

## Shortage of Behavioral Health Resources Means Many Californians Can't Get the Treatment They Need

### The Issue

California has a [massive shortage](#) of mental health and substance use disorder treatment professionals, and access to behavioral health care [varies drastically](#) from county to county.

Almost a quarter of adults with a mental illness are not able to receive the treatment they need, a number that has not declined since 2011. Children and adolescents are under unprecedented levels of distress, with suicide and self-harm on the rise at alarming levels. Half of mental health problems emerge before children are 14 years old, yet more than half of children and adolescents are not able to get the mental health services they need.

Hospital emergency departments are the primary places people go when in crisis. Due to a lack of alternatives to emergency departments and post-hospital care options, an estimated 750 patients remain in California hospitals on any given day despite being medically ready for discharge.

### What's Needed

Solutions must mirror those in primary care, where the goal is to prevent illness and provide the right care in the right setting.

As the state invests billions to develop comprehensive behavioral health services, a focus on prevention, early intervention, and community-based care will help Californians avoid hospitalization, incarceration, conservatorships, and institutionalization.

Californians should support [Proposition 1](#) in March to better meet growing behavioral health needs through investments in housing and treatment settings as well as greater partnership with counties.

As recommended by the California Health and Human Services Agency's [Crisis Care Continuum Plan](#), California should:

- Build toward consistent statewide access to behavioral health care so that every Californian has access to baseline treatment options, regardless of their type of health insurance or county of residence.
- Enhance care coordination by removing unnecessary, bureaucratic barriers that make care fragmented and complex for people to navigate.
- Design and deliver a high-quality and equitable system for **all** Californians by developing a comprehensive strategy for data measurement and quality of care.



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