Mental and emotional suffering
Local data on a national issue

A national problem

Nationally, 1 in 5 Americans will experience a mental illness in a given year, and 1 in 2 will be diagnosed with a mental illness or disorder in their lifetime. Poor mental health can lower the productivity of local businesses and increase health care costs, make it difficult for children and youth to succeed in school, and disrupt daily life in families and community. Nationally, mental health and substance use disorder costs our economy nearly $200 billion (2013). The loss of income because of unemployment, expenses for social supports, incarceration and a range of indirect costs from chronic disability add to this economic burden. Communities prosper when residents have fair opportunities to get their mental health needs met. When communities don’t have resources to prevent and address mental health problems, those living homeless or in poverty can suffer most.

The local consequences

Children and youth

Our children and youth deserve to be hopeful, happy and emotionally healthy. Too many Pierce County children and youth are disconnected, depressed, or even despairing. Between 2015-2018, 42 Pierce County children aged 10-19 ended their own lives. The 2018 Healthy Youth Survey asked Pierce County 10th grade students how they felt:

- 2 in 3 reported feeling nervous, anxious or over the edge and not being able to stop or control worrying in the past two weeks.
- Nearly half of 10th graders reported feeling depression. That number represents a 6% increase from 2014.
- More than 1 in 4 said they seriously considered suicide in the last year. Of those students, about half attempted suicide.
- Suicide ideation is higher among multiracial youth, American Indian or Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander youth.
- Pierce County youth reported receiving less education about suicide than the state average. Younger children are also at risk. 1 in 5 6th graders in Pierce County “seriously considered” suicide in the last year.

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1 https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/learn/
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The Washington State Department of Health reports suicide deaths have increased among most age groups with the sharpest increase among those 15-25 years of age.\(^5\)

LGBTQ youth are at greater risk for poor mental health across developmental stages than non-LGBTQ youth.\(^6\)

1 in 2 considered suicide, 2 out of 3 felt sad or hopeless, and 1 in 4 misused prescription opioids.\(^7\)

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)

ACES can have lasting, negative effects on health, well-being, and opportunity. Some negative experiences in childhood are so overwhelming for children they become traumatic. These experiences can increase risky behaviors and can lead to a wide range of chronic diseases and leading causes of death such as cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and suicide.\(^8\)

The 2018 Health Youth Survey results for Pierce County 10\(^{th}\) grade students included:
- 2 in 5 reported experiencing emotional abuse.
- 1 in 4 reported experiencing physical abuse.
- 1 in 4 reported witnessing violence in the home or community.
- 1 in 5 reported experiencing unwanted sexual advances.

Adults

Poor mental health days interfere with work, relationships and daily activities. When we have poor mental health days, our physical health can suffer too.

- Nearly 1 in 5 Pierce County adults reported poor mental health days lasting two or more weeks in the past month.\(^9\)
- Of those adults who experienced 14 or more days of poor mental health in the last month, more than half (56.4\%) are not receiving care or taking medication.\(^10\)
- Suicide is the 9th leading cause of death in Pierce County.\(^11\)
- The rate of suicide in Pierce County is 18 per 100,000. This is 20\% higher than Washington State rate of 15 per 100,000, and 38\% higher than the US rate of 13 per 100,00. In Washington State, for suicides, Pierce County ranks 22nd out of 39 counties.\(^12\)
- In Pierce County, 5\% of adults have experienced, or are experiencing, serious mental illness, which is higher than the Washington State average (3\%).\(^13\)
- 437 Pierce County residents died from an overdose involving opioids.\(^14\)
- 573 hospitalizations in Pierce County were related to overdose involving opioids, averaging 204 per year.\(^15\)
- Nationally, 1 in 9 women experience symptoms of postpartum depression.\(^16\)

\(^{7}\) CDC Health Disparities Among LGBTQ Youth (2015-2017)
\(^{8}\) CDC Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences
\(^{9}\) BRFSS (Poor Mental Health Days) 2015-2018; BRFSS (Care and Medication) 2011-2016.
\(^{10}\) BRFSS (Poor Mental Health Days) 2015-2018; BRFSS (Care and Medication) 2011-2016.
\(^{13}\) BRFSS (Serious mental illness) 2018.
\(^{14}\) Washington State Department of Health Center for Health Statistics (CHS) 2013-2017
\(^{15}\) DOH Comprehensive Hospital Abstract Reporting System (CHARS) 2013-2018
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Military families
Pierce County is home to more than 40,000 active duty, National Guard and reserve service members and another 15,000 civilians who work for the military. In addition, the base supports 60,000 family members who live on and outside the base and nearly 30,000 military retirees living within 50 miles. In Pierce County, 1 in 4 10th graders have a family member who is or was in the armed forces. This is significantly higher than the state.\(^{17}\)

- For 10th grade students whose family were in the military, depression and anxiety was higher and hopefulness and quality of life was lower.
- Self-reported mental health for veterans in Pierce County is better than the overall population. The rate of suicide among veterans is 2 times greater than non-veterans.\(^{18}\)
- 9% of people living homeless in Pierce County were veterans. Among all those living homeless, 1/3 reported mental illness.\(^{19}\)

Access
Access to health care means everyone can get quality health services when needed. People can experience barriers to access such as inadequate insurance coverage, lack of conveniently located services, and delays in appropriate care has become a crisis for millions of people in the United States.

- Pierce County has one mental health provider for every 380 residents in Pierce County, compared to the state ratio of one provider for every 279.\(^{20}\)
- Pierce County has one Health Provider Shortage Area (HPSA) for mental health, in Key Peninsula.\(^{21}\)

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17 Healthy Youth Survey 2018.
18 BFRSS, Death Records 2014-2018
19 Pierce County Point-in-Time Count 2019
20 County Health Rankings and Roadmaps 2016.
21 HRSA Data Warehouse, HRSA in Your State, 2016