



# NEWSLETTER

*December 2022 Edition*

## **Contents:**

- Supporting Child Well-Being through Housing Stability
- Lived Experience Insights
- YRBS Published
- The One Thing! A Year-end Look at Social Connectedness of Youth
- OCMH Updates
- Legislative & Policy Update
- Children's Mental Health in the News
- Of Interest

**Welcome to the Office of Children's Mental Health (OCMH) December Newsletter!**

## **Supporting Child Well-Being through Housing Stability – Newest OCMH Fact Sheet**

***An estimated 20,000 students in Wisconsin are homeless, according to the Department of Public Instruction.***

The effects of housing instability impact health and well-being and often last for years, impacting children for the long-term.

Homelessness, even short-term, is traumatic and has a major impact on children's development. Children who experience homelessness have significantly higher rates of emotional, behavioral, and physical health problems. Youth who experience this kind of trauma often have lower self-esteem, which can lead to increased risk for substance use and suicide. On the other hand, youth who live in stable housing have better mental health, physical health, school attendance, academic performance, participation in extracurricular activities, and improved earnings later in life.

Affordable housing and housing assistance lead to better outcomes for kids, both in the short-term and long-term. Children who live in subsidized housing have lower levels of lead in their blood, have increased earnings as adults, and are less likely to be incarcerated later in life. However, only a quarter of eligible households receive this type of housing assistance.

Read the complete [Fact Sheet](#), see the references, and learn what families, schools, and policymakers can do to help ensure stable housing.



*(more)*

## Lived Experience Insights

*Peer Recovery Coach and OCMH Lived Experience Partner Michelle Gilbank shares her insight on housing instability. Michelle lives in Marshfield, WI.*



Housing stability is important because of the effect of housing instability.

When my daughter, Tessa, was removed from my care, I was told I couldn't go home. I had been using drugs with Tessa's father and had been living with him. I became homeless. All my friends who offered me a place to stay were using drugs. I wasn't strong enough to be exposed to that all the time and I wouldn't have gotten Tessa back if I was in that environment. I lived in my van for nine months because I didn't want to be in that environment. Being homeless is very damaging to your mental health – I ended up suicidal and entered myself into crisis services.

After you've been homeless, it's nearly impossible to find someone to rent to you because you don't have the immediate references they look for. It took me 27 denials to find my place. I had Section 8, and the rent at the place I was finally approved for was \$25 too expensive according to Section 8. The landlord reduced the rent to make it work for me.

It has transformed our lives to have a home that we can afford. We felt safe for the first time. If you don't have a stable family or unconditional people in your life, your home is your ground, it's your space. People think folks end up homeless because they made bad choices. We got into this whole mess because I was renting a house for me and my daughter, but the owner was not applying my rent payments to the mortgage. We got foreclosed upon. There was nothing else comparable anywhere that I could afford. So, it was either move to Rhinelander to live with my dad or move in with Tessa's dad.

Now I'm on the Board of Directors for Habitat for Humanity for Marshfield. I'm also on Central Wisconsin Partnership for Recovery. For anyone in active recovery for six months, we can cover rent for a whole year, so hopefully they can find housing even if they have a bad rent history. I'm also a Rent Smart trainer, so I teach about budgeting and rights around renting. I want to house everyone who doesn't have a house!

- Michelle Gilbank

## Youth Risk Behaviors Survey (YRBS) Published

Statewide data published by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) on December 6, 2022 shows Wisconsin students experienced significant mental health challenges while having fewer supports at school and at home last year. The findings come from self-reported surveys administered to Wisconsin high schoolers in 2021. Specific findings reported include:



- More than half of all students surveyed (52%) had "significant problems with anxiety," with eight of 10 students who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual saying they had anxiety challenges.
- Two of every three female student surveyed (66%) reported experiencing anxiety.

- Over a third of surveyed students (34%) reported suffering depression in 2021. That is the highest level recorded since the survey began asking teens if, during the last 12 months, they ever felt sad or hopeless almost every day for at least two weeks in a row to the point that they stopped doing usual activities. The majority (66%) of LGB students and nearly half (46%) of female students said they felt sad or hopeless almost every day.
- 18% of all students surveyed seriously considered suicide in the past 12 months, the highest rate since 2003. Nearly half (48%) of LGB students surveyed reported they seriously considered suicide – four times higher than their heterosexual peers – and, at one in four (25%), female students were more than twice as likely than males to seriously consider suicide.
- Among all students, 8% said they attempted suicide, with 22% of LGB students and 11% of females saying they had attempted suicide.
- Females, students who are LGB, students of color, students receiving special education services, students with health conditions, and students facing food insecurity all reported experiencing greater challenges while having fewer supports.
- Fewer students feel they belong at their school (61%). The rate of school belonging has dropped 10 percentage points in five years.

