



# Young people need our help. So do the people who care for them.

## Insights from Dr. Yusra Benhalim

Sr. National Medical Director, Optum Behavioral Health Solutions

As a child and adolescent psychiatrist, I help children and families understand and manage mental health conditions and substance use disorders. As a senior national medical director at Optum Behavioral Health Solutions, I help put clinical puzzles together to create behavioral health solutions that connect children and families to the care they need.

Too often, however, both of my roles are keenly focused on addressing a crisis, rather than preventing one.

This challenge isn't going away. As is widely documented and reported, American youth are increasingly struggling with their mental health and well-being. Late last year, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory calling "for a swift and coordinated response" to this mental health crisis.



**Finding new ways  
to help solve the  
youth mental  
health crisis**

## Learning how to reach today's youth

Driven to improve care options, we recently completed extensive research – including one-on-one interviews – to better understand the lives, needs, desires and values of youth ages 13–26 who are experiencing behavioral health symptoms, conditions and treatment.

One of the key things we learned is that traditional intervention paths and solutions are not working for this generation as well as we had hoped:

- Primary care physicians generally see individual youth too infrequently to identify mental health concerns, much less make referrals for them.
- Teachers, coaches and other community leaders may have more interactions and influence with youth but are not always privy to such concerns or professionally equipped to address them.
- Many youth say they are reluctant to confide in their parents and caregivers because they don't want to burden them, fear they will overreact or don't believe they can help.
- From a social determinants of health perspective, many youth do not have ensured access to one or any of the above.

Our research also revealed that when youth do seek care, they expect their care experiences to be tailored to their specific needs and wants. From their perspective, they know it when they see it and are otherwise suspicious of those they believe lack authenticity or could be motivated by self-interest.

However, youth say when they feel seen, heard and validated, they are more likely to trust another person. For most youth, though, this means keeping only a close circle of select confidants that rarely includes designated conventional caregivers.

Compounding these challenges, the world has changed. Youth no longer need to rely on their caregivers or nearby community resources for support and information. With instant access to a global network, they can easily circumvent traditional pathways in search of validation, answers and support online. Unfortunately, a quick search may or may not take them to legitimate or credible sources of information critical to their health and well-being.



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## Tackling the youth mental health crisis

The good news is that innovative help is on the way. At Optum, we are leveraging the results of our in-depth research and analysis to design new pathways to connect with and engage children, adolescents and young adults through the people, places and things they interact with and trust.

By earning their trust and creating new support systems that meet them where they are, we can make the most difference in the right ways. We value your role in helping children and their families access the behavioral health solutions they need.

**To learn more** about how we can partner to address youth and family mental health, contact your Optum representative or visit [optum.com/behavioralhealth](https://optum.com/behavioralhealth).

## About the author

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Dr. Yusra Benhalim is a Triple Board-certified psychiatrist in adult, child and adolescent, and addiction psychiatry. In her role, she focuses on enhancing the clinical enablement of innovative and effective solutions that meet the current and future needs of people across the country. With a focus on helping patients connect with their well-being and health outcomes, Dr. Benhalim helps create clinically focused, human-centered solutions, perspectives and best practices to facilitate a seamless and effective engagement experience.



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