

The Belmont Human Rights Commission Commemorates Mental Health Awareness Month

Mental health is an essential part of our health and wellbeing. Our mental health influences how we feel, think, and act. It also is reflected in how we cope with stress and relate to others. Per the [Centers for Disease Control](#), certain mental health conditions, such as depression, could increase a person's risk of medical conditions, such as diabetes or heart disease. Additionally, untreated symptoms of mental illness could impact a person's social, academic or occupational functioning. The Belmont Human Rights Commission is supportive of efforts to strengthen the systems that provide mental health services, so that all individuals can access the preventive and critical care they need. We stand in support of those who have lived experience with mental illness. It is important to eradicate stigma and improve access to mental health services.

In March, the American Psychological Association published [a nation-wide survey](#) of stressors for American adults. Top sources of stress cited were the rise in prices of everyday items (e.g., gas prices, energy bills, grocery costs, etc.; 87%), followed by supply chain issues and global uncertainty. Recent news reports estimate that American households will spend an additional \$5,000 annually on these everyday items. Close to two-thirds of adults said their lives were forever changed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The data showed widespread grief and loss, continued hardships for vulnerable populations, concerns for children's development, and entrenched, unhealthy coping habits, as substantial sources of stress. More than half of parents said their children could have benefited from receiving treatment from a mental health professional since the pandemic started, particularly parents of teens.

Two years into the pandemic, outcome data points to concerning trends in children's mental health. A [national survey](#) of 3,300 high schoolers found close to a third felt unhappy and depressed. In Belmont, the 2021 [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) found that 12% of Belmont High School students had engaged in self-harm, 31% experienced overwhelming stress, 28% experienced depression, 12% had considered suicide, and 9% had a suicide plan while 18% of Belmont middle schoolers had considered suicide and 9% had a suicide plan. Mental health [crises are also on the rise](#). From March 2020 to October 2020, mental health-related emergency department visits increased 24% for children ages 5 to 11 and 31% for those ages 12 to 17 compared with 2019. Even before the pandemic, kids experienced substantial barriers to access mental health care, most notably long wait lists to see providers. A 2020 [report](#) from the University of Massachusetts found substantial disparities in the availability of school-based services for children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

The Belmont Human Rights Commission calls for an increase in resources and access to critical and preventative mental health care, particularly for children. Together we can eliminate the stigma associated with mental health challenges and strengthen the resources for those who need it most.

For resources regarding Massachusetts Children's Behavioral Health Initiative visit <https://www.mass.gov/childrens-behavioral-health-initiative-cbhi>. Individuals and families looking

for services could contact community service agencies such as the [Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children](#), [The National Association of Social Workers referral service](#), [Boston Children's Hospital](#), the [Justice Resource Institute](#), and the [William James College interface program](#).

The Belmont Human Rights Commission is dedicated to fighting discrimination in all forms and increasing visibility and awareness of issues regarding diversity and discrimination in our community. If you have experienced discrimination in Belmont, please contact us at belmont.hrc@gmail.com or call 617-993-2795.