“These findings support what we know – that Wisconsin youth need our help now” said Linda Hall, Office of Children’s Mental Health Director. “The increasing trends in anxiety and depression and disconnection among our young people that were happening prior to the pandemic have only gotten worse. We must foster social connectedness. This starts with spaces – schools, homes, and communities – that are safe and welcoming to bolster kids’ sense of belonging, which improves their well-being.”

The YRBS is administered to Wisconsin public school students on a voluntary basis. The study is in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Registration is currently open for the 2023 YRBS which will be administered between January 3 and June 30, 2023. School districts are encouraged to participate in this important study.

The YRBS is a pivotal source of data on children’s mental health and overall well-being. It drives much of our work and shapes our understanding of what kids need. If your district participates in the YRBS, you can analyze results in relation to the statewide data, but also county-level and CESA-level results. These data can be used to advocate for local changes, justify funding requests, and identify priorities around student mental health.

YRBS Resources:

- [Conducting a YRBS](#) (DPI)
- [YRBS data news release](#) (DPI)
- [YRBS results, trends, explorer](#) (CDC)

## The One Thing! A Year-end Look at Social Connectedness of Youth

Being socially connected is the one thing that can make a difference in children’s mental health. We’ve said this consistently since we started talking about [Social Connectedness of Youth](#). It is the one thing, across all ages from birth through young adulthood, that can positively impact children’s mental health.

Youth are socially connected when they are actively engaged in positive relationships where they feel they belong, are safe, cared for, valued, and supported. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention agrees, stating:



“Connectedness to family, peers, and trusted adults in schools and community organizations is key to protecting adolescent health. Students are more likely to thrive if they know they matter and that they have adults, teachers, and friends who care about their safety and success. These protections can last long into adulthood, leading to better mental health, and less substance use.”

OCMH identified Social Connectedness of Youth as its strategic focus in late 2021 and created collective impact teams in three areas: Cultural Identity/Community, Family, and Supportive Adult. The teams began meeting in June 2022 and finished the year with drafting goal ideas to support their individual team visions. Team visions are:

- [Cultural Identity/Community](#) – Young people are regularly involved in spaces that help them feel connected to one another and their culture or identity.
- [Family](#) – Children have warm, positive relationships with their family that make them feel like they belong, are safe, cared for, valued, and supported.
- [Supportive Adult](#) – Adults, especially older adults, connect with and establish affirming relationships with youth.

The next step for OCMH teams is to refine their goals and develop strategic action plans.

In addition to establishing impact teams, OCMH took the Social Connectedness of Youth message across the state, visiting eight communities July through October, showcasing organizations doing great work in connecting youth. The programs highlighted included:

- [Mental Health Matters](#) – Eau Claire/Chippewa Valley
- [Family Resource Center St. Croix Valley](#) – Baldwin
- [Washburn County Mental Health Task Force](#) – Spooner
- [In a New Light Gallery](#) – [Northwest Passage](#) – Webster
- [The Boys and Girls Club of Greater Green Bay](#) – Green Bay
- [Acceptational Minds](#) – Green Bay
- [Racine Unified School District Academies](#)/Racine Collaborative for Children’s Mental Health – Racine
- [Boys and Girls Club of Greater Milwaukee](#) – Milwaukee

We look forward to continuing our important work on social connectedness of youth in 2023!

## OCMH Updates

### Happy Holidays and Thank You!

Your team at OCMH wishes you and yours the very best this 2022 holiday season. We extend our heartfelt thanks to you for your commitment to children’s mental health. We treasure the relationships we have formed with those of you who are active on our teams, councils, and in our work. We simply can’t say it enough – THANK YOU and happy holidays!



### OCMH 2022 Annual Report Briefing: Wired for Social Connection – How Wisconsin Youth are Feeling and Connecting

Learn the status of children’s mental health, concerning trends, and what we can do to improve children’s well-being and social connection as we present our 2022 Annual Report.



