

SUPPORT legislation that increases transparency and data availability on Florida's behavioral health investments and their outcomes.

SUPPORT legislation that integrates behavioral health into pediatric primary care and educational settings, including through telemedicine.

United Ways in Florida are dedicated to advocating for **ALICE** (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) families and individuals who are often one emergency away from disaster. These individuals experience significant stress due to financial instability with the constant threat of a crisis that can severely impact their emotional, behavioral, mental, and physical well-being. This ongoing strain affects their daily lives and overall quality of life. In response to these challenges, United Ways are actively supporting efforts to expand access to behavioral healthcare.



BACKGROUND:

Access to behavioral healthcare remains an ongoing challenge for both adults and children in Florida. A report from the Florida Chamber of Commerce highlights that 75% of children with mental health challenges who receive care do so in primary care settings, such as family doctors or pediatricians. Florida's population is projected to continue its rapid growth, with an estimated average of 319,109 new residents per year between April 1, 2024, and April 1, 2028. This population increase will further elevate the need for behavioral health services.

WHAT CAN BE DONE:

- **Continue making preemptive investments in behavioral health services**, as the Legislature has done previously, to address Florida's growing population and the resulting demand.
- **Increase access to trained behavioral health professionals in dedicated mental health settings.** This is essential to effectively address the growing demand. While primary care providers play a critical role in general health, behavioral health care should not be primarily managed in these settings.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

Financial hardship and the inability to meet basic needs significantly contribute to mental health stressors. A 2024 TIAA report reveals that 42% of adults nationally report money negatively impacting their mental health. ALICE families and individuals are regularly confronted with economic decisions that often create severe financial constraints.

The impact is not limited to adults; children also suffer from the effects of financial stress. The struggles of parents or caregivers often trickle down to children, affecting their access to basic needs and overall well-being. This stress can lead to academic and social difficulties, which extend beyond childhood into adolescence and adulthood. America's Health Rankings shows that Florida ranks 42nd in the nation for the number of mental health professionals (psychiatrists, psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, counselors, marriage and family therapists, and advanced practice nurses) per 100,000 population. Minority and marginalized young people are at a higher risk for mental health difficulties due to factors beyond their control.

According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, mental health challenges are the leading cause of disability and poor life outcomes in young people. There have been significant increases in certain mental health disorders in youth, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. Many factors shape the mental health of young people, from individual to societal level forces. Although exacerbated by the pandemic, this trend was recognized earlier than 2020.