

How can we improve mental health in St. Louis?

# INVEST IN OUR COMMUNITY AND RAISE AWARENESS

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October 2013 | Brief 3 of 5

The second brief in the *For the Sake of All* series discussed how poor mental health influences high school dropout. This brief examines how mental health affects people's social and economic opportunities, and in turn, how social and economic opportunity affects mental health.

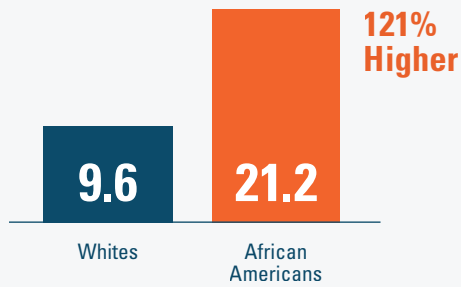
## Mental health in St. Louis

Mental health conditions don't just affect a person's mood. These conditions can also affect people's ability to earn a living and their physical health. In St. Louis City, adults spend an average of 4.5 days a month in poor mental health. And in St. Louis County, the figure is 3 days a month. That's roughly half a week or more spent feeling hopeless, anxious, or overwhelmed every month.<sup>1</sup>

There are differences by race in mental health outcomes and mental health treatment in the St. Louis region. Rates of emergency room (ER) visits for mental health conditions in St. Louis are 121% higher for African Americans compared to Whites, and rates of hospital stays for mental health conditions are 64% higher. Specifically, African Americans have much higher rates of ER visits for alcohol and substance abuse disorders, anxiety, and serious mental health conditions, such as schizophrenia.<sup>2,3</sup> Due to stigma, underreporting, and under-diagnosis of mental health conditions among African Americans, it is possible that even more African Americans who have mental health conditions are not receiving the treatment they need.<sup>4,5</sup>

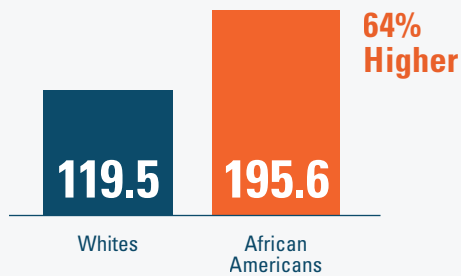


## Rate of emergency room visits for mental health conditions in St. Louis in 2011<sup>2</sup>



Rates are per 1,000 and are age-adjusted using US 2000 Standard Population

## Rate of hospital stays for mental health conditions in St. Louis in 2011<sup>3</sup>



Rates are per 10,000 and are age-adjusted using US 2000 Standard Population

## Emergency room rates per 1,000 in St. Louis City and County in 2011

	Whites	African Americans
Alcohol and substance disorders	3.1	6.2
Anxiety	1.9	3.4
Mood disorders (e.g., depression)	1.6	2.9
Schizophrenia and related	0.3	2.9

Rates age-adjusted using US 2000 Standard Population  
MODHSS Emergency Room MICA

## How does poor mental health influence social and economic opportunity?

Mental health conditions in early life are associated with

- > school dropout<sup>6</sup>
- > imprisonment<sup>7,8</sup>
- > low household income<sup>9,10</sup>
- > family disruption<sup>11</sup>

Mental health conditions can negatively affect an individual's social and economic success. For example, people dealing with mental health challenges are less likely to complete school. And low educational achievement is strongly associated with lower earnings.<sup>10</sup>

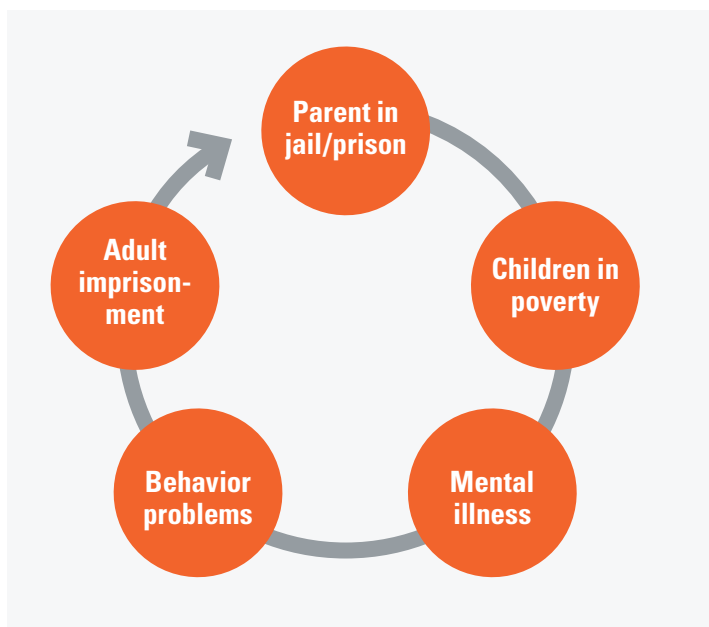
Mental health conditions that begin early in life are also associated with imprisonment. Approximately 64% of individuals in jail and prison have mental health conditions.<sup>12</sup> Racial and ethnic minorities are overrepresented in the prison system.<sup>13</sup> Imprisonment and untreated mental health conditions make it difficult for individuals to find employment and stay employed. Imprisonment also affects entire families. This is because families are separated and disrupted as a result of imprisonment.

