



## Purpose and Scope

Researchers at Duke University and RTI International interviewed 4,500 children and their families to identify the costs of adolescent mental health and teens' access to services.

The study was published in the January issue of the *American Journal of Psychiatry*.

## Key Findings

- 70 percent of adolescents did not receive needed mental health services and those that did generally received services from organizations not designed to provide mental health care.
- National costs for providing mental health services to 13- to 16-year olds is between \$10.2 and \$12.3 billion annually, three to four times more than previous estimates for the entire child and adolescent population.
- Schools were the most frequent providers of mental health services for adolescents, accounting for 16 percent of the costs.

## Report Sponsor

The report was funded through National Institutes of Health grants and an Independent Scientist Award.

## About RTI International

RTI International is an independent nonprofit research organization based in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, that provides research and technical solutions to governments and businesses worldwide in the areas of health and pharmaceuticals, education and training, surveys and statistics, advanced technology, democratic governance, economic and social development, energy, and the environment. For more information, visit [www.rti.org](http://www.rti.org).

*RTI International is a trade name of Research Triangle Institute.*

# Research & Policy Brief



## Adolescents Not Receiving Needed Mental Health Services, Annual Costs Exceed \$10 Billion

### What the Study Found

Most adolescents who need mental services aren't receiving them. Almost 70 percent of adolescents are not receiving needed mental health services and those that are generally receive services from organizations not designed to provide mental health care.

Results from a new study found that the national costs of providing mental health services to 13- to 16- year olds is between \$10.2 and \$12.3 billion annually, three to four times more than previous estimates for the entire child and adolescent population.

The burden of adolescent mental health problems is commonly borne by agencies that are not designed primarily to provide psychiatric or psychological services, particularly schools. According to the research, schools are the most frequent providers of mental health services for adolescents, accounting for 16 percent of the costs.

The majority of adolescent mental health costs, 67 percent, fall to juvenile justice services and inpatient services, such as inpatient hospitals and group homes. Children with disruptive behavior disorders account for the greatest expenses of any diagnostic group because of the higher prevalence of those disorders in childhood.

There is evidence that the majority of adult psychiatric disorders are continuations or recurrences from childhood disorders, and children who have neither a psychiatric diagnosis nor symptomatic impairment may need mental health care as a result of a disability or trauma. Identifying and treating these disorders early could make a significant difference in long-term health.

The authors point out that some states are making an effort to provide an integrated system of care for children and adolescents with mental illness, but based on the high level of unmet needs among youths, as well as the burden on service systems that were not designed to deliver expert mental care, they suggest more needs to be done.