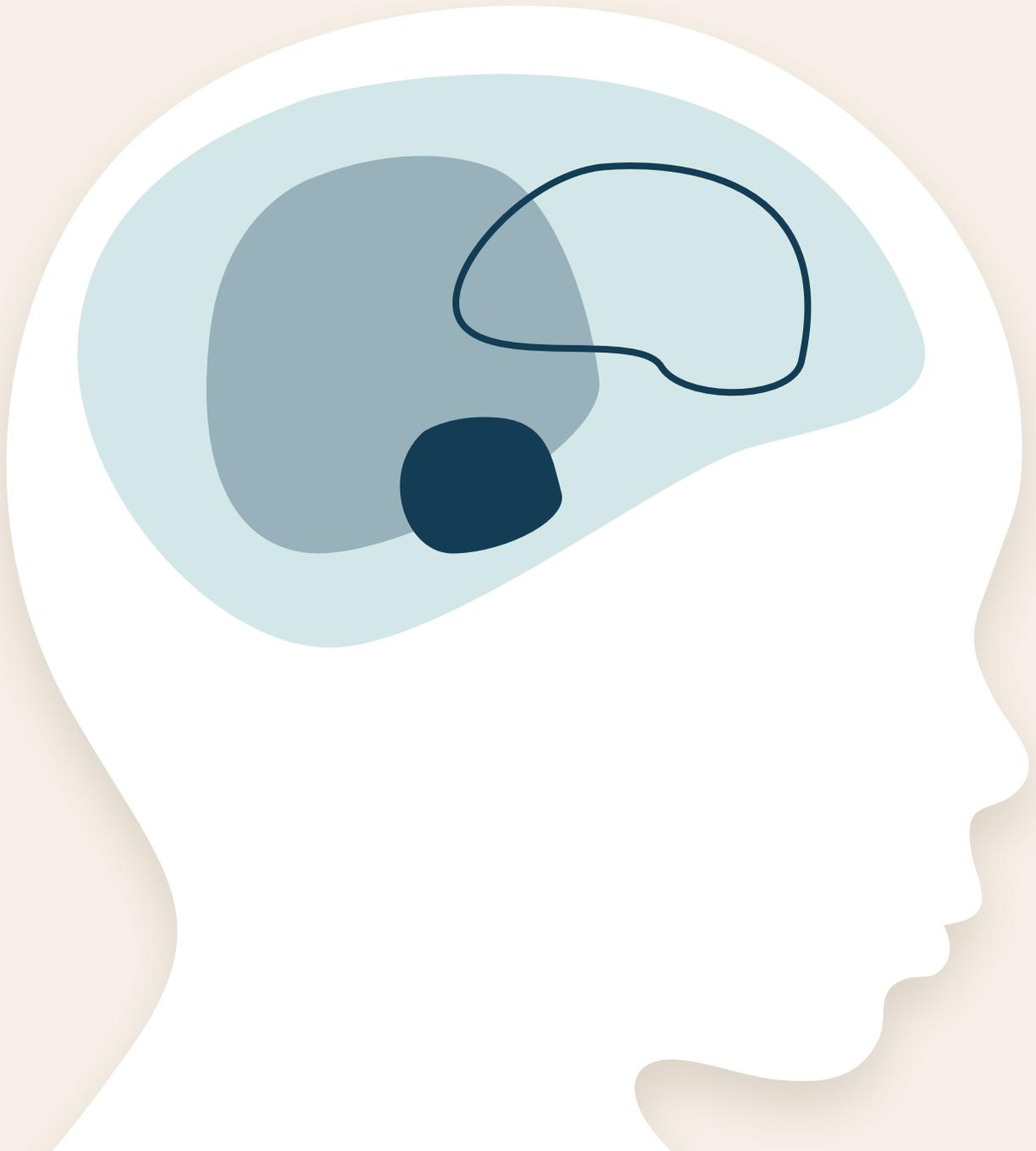


Lyra

Children's Mental Health: The Urgent Benefit You May Not Be Thinking About



Many employees have another role outside of work, one that takes more time and energy than their career—and that role is being a parent. Parents make up a large portion of today's workforce. According to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) (BLS), in 2020 there were 33 million families with at least one child under age 18 living with them. Of those families, [88.5 percent](#) had at least one working parent; and, among married families with kids, [95.3 percent included at least one working parent and 59.8 percent had both parents employed](#).

