Behavioral Health Services Outcomes That Matter Most to Caregivers of Children, Youth, and Young Adults with Mental Health Needs

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This project explores the service outcomes most valued by caregivers in behavioral health settings. Caregivers from six U.S. regions participated in two rounds of virtual focus groups. In the first round, they identified desired outcomes for themselves, their families, and their children, and shared what makes services positive for them. They also highlighted their top three hoped-for outcomes. In the second round, participants validated and refined the initial findings.

Caregivers prioritized outcomes related to service quality, emphasizing the need for accessible, respectful, and supportive environments with culturally responsive, well-trained professionals. They stressed the importance of seamless collaboration between providers and care transitions that incorporate family and child preferences into customized care plans.

Other key outcomes included gaining knowledge, tools, and resources to support their children’s mental health, seeing improvements in their children’s daily functioning and communication skills, reducing stigma around mental health, and achieving personal fulfillment for both caregivers and children. The findings underscore the importance of designing research, policies, and mental health services around the priorities of youth and families.

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