



# CDC's Behavioral Health Coordinating Unit

*Mental Health is Public Health: CDC's Strategic Approach to Mental Health*

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Presentation to NCIPC Board of Scientific Counselors

**June 6, 2024**





**Key Concepts: Mental Health is Public Health**

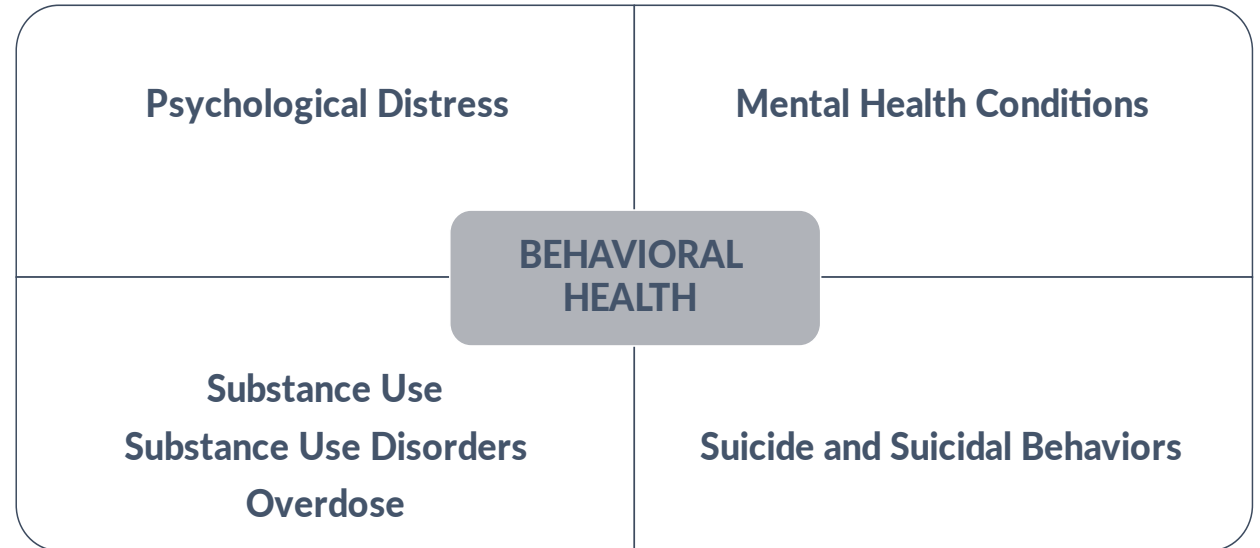
# 2024 CDC Priorities



# Key Terms

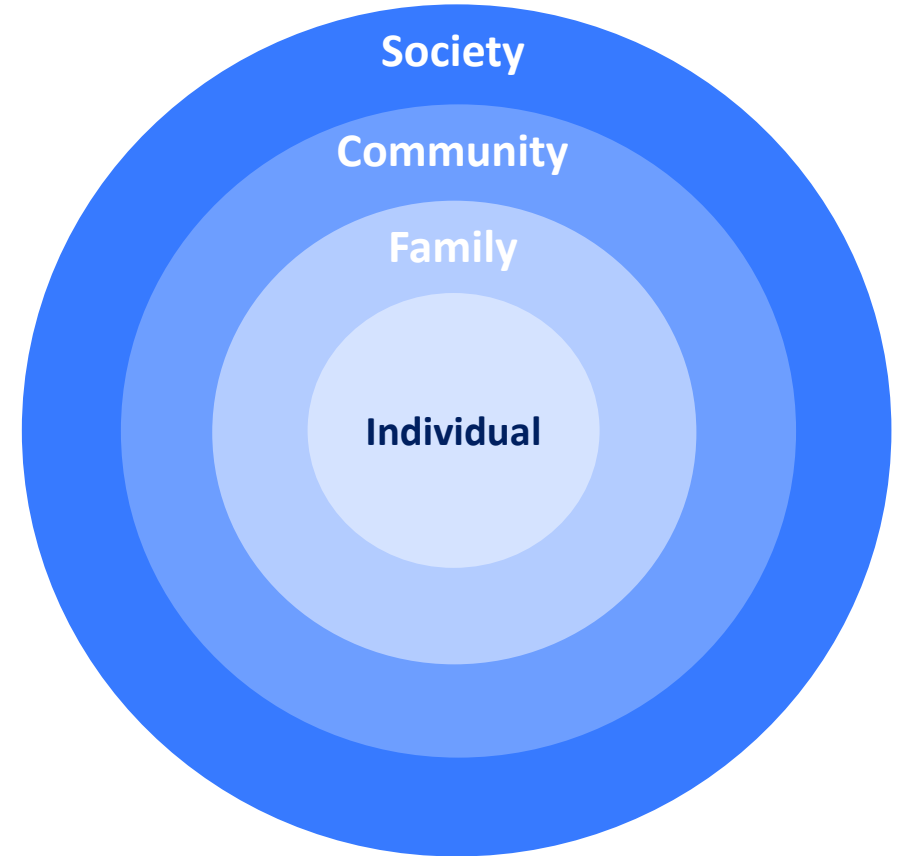
- Behavioral Health
- Mental Health
- Well-Being
- Mental Distress
- Mental Health Condition

