The Future of Behavioral Health Services for Youth with Foster Care Experience

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Youth with foster care experience (FCE) are up to 62 percent more likely to face mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety, and PTSD, than their peers in the general population. Hence, access to effective therapy is vital. However, most of these youth are insured through Medicaid, which constrains access to a wide array of mental health treatments and primarily covers only traditional “talk therapy” modalities. Youth with FCE have expressed that talk therapy modalities are not universally effective and leave many youth in need of better support. Alternative treatments such as art therapy, movement therapy, music therapy, and equine-assisted psychotherapy – already available to higher-income populations – show promise in treating mental health conditions often faced by youth with FCE and so offer the potential to fill this gap. However, as of now, there is no clear agreement between or guidance offered to states on whether alternative therapies are covered by Medicaid. In order to achieve equitable access to mental health care, we must ensure that foster youth have the ability to choose from a wide array of mental health treatments, including alternative therapies. Equitable access necessitates coverage and reimbursement under Medicaid..

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