governor Phil Murphy

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Office of Governor PO Box 001  
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