**Friday, January 13, 2023 • 10-11 am**

Two ways to join:

- In person at the Wisconsin State Capitol (2 E. Main Street, Madison), GAR Hall (413 N) or
  - Virtual

[Register for this event.](#)

### **Connecting with Kids this Holiday Season**

OCMH hosted a panel discussion, on December 13<sup>th</sup>, for the media to provide tips on how adults can authentically engage and connect with kids during holiday gatherings.

Dr. Marcia Slattery, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, Professor of Psychiatry and Pediatrics, UW School of Medicine and Public Health -- who guided OCMH in the development of our Feelings Thermometer -- offered ideas on how to start conversations with youth at a holiday dinner. Prince, a 17-year old Wisconsin High School Student and OCMH Lived Experience Partner, offered ideas from his perspective on ways to talk with teens. He described how his grandfather successfully engages with him despite the huge generational divide between them. Both Prince and Dr. Slattery acknowledged that these conversations may sometimes feel awkward, but youth will feel seen and appreciate the effort. OCMH Director Linda Hall provided anxiety and depression data that paint a picture of the seriousness of our youth mental health crisis and the lack of belonging that kids feel.

A link to the full recording of this media event will soon be available on the OCMH [home page](#). We will also have links to brief outtakes that can be shared on social media. A list of Conversation Starter questions and Games to play that may lead to lighthearted conversation are available [here](#).

Holiday events with friends and extended family offer a tremendous opportunity for each of us to connect with young people to allow them to feel seen, valued, and heard. Even a less than one minute connection can make a difference – for the youth and for you!

### **Ideas to Make Your Holidays Meaningful**

The holidays are a great time to connect with loved ones and friends. OCMH offers ideas to make the holidays meaningful. Check out and share these flyers:

- [Gift & Art Activities](#)
- [Memory-Making & Fun](#)
- [Feeling Connected](#)



### **Youth Leadership in Systems Change and Relationships – Recording Available**

The OCMH November 4, 2022 Collective Impact Council meeting focused on youth leadership and featured speakers leading this work at a national level and state level:

- Kelly Davis – Associate Vice President of Peer and Youth Advocacy, Mental Health America
- ShawnaRae Bruch – President, Department of Children and Families Youth Advisory Council
- Sebastián Fuentes – Community Engagement Manager, Milwaukee Succeeds

Listen to a [recording](#) of what the speakers shared.

## Legislative & Policy Update

**School Health Service Workforce Investment.** On November 22<sup>nd</sup>, DHS announced \$8.3 million in funding to support K-12 school health service workforce in schools throughout the state. This first-of-its-kind funding will support hiring and retention for school nurses and health staff in K-12 schools and provide funding for school nurses to pursue wellness activities (e.g., gym memberships, yoga classes, and national and state park passes) and professional development. Funds could be used to hire new nurses and health coordinators, retain those staff through retention bonuses, and extend the hours of existing health staff. Funds will also support the education of future school nurses in partnership with University of Wisconsin—Madison, School of Nursing. This initiative is possible due to funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) using an allocation formula based on CDC health equity indicators and data on the number of: school nurses, students, students with disabilities, and students who are economically disadvantaged. The health and well-being of Wisconsin’s K-12 students is supported through a healthy and present school health workforce. View the [list of schools that received funding](#) to support school health service staff.

**Mental Health Care Integration.** On November 10<sup>th</sup>, the U.S. Senate Finance Committee’s issued its Fourth Bipartisan Discussion Draft of legislation aimed at creating better care integration of mental and physical health care services and expanding access to crisis care and follow up services to get Americans the longer-term care they need. This draft makes a number of recommendations:

- Increase payment rates to help providers integrate behavioral health and primary care.
- Create a standardized payment in Medicare for mobile crisis response team services.
- Create a bundled payment in Medicare for crisis stabilization services including observation care, screening for suicide risk, screening for violence risk, assessment of immediate physical health needs, and other services.
- Ensure peer support specialists may participate in furnishing behavioral health integration services to Medicare beneficiaries.
- Make mobile crisis intervention services a permanent state option available to states eligible for federal Medicaid match funding.
- Direct the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to inform states of best practices and recommendations for building a crisis care continuum financed by Medicaid and CHIP, and provide funding for technical assistance and planning grants for states.
- Require CMS to provide best practices to health care providers on integrating behavioral health care into the primary care setting and encourage CMS to consider models that include behavioral health integration.
- Direct CMS to conduct an analysis of integration models in Medicaid.
- Establish CMS technical assistance for providers seeking to integrate behavioral health and primary care.
- Require CMS to issue guidance outlining flexibilities and best practices for partnering between states, Medicaid managed care organizations, and community based organizations to address health related social needs.