## Behavioral Health



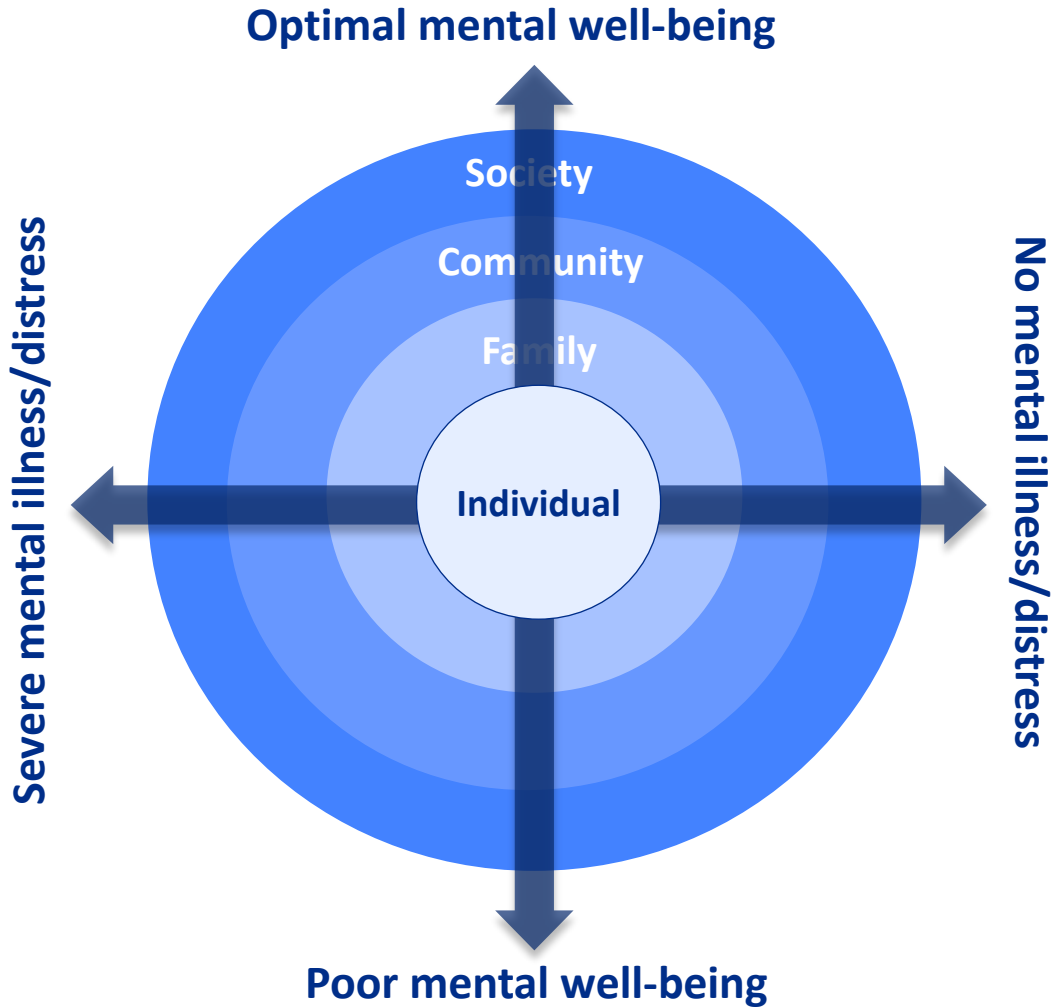
# Conceptualizing Mental Health: Risk and Protective Factors

