

The Threat to Mental Health

A Complicated but Significant Concern

By Research America, Inc.

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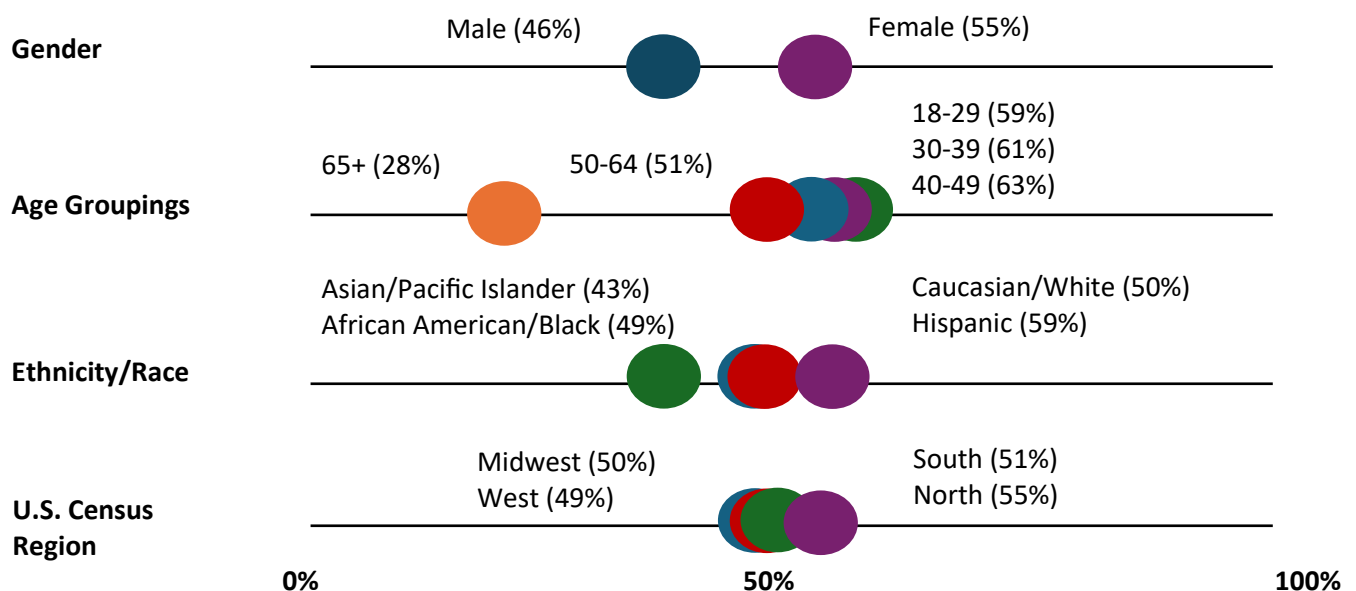


Mental Health at a Crossroads: Challenges and Paths Forward

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 1 in 5 U.S. adults were told by a healthcare professional that they had some type of depression disorder in 2023, a gradual increase since 2019. The same trend holds true for adults with anxiety disorders.¹

Issues related to mental health are a universal concern to healthcare systems across the world. Not only is there a negative public perception regarding those with mental health conditions and increased institutional hurdles limiting sufferers' rights and privileges, but there may also be a personal stigma or associated shame for those who have any mental illness (AMI). In spite of increased transparent conversation prompted by celebrities and social media influencers, this stigma remains.

Population Actively Managing Stress/Depression/Anxiety in 2024 ²



Exacerbating the Problem: The COVID-19 Impact

We are still experiencing the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic significantly shifted not only how medicine – including mental health care – is practiced, but also the very nature of society itself. Feelings of isolation and stress increased as a result of necessary

measures taken to address the spread of the virus, particularly social distancing. Natural Marketing Institute's (NMI) consumer research conducted the year following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic noted a significant increase in anxiety and feelings of depression by 5-6% over the course of a five month period.³ Obtaining routine healthcare became near-impossible, and a quick pivot to telehealth medicine to meet that demand came with numerous difficulties.

These compounded emotional stressors coupled with system strains (e.g., consumer product shortages) disrupted both child development and adult enrichment. Children's social development was interrupted when they were abruptly removed from school and interaction with their peers. Adult interpersonal relationships, from work to family to friends, were notably impacted at the same time adults struggled.

A Communal Issue

In some cases, mental illness can be the reason for, and an exacerbating influence on, many social issues. They are a frequent concern among the homeless population. Veterans routinely face mental health struggles while deployed and effects of PTSD linger long after reintegration into "conventional society". Severe diagnoses influence unemployment rates as sufferers face difficulties managing both their condition and a job, which adds up on a national scale in losses of productivity and earnings. Depression is cited as a leading cause of disability.

Adapting to a shifting world where opportunities are scarce and competition is fierce produces remarkable stress and anxiety. As they attempt to meet expectations which are often unrealistic in today's reality, teenage and young adult populations suffer more than other social groups. Per the CDC's most recent 2023 data, 2 in 5 (40%) of U.S. high school students reported experiencing depression symptoms, with significant spike seen in the female demographic when compared to males.⁴

Notably Marginalized Populations

Although mental health is an issue that should be addressed at all levels of society, there are certain demographics that are disproportionately affected.

