



## PRESS RELEASE

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### CALL FOR URGENT ACTION ON PENNSYLVANIA'S YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

**Pennsylvania – March 11, 2025** – A growing chorus of voices across Pennsylvania is demanding bold action to address the youth mental health crisis. At last week's **Strong Minds, Bright Futures Webinar: Solutions to the Youth Mental Health Crisis**, parents, youth, educators, and mental health professionals came together to discuss the urgent need for systemic reforms. With over 85 attendees representing diverse sectors across the Commonwealth, the consensus was clear: Pennsylvania's mental health system is not meeting the needs of its children, but together, real change is possible.

Led by **Ashley Rosario**, Senior Trainer at Flourish Agenda and MSW Candidate at Columbia University, and **Sarah Pesi**, MSPPM, Policy Specialist at the Jewish Healthcare Foundation, the event centered on community-driven solutions to expand access to quality mental health care.

Morgan, a mother of a teenager seeking help in Central PA, shared her struggle in accessing mental health care for her son:

*"In our local small town, there's not a whole lot of access to treatment in the area... So, we really struggled with finding a way for him [my son] to get therapy... The first appointment we could get was a nine-month wait, and we were expected to drive two hours to the closest facility that would take him with his insurance... He decided to give up on it.... We had this window where he was willing to get treatment, and we tried as his parents as hard as we could to get him the help that he needed, and the system failed him."*

**WHAT:** Strong Minds, Bright Futures Webinar: Solutions to the Youth Mental Health Crisis – A solutions-oriented conversation on expanding mental health services, supporting families, and implementing policies that ensure access to care.

**WHO:** Panelists included community members with lived experience alongside leading experts in youth mental health:

- **Heather McDonough-Caplan**, LAPC – Youth Psychotherapist, UpStreet
- **Dr. Jayme Banks**, Psy.D, MBA – Chief of Student Support Services, The School District of Philadelphia
- **Dr. Mary Anne Albaugh**, MD – Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist, Deerfield Behavioral Health

**WHEN:** Tuesday, March 11, 2025 at 12:00 PM ET

**WHERE:** On Zoom - Recording available upon request

**WHY THIS MATTERS:** Pennsylvania's children deserve strong, healthy futures. But too many families are struggling to find the mental health support they need. By bringing together parents, educators, health professionals, and community leaders, this webinar focused on real solutions that strengthen families,

keep communities thriving, and ensure every child gets the care they need to grow and succeed. Investing in early mental health support keeps schools, hospitals, and first responders from being overwhelmed by crises—and helps build a stronger, more resilient Pennsylvania.

Nicole, a Philadelphia high school student, highlighted the need for more resources in schools:

*“I started struggling with my mental health in around fifth grade, but I never sought help until I was in high school, and that was mainly because my school didn't really have a lot of mental health resources... I don't want anyone going through a similar experience like me.... I really just hope that for the next generation there's going to be more education on mental health.”*

#### **KEY TAKEAWAYS:**

- **A Shared Recognition of the Crisis** – Families, educators, and experts agree that Pennsylvania's mental health system is failing to meet rising demand due to access barriers, provider shortages, and insufficient insurance coverage.
- **Schools as Hubs for Mental Health Care** – Schools must play a central role in providing accessible, early intervention mental health services.
- **Investing in Workforce & Sustainable Funding** – Expanding training and certification pathways can increase the number of mental health providers. Long-term funding is essential.
- **Prioritizing Prevention & Early Intervention** – Addressing mental health concerns before they escalate can prevent crises and reduce the burden on schools, hospitals, and first responders.

Dr. Banks emphasized the importance of early intervention in youth mental health:

*“I think it's imperative that we start early... We start before it becomes an identified mental health issue and helping our students and young people identify emotions, as well as understanding the importance of relationships, the importance and ability to express themselves.”*

Heather McDonough-Caplan reinforced the role of community-based programs in preventing crises:

*“A lot of the preventative services that we're trying are to keep kids from needing a higher level of care or trying to stay. Stop a crisis before it becomes a crisis.... after-school programs and community organizations are really in to talk to these kids who either wouldn't have access to services elsewhere or wouldn't be willing to seek them out.”*

**WHAT IS NEXT:** The momentum from today's discussion continues later this week with the official launch of Strong Minds, Bright Futures: A Partnership for Child Mental Wellbeing. This partnership is committed to pursuing bold, impactful, and sustainable reforms that will improve access to youth mental health services across Pennsylvania.

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**ABOUT STRONG MINDS, BRIGHT FUTURES:** Strong Minds, Bright Futures is a statewide partnership dedicated to improving youth mental health across Pennsylvania by advocating for policy changes, expanding mental health services, and supporting families. Learn more at [www.strongmindspa.org](http://www.strongmindspa.org), and follow us on Facebook and BlueSky @StrongMindsPA and on Instagram @PaStrongMinds.

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