



Psychiatric Medication in Pediatric Mental Health Care

Many children who could benefit from treatment receive none at all.

- Epidemiologic studies consistently show that many children and adolescents with diagnosable mental health conditions do not receive any evidence-based treatment.
- This includes both psychosocial treatments and medications when clinically indicated.
- Barriers include workforce shortages, insurance limitations, stigma, and lack of access to specialty care, particularly in rural and underserved communities.

Untreated mental health conditions in children are associated with significant risks.

- Improving access to evidence-based mental health care is critical for supporting healthy development and reducing risks such as suicide, school failure, and substance use.
- Ensuring timely access to evidence-based mental health treatment is therefore an important component of youth suicide prevention.

For some pediatric conditions, medication can be an essential and evidence-based component of treatment.

- For several conditions—such as ADHD, moderate-to-severe depression, bipolar disorder, and psychotic disorders—medications are strongly supported by clinical trials and treatment guidelines.
- When prescribed appropriately and monitored carefully, these medications can substantially improve functioning, safety, and long-term outcomes.

Concerns about overprescribing are addressed with careful oversight and data.

- Like any medical treatment, psychiatric treatment, including the use of medication, requires monitoring.
- Child and adolescent psychiatrists work closely with patients and families to assess the risks and benefits of psychiatric medication, as well as to monitor for potential side effects, altogether ensuring each child receives evidence-based, individualized care.
- Established oversight systems including state and federal Medicaid monitoring programs and prior authorization and review processes are designed to support safe and appropriate prescribing while ensuring access to necessary care.

Medication decisions in child psychiatry are highly individualized and must be evaluated in clinical context.

- Medication is often part of a broader treatment plan that may include talk therapy, lifestyle and school changes, and family support.
- AACAP strongly advocates for a personalized, evidence-based approach considering each child's unique needs.

Improving access to trained specialists is one of the most effective ways to ensure safe, appropriate prescribing.

- The United States has fewer than 10,000 practicing child and adolescent psychiatrists, far below what is needed to meet population needs.
- Many children receive care from primary care clinicians who often lack access to consultation with specialists.
- Expanding the child mental health workforce and consultation programs can improve prescribing quality and access to care.