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Protective</b>
Structural, social drivers (e.g., discrimination)	Health equity
Lack of access to housing, healthcare, education	Access to social determinants of health
Stigma associated with help-seeking, mental distress	Social acceptance of distress and help-seeking
Adverse childhood experiences	Positive childhood experiences
Social isolation	Social connection
Poor emotion regulation	Ability to emotionally regulate
Genetic predisposition	



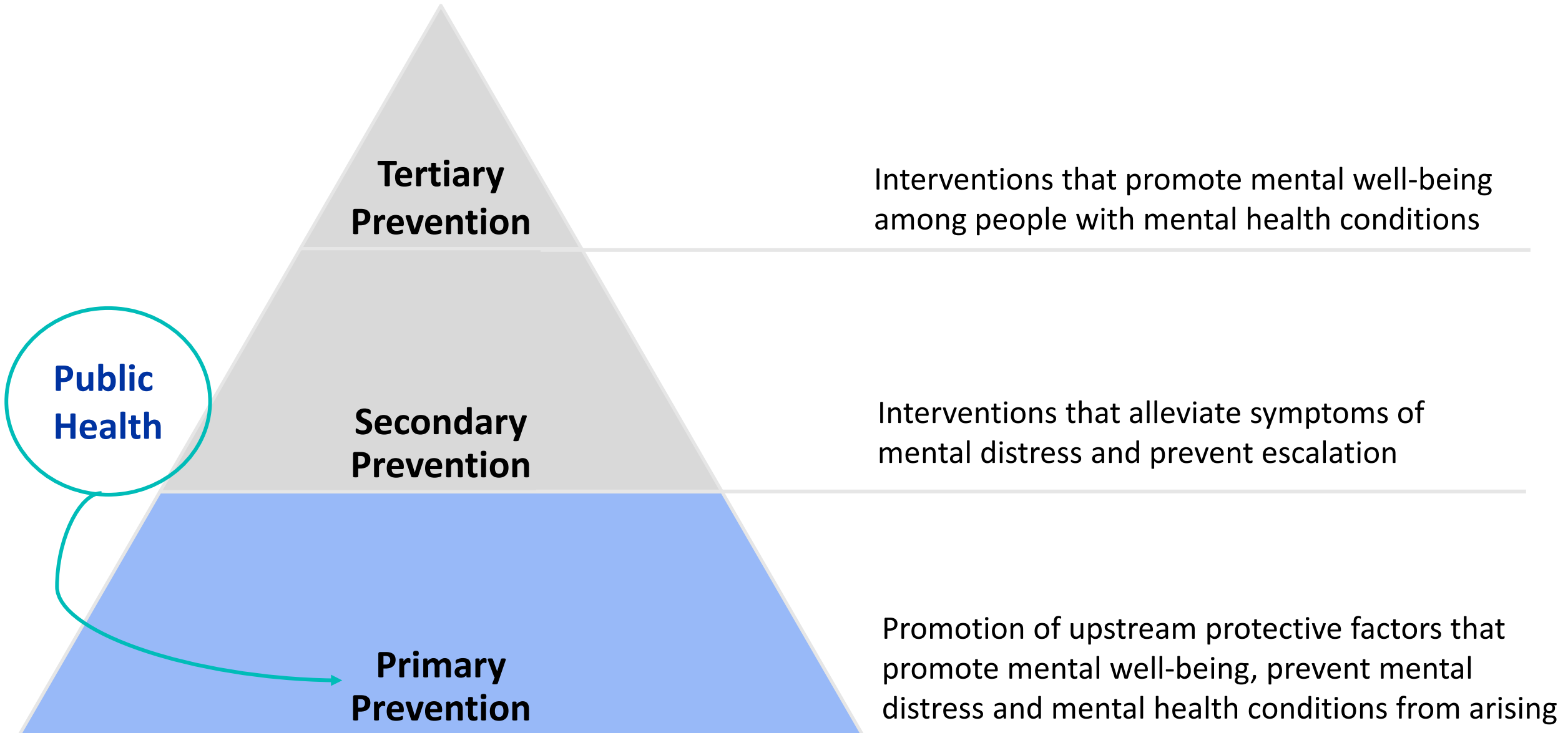
# Conceptualizing Mental Health: Dual Continuum

