

Kentucky's Children Can't Afford to Wait

The Human Cost of an Underfunded Behavioral Health System



Kentucky's voice for at-risk children and families

Our Children are in Crisis

Behind every statistic is a real Kentucky child who waited too long for help. A 15-year-old in Louisville kept for days in a medical ER because no psychiatric bed existed. An 11-year-old in Eastern Kentucky left on a waitlist before spiraling—violent outbursts, repeated ER visits, police calls, and an extended inpatient stay—because care did not come in time.

In Kentucky, from 2019-2023:¹

73,000

ER VISITS WERE MADE BY CHILDREN IN CRISIS — MEDICAID COVERED NEARLY 75%

126

CHILDREN DIED BY SUICIDE: A CHILD LOST EVERY TWO WEEKS

74%

INCREASE IN SELF-HARM HOSPITALIZATIONS AMONG MEDICAID-COVERED YOUTH

Our Children Are Waiting for Needed Treatment



Average Wait Time for Care has nearly doubled in just two years (42 days in 2023 to 77 days in 2025); behind every wait is a child in need of mental health care, unable to access support due to shrinking service capacity and staff turnover.²

While our children waited, their symptoms worsened.¹

- ER visits for self-harm among youth: 5,190 in five years.
- PTSD-related hospitalizations more than doubled (405→925).
- Depression and mood disorders caused almost 7,000 child hospitalizations.
- The number of high acuity children in psychiatric hospitals increased from 129 in 2019 to 514 in 2025.³
- The youngest reported self-harm ER patient was 6 years old.

Our System is Eroding

Incremental increases in rates are outpaced by the cost to do business. Providers are closing, staff turnover rates are soaring, and children are either going without care or being uprooted from their families and communities in order to access behavioral health services.



Staff turnover in 2025 — a ten-point jump in just two years.²



Of agencies reported operating at a loss in 2024.²



Increase in Kentucky children placed in out-of-state psychiatric facilities in 4 years.⁵

Our Ask

Allocate funding to increase Medicaid rates for children's behavioral health services to 100% of Medicare, plus an additional 25% for in-home services

- This approach reduces wait times, saves taxpayer dollars, ensuring Kentucky children have access to quality, in-state, community-based behavioral health care.



20 Years Later, Therapists Earn **Just 27 Cents More**

In 2005, the hourly rate for associate-level therapists under the state's Impact Plus program was \$78.40 per hour. **Twenty years later, in 2025, rates are only \$78.67, just 27 cents more**—even though the 2005 rate would equal \$132.61 today when adjusted for inflation.

Despite small dollar increases, providers are paid far less in real value, with services like a 60-minute therapy session and in-home services reimbursed well below the true cost of care. This underinvestment is reflected in spending as well: **KY Medicaid spent 49% less on in-home services in SFY 2024 compared to SFY 2020.**⁴

1. Kentucky Injury Prevention and Research Center. (2024). Kentucky resident behavioral health indicators report, 2019–2023. University of Kentucky College of Public Health.
 2. Children's Alliance Provider Surveys
 3. Kentucky Hospital Association Data
 4. Department for Medicaid Services Data
 5. Children's Review Program Data

Medicaid Reimbursement Rates 2025

Kentucky Compared to Surrounding States

Service	CPT Code	Provider Type	KY	Avg Other States	IL	MO	IN	OH	VA	WV
					IL-MD					WV-MD
60 min Psychotherapy	90837	Licensed Independent Therapist	\$ 89.91	\$ 119.65	\$ 139.36	\$ 112.26	\$ 109.16	\$ 115.35	\$ 112.27	\$ 129.52
		Psychiatrist, MD/DO	\$ 112.39	\$ 133.80	\$ 91.58	\$ 149.68	\$ 145.54	\$ 135.71	\$ 166.32	\$ 113.97
45 min Psychotherapy	90834	Licensed Independent Therapist	\$ 60.69	\$ 84.51	\$ 104.52	\$ 76.43	\$ 74.05	\$ 78.63	\$ 76.32	\$ 97.14
		Psychiatrist, MD/DO	\$ 75.86	\$ 90.87	\$ 62.03	\$ 101.90	\$ 98.73	\$ 92.51	\$ 113.06	\$ 76.96
30 min Psychotherapy	90832	Licensed Independent Therapist	\$ 46.00	\$ 61.10	\$ 69.68	\$ 57.90	\$ 56.09	\$ 60.49	\$ 57.69	\$ 64.76
		Psychiatrist, MD/DO	\$ 57.50	\$ 68.99	\$ 46.98	\$ 77.20	\$ 74.78	\$ 71.16	\$ 85.46	\$ 58.33
Psy. Diagnostic Evaluation	90791	Licensed Independent Therapist	\$ 103.63	\$ 134.29	\$ 139.36	\$ 133.09	\$ 123.35	\$ 125.28	\$ 133.48	\$ 151.20
		Psychiatrist, MD/DO	\$ 129.53	\$ 155.37	\$ 122.11	\$ 177.45	\$ 164.46	\$ 147.39	\$ 197.75	\$ 123.04
Family Psychotherapy w/ client present	90847	Licensed Independent Therapist	\$ 60.71	\$ 94.71	\$ 151.36	\$ 75.83	\$ 73.78	\$ 96.53	\$ 76.05	
		Psychiatrist, MD/DO	\$ 75.89	\$ 95.45	\$ 69.80	\$ 101.11	\$ 98.37	\$ 113.56	\$ 112.67	\$ 77.21
Family Psychotherapy w/o Patient	90846	Licensed Independent Therapist	\$ 58.24	\$ 88.87	\$ 151.36	\$ 73.24	\$ 70.40	\$ 98.02	\$ 72.95	\$ 67.22
		Psychiatrist, MD/DO	\$ 72.80	\$ 97.79		\$ 97.65	\$ 93.87	\$ 115.32	\$ 108.08	\$ 74.02
Group Psychotherapy	90853	Licensed Independent Therapist	\$ 16.37	\$ 26.41	\$ 38.48	\$ 20.33	\$ 19.77	\$ 31.71	\$ 20.43	\$ 27.72
		Psychiatrist, MD/DO	\$ 20.47	\$ 29.26	\$ 33.70	\$ 27.11	\$ 26.36	\$ 37.31	\$ 30.27	\$ 20.83
Alcohol/Drug Abuse (SBIRT)	99408	Licensed Independent Therapist	\$ 17.55	\$ 19.22			\$ 23.91		\$ 9.65	\$ 24.10
		Psychiatrist, MD/DO	\$ 21.95	\$ 23.40			\$ 31.88		\$ 14.30	\$ 24.02
		Comparison State is Lower than KY								
		Comparison State is Comparable to KY								
		Comparison State is Higher than KY								
		No reimbursement rate found for this code for this level of professional								
		* Both IL and WV use different billing codes for their community behavioral health services - so not a match, however they were included to demonstrate reimbursement comparison based on service descriptions/practice								