CLASP
The Center for Law and Social Policy

Core Principles for Mental and Behavioral Health Policy

01 Redefining mental health

02 Expanding access to care

03 Enhancing culturally responsive services

04 Addressing social needs

05 Strengthening quality infrastructure

06 Building a robust and diverse workforce

CLASP has identified the following principles for advocates and policymakers to consider as we develop policy proposals at the local, state, and federal levels. We urge policymakers to apply the same approach to mental health and other systems that impact wellbeing. When proposing changes to the mental health system, consider the following:

1) Redefining Mental Health:

Mental health systems and other systems that affect one's wellbeing should focus on assets-basedframing, on wellness and prevention at both the structural and individual levels, rather thandiagnosis and deficit-based framing.

2) Expanding Access to Care:

To achieve comprehensive mental health care, we need to expand the current mental healthsystem. We must establish universal health care, and implement and enforce mental health parity, atleast equivalent to what is needed for physical health services.

3) Enhancing Culturally Responsive Services:

Changes to our mental health system must explicitly promote equity and address health inequities.Policymakers must acknowledge and remove structural barriers impacting mental health andmental health access. These barriers include historical trauma and systemic racism, which haveresulted in mistrust of providers, services, and systems.

4) Addressing Social Needs:

Public health recommendations highlight the importance of addressing the root causes of community health challenges. This includes focusing on the social determinants of health, such as housing and education. Mental and behavioral health policy solutions must follow suit. They must address the underlying social and economic conditions in communities that limit or foster good mental health, as well as addressing individuals' basic needs.

5) Strengthening Quality Infrastructure:

A proper data surveillance system and care management infrastructure must be in place to improvecare provision. Data needs to be disaggregated by race/ethnicity and age, and continuously collected in youth-friendly and culturally responsive spaces. Providers must be appropriately trainedin the above principles, including offering culturally responsive care, receiving implicit bias trainings,and understanding and dismantling societal and structural racism.

6) Building a Robust and Diverse Workforce:

Meeting communities' mental and behavioral health needs calls for more providers across differentareas of expertise, coming from many racial/ethnic backgrounds. Policymakers must create apipeline to bring more providers of color into the workforce who represent and understand thecommunities they are working with.

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