A National Agenda for Children’s Mental Health

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This brief presents a national agenda for creating an effective children's mental health system. It reviews challenges in supporting children’s mental health during the pandemic, describes principles to guide the agenda’s implementation, and outlines key strategies for addressing those challenges to create a more effective and equitable mental health system for children and youth.

The *Principles for a National Children’s Mental Health Agenda* advocate for a population health approach to promoting children's mental health. This approach emphasizes the importance of addressing the social, economic, and physical conditions that affect mental health, using interventions at multiple levels: individual, family, community, and societal.

Key areas of focus include:

1. **Promotion** – Maximizing mental health before illness occurs.
2. **Prevention** – Minimizing risks for mental health problems.
3. **Early Intervention** – Addressing early signs of mental illness before it worsens.
4. **Treatment** – Targeted interventions for identified mental health disorders.

Key principles for the agenda's implementation include:

- **Parity** – Systems must eliminate barriers to high-quality mental health services to ensure access for all individuals
- **Holistic Approach** – Children's mental health must be linked to their overall physical health and well-being.
- **Multi-sectoral and Multigenerational Efforts** – Mental health is shaped by complex, long-term interactions at multiple levels.
- **Prioritization of Prevention** – Focus on promotion, prevention, and early intervention while recognizing the effectiveness of interventions at any life stage.

- **Community Engagement** – Communities most affected should actively participate in decision-making.
- **Comprehensive and Coordinated Support** – Mental health systems should address diverse influences and involve collaboration across service providers.

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