Risk	Protective
Structural, social drivers (e.g., discrimination)	Health equity
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*Mental well-being and mental distress are on a dual continuum—both can be present simultaneously*

# Public Health Model of Mental Health Promotion



# Public Health's Role in Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention







# Behavioral Health Coordinating Unit

# Meet CDC's Behavioral Health Coordinating Unit



**Neetu Abad, BHCU Lead**



**Rachel Smith, BHCU deputy**



**Greta Massetti, BHCU Champion**



**Angeline Boey, Comm Lead**



**Meghan Frey, Policy Lead**

# About Behavioral Health Coordinating Unit (BHCU)

## History

- Builds on previous CDC efforts to coordinate and strengthen focus on mental health
- Responding to congressional appropriations language in FY22, FY23, and FY 24, BHCU was launched in July 2023
- Stood up to inform mental health priorities and goals
- Environmental and data scans conducted to understand landscape of mental health work across CDC

# BHCU Mission & Vision

## Mission

To elevate, advance, and coordinate CDC's public health approach to promote mental well-being and prevent mental distress, substance use, overdose, and suicide. This includes a focus on behavioral health as a necessary component of well-being across the life course, particularly during early childhood and adolescence.

## Vision

**One CDC** working together to advance our shared commitment to optimal mental and behavioral health for all people.

# BHCU Core Functions



1. Develop, coordinate, and advance an agency-wide **mental and behavioral health strategy**
2. Champion **CDC's distinctive collective contribution** to advancing the role of public health in mental health promotion
3. Foster **collaboration across CDC** to support current efforts, identify emerging needs, and advance CDC's work on mental health
4. Collaborate with **external partners and federal agencies** on cross-cutting behavioral health initiatives
5. Create and promote **unified messages** related to behavioral health
6. Sponsor and support the **CDC mental health workgroup** and its activities



# CDC's Mental Health Strategy

# Mental Health Action Tank: SWOT Analysis

## 7 Focus Areas

- Improve population surveillance
- Identify risk and protective factors
- Leverage surveillance, research & evaluation data
- Promote healthy beginnings
- Promote healthy environments
- Promote healthy connections
- Address provider burnout

***Strength***  
Enhance and  
Build



***Weakness***  
Resolve and  
Reduce

***Opportunity***  
Exploit and  
Expand



***Threat***  
Avoid and  
Thwart

# Mental Health Action Tank: SWOT Analysis Themes

Strengths: diverse partnerships, primary prevention approach, robust data collection and evidence base

Weaknesses: Limited resources or dedicated funding, Lack of defined role, Need for internal coordination and collaboration

Opportunities: Strengthen existing partnerships, expand inclusion of non-traditional partners like mental health advocates and providers

Threats: Perceived overlap with other agencies, limited community engagement



## STRENGTHS

- Diverse partnerships
- Primary prevention approach
- Robust data collection & evidence base



## WEAKNESSES

- Limited resources/dedicated funding
- Lack of defined role
- Need for internal coordination & collaboration



## OPPORTUNITIES

- Strengthen existing partnerships
- Expand inclusion of non-traditional partners (MH advocacy, providers)



## THREATS

- Perceived overlap with other agencies
- Limited community engagement



# Mental Health Action Tank: SWOT Analysis Recommendations



## COMMUNICATION & DISSEMINATION

Speak with one CDC voice, increase awareness of existing work



## PARTNERSHIPS

Collaborate with diverse partners



## STRATEGY & INTERNAL COORDINATION

Develop a mental health strategy



## RESEARCH & DATA

Make mental health data local, timely, and action oriented



## RESOURCES

Proactively address the need for dedicated resources

# CDC Mental Health Strategy: Purpose

- Promote One CDC approach to improve mental health
- Provide unified narrative to help define CDC's role
- Help identify current activities, gaps, and progress in mental health work across CDC
- Inform research, program, & policy to improve mental health