In 2020

33 Million

families included at least one child under age 18

(Source: [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#))

While most working parents may mention their children to their colleagues, employees have historically tended to keep their work and home lives separate. That is, of course, until the pandemic. Suddenly, many parents across the globe were working from home alongside their children who were learning remotely, while others were struggling to find child care for jobs that were not conducive to remote work. It became relatively common to see a child in the background of virtual meetings, or have a parent adjust their schedule around their child's new schedule. This gave co-workers and managers without children a glimpse into the lives of working parents—highlighting not only the struggle for balance but also how intertwined parents are with their children.



Nearly 1 in 5 children have a mental, emotional, or behavioral health disorder

(Source: [CDC](#))

Parenting and the 'Great Resignation'

For some parents, finding a balance between work and caring for their children became unattainable during the pandemic. As part of the so-called [Great Resignation](#)—a mass exodus of people from the workforce—many parents left their jobs to dedicate more time and resources to help their kids. The Census Bureau noted in [January 2021](#) that 10 million mothers with school-aged children were not actively working. That's 1.4 million more unemployed moms than in 2020. Overall, the number of families with at least one working parent is down by [2.9 percent](#) since 2019.

The Great Resignation has spurred many companies to seek ways to support and incentivize employees to stay. In some cases, employers are offering higher wages, bonuses, and signing bonuses just to fill open positions and keep their current workforce. But that tactic doesn't address issues such as the stress and burnout that many employees, including working parents, are experiencing.

[A recent survey from LinkedIn](#) showed that, since the start of the pandemic, employees have increasingly been looking for more from their jobs than just compensation. More and more employees today want jobs that provide flexibility and expanded benefits, including mental health benefits.

In fact, 71 percent of respondents in [a Lyra Health survey](#) said that, when considering a new job, it's at least somewhat important to them that the prospective employer offers mental health benefits.

But with parents and kids so connected, mental health benefits shouldn't stop with the employee. Just as medical, vision, and dental benefits are available to dependents, it's important that a mental health benefit be offered to employees' families, too.

"If you think about your rationale for providing health benefits for the whole family, including children, a mental health benefit is an extension of that," said Kendall Browne, PhD, program manager of workforce mental health at Lyra. "You provide these benefits to help employees live happy, healthy, and productive lives. We've learned repeatedly over the past year that your employees' mental health is a critical part of that picture. If you care about your employees' health and well-being, you care about their children's health and well-being."

Parent and child mental health in a post-pandemic world

Even before the pandemic, mental and behavioral health issues were fairly common in kids. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), [nearly one in five children](#) have a mental, emotional, or behavioral health disorder. Even at young ages, children can have complex mental health issues. [Among children ages three to 17](#), an estimated 3 percent have depression, and 7 percent have anxiety.

Unfortunately, the pandemic has intensified mental health issues and other psychosocial stressors for many children. In nearly [one in 10 families](#), both parents and their kids have experienced worsening mental health during the pandemic.



50%

of parents said they have been more concerned about their children's mental health during the pandemic

(Source: [Bright Horizons](#))

Kids in these families may have also faced isolation due to closed schools and child care centers, anxiety over the pandemic, loss of a loved one to COVID-19, or overworked parents and caregivers, among other factors.

In a [national survey conducted in 2020](#), 27 percent of parents reported that their mental health had declined, and 14 percent said they'd seen their children's behavioral health decline. Another study found that [50 percent of parents'](#) concerns about both their kids' mental load and mental health have grown during the pandemic.

31% ↑

In 2020, mental health-related emergency department visits among children aged 12-17 rose 31% over 2019

(Source: [CDC](#))

Suicide is the [second leading cause of death in youths ages 10-24](#). In 2020, mental health-related emergency department visits among children aged 12-17 [rose by 31 percent over 2019](#), including a drastic increase in suspected suicide attempts in that age group.

The mental health care gap for kids

Around 75 percent of all mental illnesses emerge before the age of 25, and a key component of treating these children and young adults is early intervention. Unfortunately, too many kids go without the mental health care they need. According to the CDC, only around 20 percent of children with mental or behavioral health issues receive treatment from a specialized mental health care provider.

20%

Only around 20% of children with mental or behavioral health issues receive care from a specialized mental health care provider

(Source: [CDC](#))

What's more concerning—the infrastructure for children's mental health care is lacking in most of the U.S. Less than half of emergency departments (46.2 percent) have policies in place to care for children with mental health and social concerns.

This is also evident in the number of barriers caregivers and parents face when trying to access pediatric mental health care, including:

- Lack of nearby providers
- Waitlists
- Cost of insurance coverage
- Lack of insurance

These roadblocks make early intervention difficult if not impossible for some families, which only adds to parents' stress.

"Finding mental health care for a child is a huge challenge for parents," said Dr. Browne. "They're sorting through insurance, spending hours on the phone, sitting on waitlists, and they may be driving a great distance to get the care their child needs."

