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What work is Aetna doing in the adolescent space to accelerate mental healthcare?

We know that adolescents are experiencing mental health symptoms at a higher rate than ever before. Ensuring quality and evidence-based care that is easily accessible has been a primary goal for Aetna and CVS Health as a whole. We are also working to advance health equity across communities while encouraging diversity within both our provider ecosystem and internal groups of colleagues. Most recently, we've been working with The Quell Foundation to create a youth advisory board to ensure youth voices have a seat at the table when talking about

mental health and well-being.

How can we create a continuum of care to support adolescent patients?

Overall, we need to look at innovative options for adolescent patients who are tech natives, and we need to pay close attention to their wants and needs when it comes to their health and how they want to receive care. It's vital that we, as an industry, shift our perspective of adolescent care to provide meaningful services that address their unique needs, preferences and attitudes, and providers should be prepared to understand and reach them.

This means addressing the needs of adolescents by ensuring diversity in our provider population and providing them with training in how to be linguistically and culturally sensitive, which is important among this increasingly diverse and open-minded age group. We also need to look beyond the treatment of symptoms and look at the entire ecosystem of an adolescent's life - providing support at home and school and helping them move toward independence is a vital component to the support of youth and teens.



What barriers need to be overcome to improve access, engagement, and outcomes for adolescents in mental healthcare?

Historically, the care of children and adolescents was dictated by the adults around them. Increasingly, we are seeing that this approach is less than effective. Instead, we must ensure that adolescents have a say in how, where and when they receive care and what that care can and should look like. Meeting youth where they are and helping them take their own next steps forward is a vital paradigm shift that will ultimately ensure the engagement of youth in any services, medical or mental health.

What are the main opportunities for transformation in adolescent mental health care?

Some of the main opportunities for transformation in adolescent mental health care lie in the improvement of support offered to this demographic.

Mainly in the enhancement of peer and school-based support and the improvement of cultural and linguistic understanding of diverse populations within this age group among providers, caretakers, practitioners and others.

A recent CVS Health and Morning Consult study found that more than half of Americans (53%) agree that hearing about other people's challenges makes them more comfortable seeking out resources and caring for themselves. Through peer support, adolescents can listen to the experiences of those who have suffered from mental health disorders. This both allows them to recognize warning signs within themselves and gives them perspective that mental health challenges are normal and treatable.

School-based support is also incredibly important. Children and adolescents spend a lot of time in school throughout their youth, and studies show that school-based mental health clinics and supports are "an effective means of addressing the mental health needs of children and improving the learning environment."



Starting interventions as early as possible, especially within the school setting, is another significant opportunity to address mental well-being among youth. These interventions not only help reduce stigma from an early age, but they also encourage seeking mental health care throughout the lifespan of the youth and their family.

Lastly, improving understanding of this increasingly diverse population through cultural, linguistic and sensitivity training can also help encourage and support those who may need help and aren't sure the proper tools, services and resources are available.

What will the next few years hold for adolescents in mental health?

I think there will be a number of advancements when it comes to adolescent mental health over the next few years. First, we'll see increasingly integrated mental health care among pediatricians and physicians, as well as an increase in school-based support and interventions and age-appropriate digital support and psychoeducational options.

The pandemic exacerbated the adoption and use of virtual care. Still, we'll continue to see services like telehealth and virtual consulting expand across various levels of care. We can also hope to see increased support for LGBTQ+ and BIPOC populations, as well as those with disabilities. With a growing understanding of the unique needs of these populations, there will also be an increased opportunity to better support individuals who fall within the intersection of these groups.

Is multi-stakeholder collaboration key in advancing this space?

Absolutely! Teens and young adults currently face more complex environmental stressors than ever before. Ensuring collaboration between primary care physicians and other providers, family members, educators, peers and other stakeholders is the first step in advancing this space. Above all, we must ensure that children and adolescents have a seat at the table with opportunities for open conversations. Support is vital to an adolescent's transition into adulthood, and having the right tools is key to their collective and individual well-being.