# CDC Mental Health Strategy

for Individual, Family, Community, Society

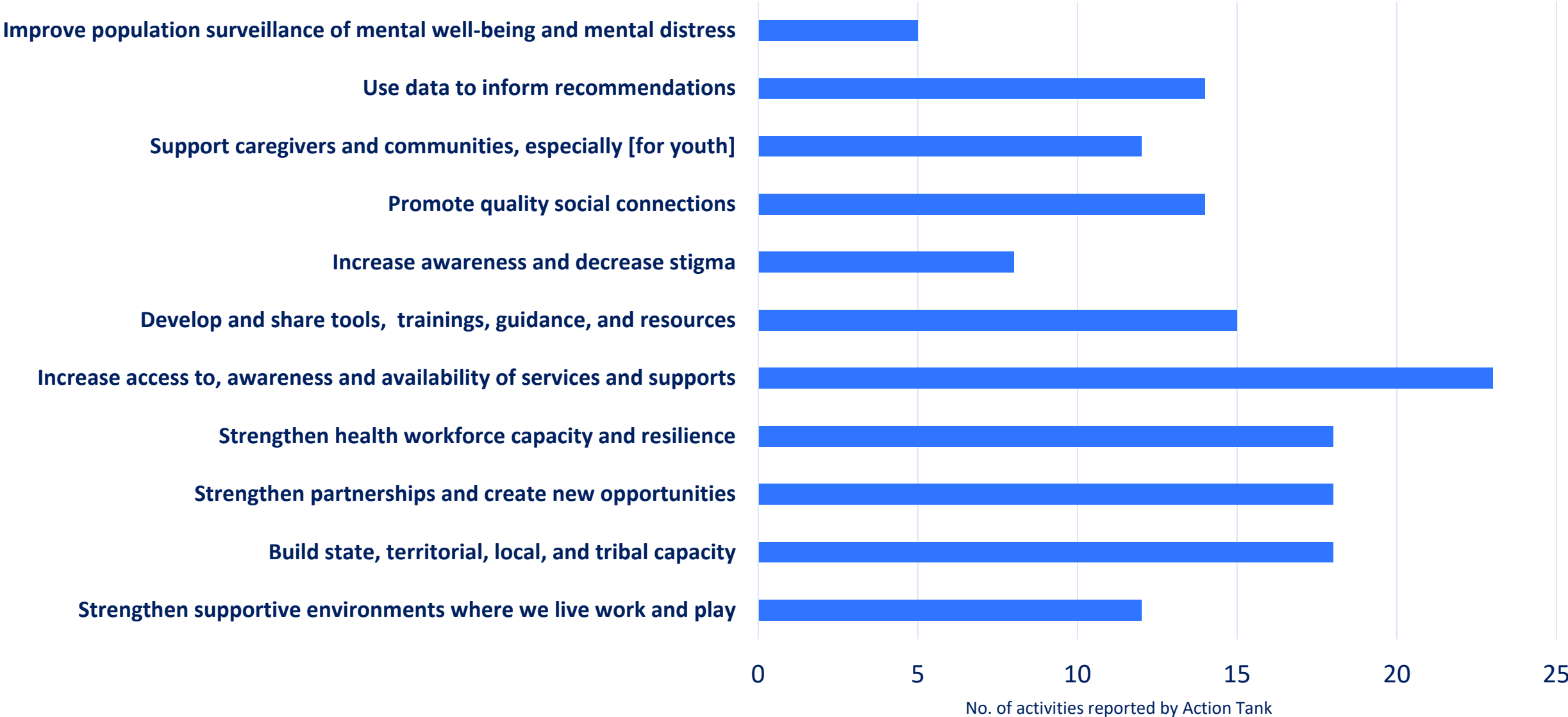


Guiding Principle: CDC works with communities and partners to promote mental well-being to ensure everyone has an equitable chance to thrive.

