



# Mental Health Is a Community Responsibility—And It Starts with Listening

According to the CDC, America is in the midst of an ongoing mental health crisis, one exacerbated by the fallout of the COVID pandemic.

Local data shows that Hoosiers—especially students—are as vulnerable as anybody.

Last year's *State of Women in Central Indiana* report (SOWR) found that girls in grades 7 through 12 are at least twice as likely as boys to...

- report feeling sad or hopeless for two weeks or more
- seriously consider suicide
- make a plan to attempt suicide

The report also showed a dramatic increase after 2020 in women's reported mental distress and men's rates of suicide and overdose mortality.

As an anonymous community participant in the study put it: "There is less fellowship now [after COVID]. A lot of communities are shifting online and not finding the same supports."

The data and testimony demand a response—one matching the urgency of this moment. Hoosiers working to restore their mental health must have broadly accessible pathways to do it. Not all communities currently enjoy easy access.

In an era of declining resources at the state and federal level, philanthropy and communities will need to deploy proven-effective efforts wherever they are needed most.

At Women's Fund, we know how intersecting identities—gender, class, race, or ethnicity—can impact outcomes in real and measurable ways. But by listening to people, and by taking seriously what the data shows us, we can empower Hoosiers who are uniquely vulnerable, improving outcomes for all.

For instance, we know that the mental health landscape is particularly fraught for younger Black girls in underserved neighborhoods.

In the most recent issue of *Diane*, our quarterly magazine, we explore this population's mental health dynamic in greater detail.

We learned how long-standing skepticism of the medical establishment within the Black community can delay critical care. We saw how a dearth of qualified providers in an area can leave entire communities without resources necessary to thrive.

And by examining national data, we learned how Black girls undergoing mental health challenges can encounter prejudice in schools, courts, and the healthcare system—challenges that their peers often do not face. For example:

- A 2016 study from the National Survey of Children's Health found that a majority of Black children have gone through one or more Adverse Childhood Experiences—the *highest rate of any racial demographic*.

- A 2017 Georgetown Law study showed that Americans across race and class view Black girls between ages 5 and 14 as *inherently "less innocent"*.
- The National Women's Law Center found that even though more white female students than Black are referred to law enforcement at school, *more Black female students are ultimately arrested*.

While this edition of *Diane* focuses largely on a single population, communities throughout our region are facing unique challenges. For example, early education and proper childcare are critical to healthy mental development, yet not even half of the demand for licensed childcare is being met in either Hancock or Shelby counties.

There is vast, untapped potential in Central Indiana today. If we can listen to each other, learn together, and fight for wider access to opportunity for our neighbors, we can realize the advancements and the collective joy within reach.

Tamara Winfrey-Harris  
President

Women's Fund of Central Indiana