
Behavioral Health Screening for Transitional Age Youth

Brianna Lombardi, PhD MSW; Brooke Lombardi, PhD, MSW; Jacob Hyman, MS; Erica Richman, PhD, MSW; Paul Lanier, PhD, MSW

Background

To understand the extent to which youth are screened in primary care, this study investigated the occurrence of behavioral health (BH) screening at well-visits for children, adolescents and young adults in the U.S.

Methods

The study sample comprised commercially insured youth and young adults (age 11-20) in the U.S. who received a well-child visit between 2017-2021. We used a repeated cross-sectional analysis of Marketscan commercial insurance claims to assess the proportion of well-child visits that included a BH screen (CPT 96127 Brief emotional/behavioral assessment) for individuals 11-20 years old at the time of the visit. We analyzed changes in the proportion of well-visits with a BH screen for adolescents and young adults across study years, stratified by gender and age.

Findings

Between 2017-2021, the percentage of well-child visits that had a BH screen increased by 113%. In 2017, 14% of well-child visits had a co-occurring BH screen as compared to 30% in 2021. With every additional year of age after age 13, the likelihood of receiving a BH screen at a well-child decreased. Males were more likely to have a BH screen during a well-child visit than females.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

Although BH health screening claims increased over the study period, most well-visits did not include a claim for a screen, suggesting that many youths are not receiving this care. Further investigation is needed to identify factors that increase BH screening in primary care settings for youth. Training pediatric primary care providers on the utility of, and supporting funding for, BH screens could increase BH screening for this population.