## How does poor social and economic opportunity influence mental health?

Nationwide, African Americans are poorer than Whites. This is also true in St. Louis. The median income for African Americans in the St. Louis region is roughly \$30,000 less than Whites (\$30,478 vs. \$61,402). The unemployment rate for African Americans is an alarming 20% compared to just 7% for Whites.<sup>14</sup> Low earnings and unemployment affect people's ability to seek and to afford treatment for mental health. The ER is often the only source of physical and mental health care for low-income individuals and families. The stress of economic hardship and social disadvantage can also have a negative impact on mental health.

In fact, there is a vicious cycle involving imprisonment, poverty, and mental illness. Children of people who are imprisoned are more likely to experience economic hardship.<sup>15</sup> People who experience economic hardship are more likely to have a mental illness.<sup>16</sup> And mental illness is associated with behavior problems and adult imprisonment.

**Cycle involving imprisonment, poverty, and mental illness**



**Cost of treating mental health conditions in St. Louis**

Annual hospital charges for mental health conditions are estimated to be a whopping \$230,403,217 in St. Louis City and St. Louis County combined. Among African Americans alone, that figure is \$95,844,477.<sup>17</sup> This means that the cost of just hospital-based mental health treatment for African Americans, who compose about 30% of the population in the St. Louis region, is nearly

**Annual hospital charges for mental health conditions in St. Louis**

**\$96 million**  
AFRICAN AMERICANS

**\$230 million**  
ALL ST. LOUIS RESIDENTS

half the cost of inpatient treatment for all of St. Louis City and County.<sup>18</sup> St. Louis residents are using hospitals in the range of hundreds of millions of dollars when access to outpatient mental health services would be better and less expensive.

**How does improving mental health benefit us all?**

Mental health is a major, though often overlooked, public health concern. Nationwide, there is an estimated annual cost of \$193.2 billion in lost earnings alone due to mental health conditions.<sup>19</sup> There are also many hidden and indirect costs associated with poor mental health. For example, children who are exposed to high levels of stress and multiple psychological traumas are more likely to suffer from physical illness later in life.<sup>20,21</sup> And these illnesses add to health care costs for all.

The treatment costs associated with mental illness among African Americans in St. Louis are staggering. Preventing acute mental health conditions in St. Louis could save hundreds of millions of dollars a year in hospital charges. Improving the mental health of African Americans in St. Louis City and County is one important way to improve the health, safety, and economy of the entire region.



# We can improve mental health in our community by INCREASING AWARENESS, ACCESS, AND INFORMATION.

## How can we improve mental health in St. Louis?

### 1 Improve screening and awareness.

Individuals may not know where to find mental health services, and opportunities to screen for mental health conditions in health care settings are often missed. Mental health conditions and physical health problems are often tightly linked.<sup>22,23</sup> Whether patients enter the medical system for checkups, pain, or a chronic condition, better screening is needed to identify people who need mental health treatment. There are a number of outstanding mental health centers in the St. Louis region but there is also a great deal of stigma and misinformation around mental health conditions, which could be barriers for those who are suffering but are unwilling to seek treatment.

- > Improve mental health screening in medical settings.
- > Use community-wide education to reduce the stigma of mental health and mental health treatment.



#### To Find Out More Click Below

Mental Health First Aid Missouri is one example of an effort to raise awareness of mental health conditions. This is a course to educate the general public about how to recognize mental health conditions. [Click here to learn more](#)

### 2 Invest in community mental health centers.

Increased effort is needed to uncover and treat mental health conditions outside of the ER and jail cell. There have been large cuts to mental health services. This means that people with mental health needs, particularly those without private insurance, are waiting long periods of time to receive treatment or heading to the ER to seek treatment.

- > Build more outpatient mental health centers in areas of need.
- > Coordinate mental health screening services at homeless shelters and food pantries, and help individuals with mental health problems find the treatment they need.

### 3 Improve quality and availability of mental health data.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Disparities Action Plan calls for increasing the availability, quality, and use of data to improve the health of minority populations. In St. Louis, publicly available mental health data is hard to find. There are sources of data for mental health related hospitalizations, as displayed in this brief, but there is limited data describing treatment of mental health conditions outside of the hospital. This limits our ability to locate areas with the most mental health need and our ability to accurately estimate the prevalence of mental health conditions in the region.

- > Establish a system for tracking outpatient mental health treatment and rates of mental health conditions in the St. Louis region.
- > Develop a system of public reporting with common definitions of mental health conditions.

## To Find Out More Click Below



There are several outstanding examples of comprehensive models of mental health care in St. Louis. People's Amanda Lockett Murphy Hopewell Center is one example of an integrative health center. Hopewell Center provides

comprehensive services, integrating mental health with residential and transportation services, as well as other client needs. [Click here to learn more](#)

## Click below to find out more about local mental health resources

[Missouri Department of Mental Health](#)

[Start Here STL – Mental Health Resource Directory](#)

**Behavioral Health Response:** Phones answered 24/7 by professional mental health counselors. 314-469-6644 in St. Louis metro, 1-800-811-4760 elsewhere.

**BJC Behavioral Health:** Referrals and services for those eligible for services by the Missouri Department of Mental Health 314-729-4004, toll-free 1-877-729-4004. 8am–5pm Monday–Friday. After hours, 314-469-6644 or toll-free 1-800-811-4760

**Places for People:** Services for those with mental health conditions, including assistance with medication and housing. 314-535-5600, [www.placesforpeople.org](http://www.placesforpeople.org)

*This is the third in a series of five briefs prepared by a team of researchers at Washington University and Saint Louis University. The data and recommendations discussed in the briefs will be explored in-depth in the forthcoming report, “For the Sake of All: A Report on the Health and Well-Being of African Americans in St. Louis.”*

Next brief: *Racial Segregation & Health*

## Resources

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## Resources Continued

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