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# CULTIVATING MATTERING FOR MAINE YOUTH: 2022 BRIEF

MAINE RESILIENCE  
BUILDING NETWORK



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## **2021 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey Data indicates that Youth Mental Health Issues Need an All-In Response**

### **A Maine Resilience Building Network Brief**

Compelling data recently released by the Maine CDC presents a concerning picture of our youth's mental health and well-being. The 2021 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS) data indicates that Maine youth's mental health issues have become more severe over the past two years. But even before the disconnect caused by the COVID pandemic, young Mainers were showing increasing mental health issues. The Maine Resilience Building Network (MRBN) has spotlighted the problem of Maine youth feel that they do not matter in their community since 2020 based on the last round of this data. The recent (October 2022) release of the new data indicates that this and other related youth mental health indicators have become even more concerning.

Mattering, which refers to the sense that your contribution is valued and that your presence is missed when you are absent, is more profound than belonging and is a powerful protective factor linked to social connectedness. (Flett, 2018). Mattering is measured in three domains: home, school, and community. Community connections that make youth feel seen, heard, and valued are crucial to building core capabilities as they transition to early adulthood. They create protective factors for adolescents who do not feel supported at home or school.

Our nation's top healthcare leaders are urging action in the face of a national youth mental health crisis. In October 2021, three national pediatric medical groups – the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Academy of

Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the Children’s Hospital Association, issued a Declaration of a National Emergency in Child and Adolescent Mental Health; this was soon followed by the U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory on Protecting Youth Mental Health. Citing these statements and a trove of data highlighting the immense toll of the pandemic on youth mental health, agencies across the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services issued a joint letter to states, tribes, and jurisdictions encouraging them to prioritize and maximize their efforts to strengthen children’s mental health and well-being.

Across all organizations, *the calls to action were clear and consistent: promote youth resilience at the family, school, and community levels.* The US DHHS encourages “states, tribes, and jurisdictions to consider how to create opportunities to collaborate across agencies and programs to support and promote resilience and well-being among children and youth.” US CDC official, Dr. Jonathan Mermin, states, “In the face of adversity, support from school, families, and communities protects adolescents from potentially devastating consequences.”

The data recently released by the Maine CDC from the 2021 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS) provides compelling data.

- In 2021, 25% of high school students reported four or more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), a significant increase from 21% in 2019.
- Forty-nine percent of high school students and 45 percent of middle school students believe *they do not* matter in the communities where they live.
  - Only 31.6% of LGBTQ high school students feel they matter in their community.
  - 35.9% of high school students reported feeling sad or hopeless for two or more weeks in the past 12 months.

- 48.1% of high school girls felt sad or hopeless for two or more weeks (past 12 months), compared to 23.7% of boys.
- **20% of middle school students and 18.5% of high school students seriously considered suicide in the past year.**
  - 24.2% of high school girls seriously considered suicide in the past 12 months compared to 12.5% of boys.
  - 11.1% of high school girls reported they attempted suicide at least once in the past 12 months, compared to 6.6% of boys.
- About one-third (32%) of middle school students and almost half (43%) of high school students reported poor mental health, including stress, anxiety, and depression ‘most of the time or ‘always’ during the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - Girls were significantly more likely to report poor mental health.
  - High School students identifying as gay/lesbian, bisexual, another sexual identity, and transgender were significantly more likely to report poor mental health.
  - Hispanic middle school students and students of multiple races in middle and high school were more likely to report poor mental health.
- **46.7% of students say they have support from adults other than their parents**, a significant decrease from 65.8% in 2017 and 50.7% in 2019, a declining trend we need to reverse.

The data shows that we have work to do. We must invest in prevention strategies and policies that improve the health and well-being of our youth. These investments are not just monetary. We must invest time, energy, and care to ensure that **all Maine youth understand that they matter** to their community. Diverse youth groups must be engaged in the design, creating safe places and supportive community environments.

Dr. Paul Reed, Director of the U.S. Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, stated this well, “The balance of research over the decades demonstrates the importance of community members having real power in decisions that affect the development of long-term resilience. Our relationships and networks of support, or social capital, are critical to individual and collective resilience and are richest at the community level. However, we know that [social determinants of health \(SDOH\)](#) — or the conditions in the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age — are not equally weighted and are not equitably supportive of greater resilience.”

Our focus must be on ensuring community resilience is vital, and youth are flourishing and growing to be a critical part of Maine’s communities and workforce. How do we build a more connected society where youth feel they matter? It’s up to us not to “make kids more resilient” but to assure that the supports are there so that resilience is the supported, more accessible option. Governments, schools, businesses, and organizations must commit to supporting systems and policies to create environments where youth can thrive.

MRBN is pleased to introduce the “*Maine Youth Thriving – A Guide for Community Action*,” developed with the Maine CDC and Public Health Partners, LLC. The guide is a tool to support positive youth development. The Youth Thriving Guide is designed to facilitate community-driven solutions to address protective factors and ensure a community environment and systems that support youth mattering and social connectedness and advances youth thriving. MRBN is committed to working with Maine communities to implement the “*Maine Youth Thriving – A Guide for Community Action*” and to develop ways to assure that Maine youth feel that they do matter in our communities. Please see our website and contact MRBN: <https://maineresilience.org>.

## References:

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