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Supporting working parents means supporting their kids

It doesn't take a toddler hijacking a video conference to understand the link between how a parent's emotional state affects their child and vice versa. Rogue meeting interruptions aside, a child's overall emotional state and well-being are closely tied to that of their parents. In fact, studies have shown that there is a [strong connection](#) between the mental health of parents and their children.

"The mental health of parents and children are inextricably linked," said Dr. Browne. "Knowing that your child is struggling is a profound stressor for a parent. Few things are going to take your employee off of their A-game more than their child needing help."

[Children depend](#) on their parents and caregivers for everything, including supporting their mental health. When parents have poor mental health, [their children are more likely](#) to have mental or behavioral health issues, too. Likewise, having a child in distress adds to parents' stress and anxiety.

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"Having a child with an untreated mental health issue is going to take your parents out of the workplace. Their mind and energy will be elsewhere," noted Dr. Browne. "A mental health benefit that parents can use to access care for their children can provide tremendous relief. It saves parents time and energy, and it can help make sure children get the care they need."

Evaluating a mental health benefit for employees and children

Not all mental health benefits are created equal. When looking for a mental health benefit that supports employees and their families, here are some key things to consider:

Easy, online signup. Searching for and signing up for care online can help reduce some of the stress parents might feel about finding mental health care for their children. It can also be less time-consuming than calling providers to schedule appointments.

Personalized match to experts. Let's face it: Most parents are not mental health experts. This makes it difficult to know which provider is actually going to be helpful for their child's specific needs. Look for benefits that offer data-driven, personalized provider matching. This takes the guesswork out of finding the right provider and reduces stress for parents.

Limited wait times. A recent study showed the median wait time for an adolescent to get a new patient appointment with a psychiatrist was **50 days**, adding stress to parents and children with more immediate care needs. With benefits like Lyra, appointments can be scheduled

immediately and sessions are available in just a few days.

Offer comprehensive care for every need.

Many mental health benefits only offer care for adults or have limited offerings for children. Choosing a mental health benefit that addresses the diverse spectrum of needs can help parents find care for the whole family without having to access multiple platforms.

A commitment to evidence-based care.

Known as evidence-based treatments (EBTs), as defined by the [Society of Clinical Psychology](#), these are proven methods that have been researched and tested in randomized controlled clinical trials and repeatedly demonstrate measurable clinical improvement.

Care for complex mental health issues.

When children and adolescents have complex mental health issues that may require in-patient care, it can be overwhelming to search for and vet facilities and providers. In-patient care may also have barriers such as long waitlists. Lyra Concierge: Advanced Care Coordination can help parents find the right care for their children in programs with qualified referrals that account for insurance, wait times, and other potential barriers.

Conclusion

If you think about parenting's true return on investment, it's seeing children grow up to live happy, healthy lives—and that starts with positive mental health at an early age. [According to the CDC](#), "Mentally healthy children are more likely to have a positive quality of life and are more likely to function well at home, in school, and in their communities."

In the office, working parents simply can't be fully present if their child needs help, especially if they are having difficulty accessing that help. Easing that burden for parents helps the child, the parent, and on-the-job productivity.

"Employees don't have infinite bandwidth so, when there's a large stressor such as a child who is sick or needs care, it places additional demand on the employee," said Dr. Browne. "Providing pediatric mental health care is not just helping children who need it, it's helping their parents, too."

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About the expert

Kendall Browne, PhD is the program manager, workforce mental health at Lyra Health and a licensed clinical psychologist. Dr. Browne has over a decade of experience in the development, evaluation, and use of evidence-based interventions for mental health conditions, including anxiety disorders, trauma-related disorders, and substance use disorders. Throughout her career, Dr. Browne has provided educational trainings and consultation to health care leaders, administrators, frontline clinician providers, and employees. In her current role, she consults with employers on workplace wellness and mental health strategy and contributes to the development and delivery of Lyra's educational content.

About Lyra Health

Lyra Health, a leading provider of innovative mental health benefits for more than 2 million U.S. employees and dependents, is transforming mental health care by creating a frictionless experience for members, providers, and employers. Using matching technology and an innovative digital platform, Lyra connects companies and their employees—plus spouses and children—to world-class therapists, mental health coaches, and personalized medication prescribing. Leading self-insured employers partner with Lyra to tailor value-driven mental health benefits programs specific to their workforce. With Lyra, benefits leaders can offer employees fast, reliable access to clinicians who practice evidence-based mental health care approaches that have been proven effective. For more information, visit: lyrahealth.com, and follow us on [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#).

Learn more about how you can support the well-being of your employees and their families.

partners@lyrahealth.com | www.lyrahealth.com