

National Behavioral Health Collective to Improve Services for Children & Families

May 20, 2026

A new Children's Behavioral Health Collective (the CBH Collective) was formed to leverage the extensive national expertise of its partners to foster resilience, health, and wellbeing for children, youth, and families with behavioral health needs. The CBH Collective does this through transforming child-serving systems, advancing collaboration across sectors, and developing solutions grounded in data, evidence, and lived experience.

Children, youth, and families need access to behavioral health services in their homes and communities. Approximately one in five children in the United States experiences a mental health condition each year (Center for Disease Control, 2023).

While there is much known about best practices that support families to thrive, these practices are not fully implemented, and families continue to face significant challenges accessing needed care. Cross-system partnerships are necessary to fully implement effective, evidence-informed approaches and improve access, coordination, and outcomes across services.

While behavioral health needs are of major concern for the general population, prevalence and intensity are significantly higher for children who are involved with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Children, youth, and families may come to the attention of these deep end systems due to gaps in behavioral health care. In addition, children and families may also experience the trauma of separation from home and community with involvement in child welfare and juvenile justice, further exacerbating their needs.

The CBH Collective shares (1) a commitment to addressing the behavioral health needs of children and youth to prevent future engagement in more punitive systems, (2) a recognition that its member organizations are undertaking a set of policy and programmatic activities to respond to this imperative, and (3) the need for an ongoing forum for coordinating activities and collaborating to achieve the greatest possible collective impact.

As a collective that includes representatives from a broad array of systems, we are uniquely positioned to strengthen the national continuum of behavioral health services for children, youth, and families by collaborating to develop actionable goals related to governance and service delivery models, policymaking, and program implementation.

The founding members of the CBH Collective include the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Programs, Center for Adoption Support and Education (CASE), Center for Health Care Strategies (CHCS), Chapin Hall, Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), Council of Juvenile Justice Administrators (CJJA), Family Run Executive Director Leadership Association (FREDLA), Foster Care Alumni of America, Innovations Institute at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work, National Association of Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD), Social Current, and the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA).