**Poll: Mental health diagnoses in Tennessee kids above national averages; less than half of kids with some conditions get treatment**

An analysis of polling of Tennessee parents by researchers at Monroe Carell Jr. Children’s Hospital at Vanderbilt has found that while diagnosed mental health conditions in children across the state remains relatively stable, they remain above the national average and are roughly double the national average for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

The poll also found a 10% decline in parents who said their children are getting mental health support at school, dropping from 23% in 2023 to 14% in 2024, when the poll was fielded across the state.

Roughly 30% of parents statewide reported their child or children have a diagnosed mental health condition, including Depression, Anxiety, Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD), or autism. Of those, only 48% said their child was getting treatment for their condition.

“We found that while there is a slight downward trend in overall diagnoses, the statewide averages in Tennessee remain above the national average and our youth suicide rate is nearly 14% above the national average,” said Heather Kreth, PsyD, associate professor of Clinical Pediatrics and Pediatric Psychology and Clinical Director of Inpatient Behavioral Health and Acute Behavioral Health Services at Vanderbilt and Monroe Carell. “Particularly concerning is that, overall, less than half of children with diagnosed mental health conditions are receiving treatment. We’ve also seen a significant decrease in the number of children reported to be accessing mental health resources at school which is concerning because for many families, schools are the only place where they can access mental healthcare.“

In 2024, Tennessee lawmakers enacted policy to require parents to consent for mental health services for their children, which researchers said could be associated with the downward trend in services provided at school.

Just over 4 in 10 parents with children diagnosed with ADD/ADHD said their child was receiving mental health services. A majority of parents with children diagnosed with depression and anxiety said their children are getting treatment.

**Autism diagnoses trending upward; most children are not getting treatment**

Researchers note that for the fifth year in a row, parent-reported diagnoses of ASD remain high, with an increase from last year’s poll. Notably, polling suggests that parent-reported prevalence rates of ASD in Tennessee are double the national average reported by parents.

 More concerning, researchers said, is that only 1-in-3 parents with children on the autism spectrum said their children are receiving mental health services for the condition.

“Further research needs to be done to understand the difference in the high parent reported prevalence of ASD in Tennessee versus known state and national averages. Regardless, it is very concerning that only 1-in-3 parents with a child with ASD report that their child is able to access treatment,” said Katie Spencer, assistant professor of Clinical Pediatrics and Pediatric Psychology at Vanderbilt. “Early, evidence-based intervention helps children thrive and identify and build on a child’s strengths so that they can experience success at home, in school, and in their communities.“

**About the Child Health Poll**

The Vanderbilt Child Health Poll is conducted annually to gauge parents’ concerns about a wide range of topics. The data, collected from a representative sample of Tennessee parents across each of the three grand divisions of the state, focuses on child health issues ranging from education to food security, insurance status and mental health. Roughly 80% of all parents polled identified as registered voters.