

Mental Health Resources Accessibility

State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council (SIYAC)

This content represents the opinions of youth in the State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council and does not reflect the opinions of the State of Iowa Department of Health and Human Services.

Mental Health Committee Chair

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Position

It is the position of the State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council, the voice of Iowa's youth, to support the requirement of mental health resources and information on school websites.

Current Situation

Today's school-aged children are suffering mental health crises at an unprecedented rate. In 2023, one in five children ages 3 to 17 had a current diagnosed mental or behavioral health condition (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2025). Suicide rates have also been rising at a concerning rate for youth in our state, as one in four Iowa teens have reported thoughts of suicide (*Suicide Prevention for Teens & College Students*, 2025). Beyond the crisis, Iowa students are also facing more chronic mental health issues. According to the 2021 Iowa Youth Survey, 27-36% of students in grades 6, 8, and 11, reported feeling "sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more weeks in a row" (*Suicide Prevention for Teens & College Students*, 2025). Even more disheartening of these young Iowans struggling is that half of those with major depressive disorder have not received treatment (*Suicide Prevention for Teens & College Students*, 2025). When a mental illness goes undiagnosed, untreated, or inadequately treated, a student's ability to learn and develop will suffer. Without proper treatment, mental illness affects a student's education, which will in turn affect their future.

Rationale

The current situation shows that youth are struggling, struggling with mental health, accessing treatment, and education. SIYAC acknowledges that the relationship between mental health and education is particularly prominent, which is why we propose the addition of Your Life Iowa to school websites. Your Life Iowa is a comprehensive, state-managed resource on mental health- addressing key issues affecting youth. It provides coverage of the barriers and problems most pertinent to youth. One of these problems is suicidal ideation, which one in four students in Iowa has experienced (*Suicide Prevention for Teens & College Students*, 2025). Your Life Iowa addresses this by providing a crisis line and education/resources surrounding

suicidal thoughts. As of April 2025, there is currently one licensed therapist for every 500 youth. Many of these therapists focus on adult-based services, causing accessibility gaps in rural areas. It eliminates barriers to treatment by offering behavioral health navigators who can connect teens with services, as well as listing 200+ providers and an "Insurance Help" tool to assist in navigating costs. In addition, it offers education, assessments, symptom lists, and more on numerous topics from addiction, stigma, suicide, and more; all issues that youth in Iowa are struggling with right now.

Recommended Action

SIYAC proposes an addition to Iowa Code 279.70A to state that schools educating grades 6-12 be required to include Your Life Iowa as a resource on their school-affiliated websites in addition to on the back of student physical and online IDs. The exact location of the resource may be self-determined, but the recommended locations include a Homepage or Counseling/Guidance tab. This action yields a reliable and efficient source for knowledge and help for peers who wish to fight their internal battles while ending the stigma around mental health. Crisis response and general connection options are all able to be found within the Your Life Iowa website. This website provides a variety of resources that would be valuable to all families in Iowa. By following through with this proposal and taking action, we will see brilliant outcomes for students.

Sources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025, June 5). *Data and Statistics on Children's Mental Health*. Children's Mental Health; CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/children-mental-health/data-research/index.html>

Iowa Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. (2025). *Access To Mental and Behavioral Health Care for Students in K-12 Schools*. https://www.usccr.gov/files/2025-04/iowa-advisory-committee-report_access-to-mental-and-behavioral-health-in-k-12-schools.pdf

Iowa Department of Health and Human Services. (2021). *Iowa High School Survey*. https://publications.iowa.gov/46688/1/2021IAH%20Summary%20Tables_FINAL.pdf

Suicide prevention for teens & college students. (2025, May 20). Your Life Iowa; Iowa Department of Health and Human Services. <https://yourlifeiowa.org/learn/suicide/suicide-prevention-teens-college-students>