While it is reported females are more frequently seen for mental health treatment than males, their symptoms and concerns are often dismissed due to preferential treatment (i.e., stereotypical and overt display of spectrum disorders in males versus females) and dismissive attitudes deeply rooted in the history of the medical field (i.e., "female hysterics"). African Americans, Hispanics, American Indian/Alaska Natives, and mixed race individuals are all traditionally marginalized groups who have suffered socioeconomic resource deficiencies,

including that of mental health care. Those who identify as LGBTQ+ are often subject to increased societal stigmas/intolerance and reduced legal protections. Travel restrictions/difficulties, limitations for communication (i.e., lack of high speed internet access for telehealth), and provider shortages all greatly influence the ability of those in rural areas to obtain mental health services.

Complicated Care: Increased Comorbid Health Threats

Genetic and epigenetic factors are significant in determining predisposition to mental health conditions. However, unnecessary stress gained from environmental factors and lived experiences can be equally powerful, with or without positive lifestyle choices. Unfortunately, comorbid physical conditions and AMLs can exist in a bidirectional relationship, creating a feedback loop that complicates a patient's life and/or that of those caring for them.

Stress and anxiety from any mental illness can contribute to and further chronic pain and sleep issues, which affects quality of life. Substance use disorders (SUD) can develop from harmful coping techniques. As a result, many physical conditions/diseases, including any number of metabolic conditions, cardiovascular diseases, and cancers, can become an added burden. For example, over half of those with depression or stress/anxiety also experience heart issues.

Condition/Issue	Among those with Depression	Among those with Stress/Anxiety
Digestion Issues <i>(i.e., Bowel concerns such as constipation)</i>	65%	60%
Brain/Memory/Concentration Issues	62%	56%
Sleeplessness	60%	53%
Heart Issues <i>(i.e., HBP/hypertension)</i>	56%	52%
Weight Loss	54%	51%
Skin Health	51%	49%
Immune Issues <i>(i.e., Need to boost immunity)</i>	49%	47%
Seasonal Allergies	46%	43%
Vision/Eye Health Problems	42%	39%
Inflammation in Body	31%	28%

Prominent health issues among those suffering from depression and stress/anxiety.⁵

Difficulty Obtaining Treatment: Not Just a Diagnostic Challenge

Not only do comorbid conditions invite complications in treating mental illnesses, but the very nature of these illnesses and their symptoms can invite dismissal from individuals in the medical industry who are *not* providers but are making influential decisions regarding a patient's care.

Atypical and/or masked symptoms and patient difficulties in articulating symptoms only further invite additional difficulties in providing correct diagnoses and/or treatment.

There is a significant deficiency in mental health services and providers followed by the sweeping repeals of protective laws/policies within the last year. In 2023, over 25 million individuals lived in a mental health professional shortage area in among rural Americans alone.⁶ In July 2025, passage of the “One Big Beautiful Bill” sought to cut Medicaid funding by 15% over 10 years. States are not obligated to cover behavioral health services in their Medicaid programs and, as such, cuts in federal support will greatly reduce access to care. Lack of insurance coverage may be a significant hurdle for many struggling with their mental health, be it from a lack of affordable healthcare options to poor coverage from plans that are able to be purchased. Inadequate formulary coverage(s) and the hurdles of obtaining prior authorizations make receiving medications, let alone the correct medications, difficult to obtain in an affordable manner.

Enacting Meaningful Change

There is no single, surefire solution to the problem of the mental health crisis we face. Treatment often needs to be individually tailored and resources are limited. Innovative approaches will be necessary for the future, but there are some facets of societal change that can be addressed now to ease the burden later.

- Restructure language and expectations with less inherently negative connotations, including supporting individuals who use more tolerant/inclusive language – not those who continue to tear down sufferers already feeling stigma from their conditions.
- Conduct accurate conversations with and provide representative depictions of those with AMI conditions and the struggles they face in the media – not just with social media influencers or celebrities which may be superficial.
- Display increased empathy and acceptance with a willingness to educate oneself among both the medical field as well as family/friends/society.
- Recognize the importance of holistic and collaborative care to understand and treat symptoms and/or diagnoses of AMI that are often entangled with physical comorbidities.
- Accept feedback from mental health patients and providers and turn it into actionable solutions that are not motivated by solely by profit including creating more comprehensive health plans and providing affordable medications/care without the stress of prior authorizations and denials.

- Commit to policies and protections that allow for individuals with mental health conditions to do things like maintain steady employment, secure safe housing, access quality health care services and education, etc.

Mental health remains a complicated but significant concern shaped by stigma, limited access, and comorbidities. The convergence of these challenges creates strain not only on individuals but also on healthcare systems and the broader economy. Addressing them requires an integrated approach that combines clinical care, public health initiatives, and policy change. For industry leaders and healthcare stakeholders, the task ahead is to recognize these barriers clearly and engage in collaborative and inclusive strategies that reduce stigma, expand access, and account for the realities of comorbid conditions. Only through this combination of awareness and coordinated action can meaningful progress be made.

Contact Research America, Inc. today to learn more about our proprietary methodologies geared towards a depth of understanding and actionable insights into all aspects of the current continuum of care for mental health.

Email: info@researchamericainc.com / **Phone:** 610-356-1800

^{1, 4} The Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Mental Health Data Channel showing the most recent 2023 data for the U.S. population. Updated April 2025.

^{2,5} Findings from Natural Marketing Institute's (NMI) syndicated Natural Marketing Institute's (NMI) Health and Wellness Trends US and Global Databases™ (HWTD).

³ Historical data from NMI's COVID-19 quantitative findings of May and October 2021.

⁶ National Alliance on Mental Illness compiled resources. Updated April 2023.