Senate members leading on this issue are: Senate Finance Committee Chair Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), Ranking Member Mike Crapo (R-Idaho), Senator Catherine Cortez Masto (D-Nev.) and Senator John Cornyn (R-Texas). Senator Wyden remarked that, “For too long, mental health and physical health have been deeply separated in this country. These policies will begin to allow health care providers to work together more than ever before to connect their patients with the mental health care they need.” A summary of the provisions in this fourth legislative draft is available [here](#). The full text of the discussion draft is available [here](#).

## Children's Mental Health in the News



OCMH Senior Research Analyst, Amy Marsman spotlights recent articles, resources and research findings impacting youth mental health.

**Most Guns Used in Suicides are Easily Accessed.** Guns cause more than half of all suicides in the U.S. each year, and new research finds most of these are handguns owned by the deceased that were stored unlocked and loaded. Increasing safe storage or removing the specific types of firearms from the home during a time of crisis may decrease risk of suicide. For details, see: [story](#). Read [journal article](#).

Wisconsin has no laws that require unattended firearms to be stored in a certain way. Wisconsin does not require a locking device to accompany the sale of a firearm, and no state statutes require firearm owners to affirmatively lock their weapons.

- [Resource](#): Child Access Prevention & Safe Storage in Wisconsin
- [Resource](#): Be SMART Secure Firearm Storage

**Study finds 'huge' increase in children going to the emergency room with suicidal thoughts.** A recent study in the journal *Pediatrics* finds that visits to the emergency room with suicidal thoughts increased 59% from 2016 to 2021, and hospitalizations for suicidal thoughts increased 57% between fall 2019 and fall 2020. Increasing suicide rates and emergency mental health visits reflect deteriorating mental health among American youth. This population-based study analyzes trends in emergency department visits for suicidal ideation before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. For details, see: [story](#), [journal article](#), [commentary](#).

**Provider shortage linked with increased youth suicide rates.** Of the more than 3,000 counties included in the analysis, over two-thirds had shortages of mental health care providers. Data showed living in a county with a mental health provider shortage was linked with a 16% higher youth suicide rate. For details, see: [story](#), [journal article](#), [commentary](#).

**It Takes a Village to Tackle the Teen Mental Health Crisis.** Starting in early 2020, middle school and high school students – members of the Gonzales Youth Council, a parallel city council for the young – have taken the lead in documenting the damage the pandemic was doing to their peers. But they didn't stop there. Using their data, they created a new mental health strategy for the city and its schools, and secured resources to enact it. For details, see: [story](#), [journal article](#).

- [Resource](#): Students Offer Lessons on Enhancing Engagement in Youth Programs (See Useful Resources)

**Teen Brains Aged Prematurely During the Pandemic. Schools Should Take Note.** Teenagers' brains aged years in a matter of months during the stress and isolation of the pandemic lockdowns. The study suggests that the pandemic caused effects to the brain that were similar to chronic, toxic stress. For details, see: [story](#), [journal article](#).

(more)

## Of Interest

### Children's Ornaments Adorn Governor's Residence Tree

Fish ornaments painted by third graders at St. Charles Borromeo School in Milwaukee adorn the holiday tree in the Governor's Residence sunroom.



American Foundation for Suicide Prevention has [fact sheets](#) on each state's suicide prevention and mental health laws. [See Wisconsin's](#).

### How to Raise Generous Kids

In a season of "getting," being intentional in encouraging generosity in children may be a good thing to do. [Read about](#) how to do this.

### Youth Crisis Stabilization Facility Grant Opportunity

The Department of Health Services Division of Care and Treatment Services is seeking applications from tribal nations county agencies, municipal agencies, and nonprofit organizations for funding to support the operation of youth crisis stabilization facilities that serve multiple tribal nations and counties. [Learn more](#).

### How to Stay Healthy this Holiday Season

As cold weather brings an uptick in COVID-19 cases, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) reminds people of the available programs for accessing COVID-19 self-tests and treatment. Wisconsinites can order free at-home rapid COVID-19 tests and have them delivered directly to their residence through the state-supported [Say Yes! COVID Test program](#). For more [information](#) from DHS on staying safe this holiday season.



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