

2023 PAMED LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Mental Health Services Access

The unique challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic increased the push for mental health awareness in our country. The Pennsylvania Medical Society (PAMED) remains committed to improving mental health services within primary care settings across the Commonwealth.

PAMED has supported previous initiatives by the legislature that would allow for independent primary care practices to provide mental health care for their patients.

[A 2018 study by the World Health Organization](#) stated, "The key advantages of delivering mental health care through primary care are that it is accessible, affordable, and acceptable to people with mental health problems and their families addressing health inequities and ensuring continuity of care for this population."

Mental health integration in primary care promotes comprehensive, coordinated, and patient-centered care, especially for those with comorbid physical and mental health problems.

Key Items:

- [Increasing access to mental health](#) services aids in lessening the stigma of psychological and behavioral health issues.
- [According to a 2022 World Health Organization](#) study, there was a 25% increase in anxiety and depression after the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - o These affected mostly young adults and women.
 - o [CDC published an analysis](#) on the mental health of U.S. high school students during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the data, 37% of high school students reported they experienced poor mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic and 44% reported they persistently felt sad or hopeless through 2021.
 - o [In a 2018 report](#) on mental health in primary care, the World Health Organization noted that globally, depression is a leading cause of illness and disability among adolescents, and suicide is a leading cause of death in 15-19 years old.
- Lack of access to mental health services contributes to an increase in the utilization of hospital emergency departments. [According to the National Syndromic Surveillance Program by the CDC](#), an evaluation of 190 million emergency department visits from the end of 2018 to 2020 revealed 6 million people had at least one behavioral symptom.



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