Mental Health Framework Strategies (ASTHO, MHA, CLASP, CDC)	PILLARS	GOALS
Promote Well-being	 Collect and use data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve population surveillance of mental well-being and mental distress</li> <li>• Use data to inform recommendations</li> </ul>
	 Promote mental well-being and prevent mental distress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support caregivers and communities, especially related to early childhood and adolescence</li> <li>• Promote quality social connections</li> </ul>
	 Educate and inform about mental health and public health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase awareness and decrease stigma</li> <li>• Develop and share tools, trainings, guidance, and resources for evaluation</li> </ul>
Improve Access to Supports & Opportunities	 Strengthen mental health systems and support providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase access to and awareness and availability of services and supports</li> <li>• Strengthen health workforce capacity and resilience</li> </ul>
	 Engage and empower partners and communities to improve mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen partnerships and create new opportunities</li> <li>• Build state, territorial, local, and tribal capacity</li> <li>• Strengthen supportive environments where we live, work, learn, and play</li> </ul>

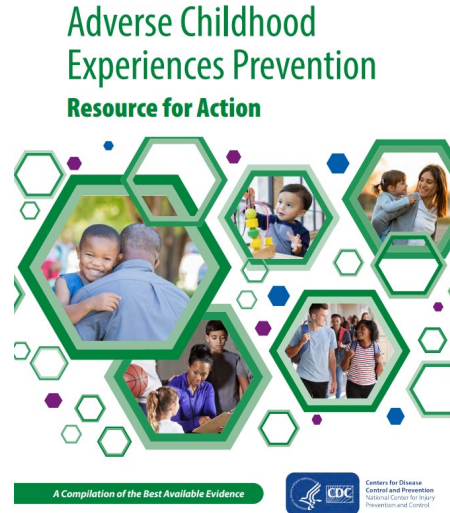
CDC recognizes that mental health is closely linked to physical health and social determinants and impacts health-related outcomes throughout life.

# Mental Health Related Activities Across CDC as of September 2023 by Strategic Goal



## Goal: Use data to inform recommendations

National Center for Injury Prevention & Control's [Adverse Childhood Experiences Prevention: Resource for Action](#)



## Goal: Promote quality social connection

National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention & Health Promotion's [What Works in Schools](#)



CDC's What Works in Schools Program  
Promoting the health and well-being of young people through schools



Taking Action to Improve Healthcare Worker Wellbeing



## Goal: Strengthen health workforce capacity & resilience

National Institute of Occupational Safety & Health's (NIOSH) [Impact Wellbeing Guide](#)



# Draft Mental Health Research Agenda

- **Data:** Visualize available data on mental well-being, mental distress, mental health conditions on accessible dashboard to guide action
- **Equity:** Identify populations at increased risk for mental distress; ensure public health strategies are tailored to address their needs
- **Stigma & Discrimination:** Develop and implement interventions and campaigns to reduce stigma and discrimination around mental health care-seeking
- **Determinants:** Map upstream determinants of mental well-being and mental distress; identify shared opportunities for intervention
- **Interventions:** Support research institutions to examine and advance interventions that promote population level mental health
- **Capacity:** Identify components of public health systems and workforce that can be leveraged to increase access to mental health screenings & services for priority populations



# Discussion

- What are ways that BHCU can continue to implement CDC's mental health strategy and further define CDC's role in improving mental health from a public health perspective?
- How can BHCU build and sustain relationships with the research community?
- What are ways to rapidly improve population level surveillance of mental well-being and mental distress?

# Thank You!

## [bhcurequests@cdc.gov](mailto:bhcurequests@cdc.gov)

For more information, contact CDC  
1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)  
TTY: 1-888-232-6348 [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.





# Key Definitions

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## Behavioral Health

A state of mental, emotional, and social well-being and/or behaviors and actions that affects wellness. Behavioral health issues include psychological distress, mental health conditions, suicidal ideation or suicide attempts, and substance use or substance use disorders. The term is also used to describe the service systems encompassing the promotion of mental well-being, the prevention of mental distress, and treatments and services for mental health conditions.

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## Mental Health

The component of behavioral health that includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Mental health is a state of well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood.

# Key Definitions

## Well-being

A state of positive functioning and general satisfaction with life, including the presence of positive emotions. This state may also be due to economic, environmental, and social conditions that contribute to a sense of purpose and are meaningful and sustainable.

## Mental Distress

A general term for a subjective sense of discomfort, mental anguish, perceived lack of control, anxiety, or stress. Also known as psychological distress.

## Mental Health Condition

An illness or disorder that affects a person's thinking, feeling, behavior, or mood. Healthcare professionals use guidelines in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders to diagnose mental health conditions. Research suggests multiple linking causes such as genetics, biochemical processes, and environment.

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