

Suicide prevention: Raising awareness

The Empire State Plaza, lit in purple and teal in observance of Suicide Prevention Awareness Month.

Resources are available statewide to help those in crisis

September is recognized nationally as **Suicide Prevention Month**, dedicated to promoting awareness, education, and action to prevent suicide. The recognition honors the lives lost to suicide, supports the survivors of suicide loss, and reinforces New York State's commitment to mental health and wellness for all.

New York had the second-lowest suicide rate in the nation in 2023, according to the [latest data](#) available from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The state's 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is also among the most active in the nation, logging more than [43,000 calls](#) in July alone – second only to California.

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

New York State's 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is free, confidential, and available any time of the day or night by phone, text, or chat. Under Governor **Kathy Hochul's** leadership, New York State has significantly expanded the capacity of 988 Crisis Contact Centers by increasing funding from \$35 million in during the 2023 fiscal year to \$60 million annually.

Supported in all 62 counties statewide, 988 provides a connection to trained crisis counselors who can help anyone thinking about suicide, struggling with substance use, experiencing a mental health crisis or any other kind of emotional distress to receive personalized support, get immediate help, and connect with follow-up services.

Honoring lives lost

To recognize prevention efforts and show solidarity with New Yorkers whose lives have been impacted by suicide, Governor Hochul issued a [proclamation](#) recognizing September as Suicide Prevention Month in New York and directed that 16 state landmarks and bridges be illuminated in purple and teal at dusk on September 2 (see photo above).

Focusing on those at-risk

Suicide claimed the lives of almost 2,000 individuals in New York in 2023 and is the second-leading cause of death for youth and young adults between the age of 10 and 24, as well as individuals between the age of 25 and 34. Consistent with national trends, the suicide rate among males in New York is 3.5 times the rate among females.

As part of an effort to address suicide deaths, the state has undertaken several initiatives that are aimed at those who are most at-risk.

Last year, OMH's Suicide Prevention Center of New York launched the [MISSION project](#), a five-year federally funded suicide prevention program that is now reaching thousands of youths on Staten Island. This project provided suicide screening for more than 1,400 youth during the past six months and referred 1,110 of them for crisis or mental health services – 92 percent of these referrals resulted in these individuals receiving care through the grant's clinical partnership. This project also supplied school-based mental health providers and clinical or community partners with suicide prevention training.

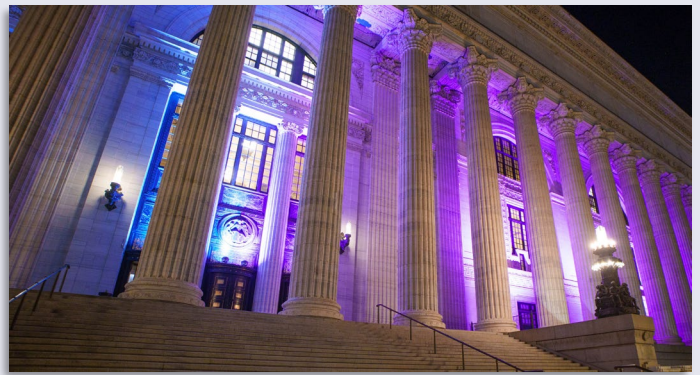
CARES UP

The state is also continuing to implement the [CARES UP](#) initiative, which is aimed at expanding resiliency and suicide prevention efforts among uniformed personnel, including law enforcement, firefighters, emergency medical service personnel, corrections officers, and emergency dispatchers. OMH has provided funding to 37 first responder organizations through CARES UP and seven veteran serving organizations via a program called **'Onward Ops.'** The CARES UP program provides \$30,000, for each discipline, annually over two years to increase suicide prevention efforts and wellness programming in their agencies. Governor Hochul was successful in tripling funding for the program in the 2025 State Budget, increasing it to \$3 million annually.

Through CARES UP, more than 575 uniformed personnel have received mental health and wellness training specifically designed for those working in emergency services. Additionally, roughly \$1.7 million has been provided to support first responder suicide prevention, resiliency, and peer support team development training. Onward Ops has helped screen 1,172 service members for suicide risk as they make the transition back into their communities after their tours of duty end. This program has helped nearly 500 of these individuals to connect with volunteer mentors trained to help ease this transition.

Other prevention initiatives

- OMH is overseeing the [Capital Connect initiative](#), a five-year \$4.9 million federally funded project that is implementing evidence-based programs and resources designed to support social connectedness in Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga, and Schenectady counties.
- Now in its third year, the initiative's [Youth-Nominated Support Team](#) program supports the support network of suicidal youth, an approach that has been shown in a study to save young lives. Young people between the ages of 12 and 24 who have recently attempted or thought about suicide select three or four trusted adults who receive coaching from a trained therapist on how best to support the youth. So far, more than 200 youth have been referred to the program. Additionally, this grant has provided enhanced suicide prevention training and support to more than 40 school districts in the Capital Region.
- Capital Connect is partnering with the construction industry to help raise awareness and foster prevention efforts among the trade. [Building Hope Through Action](#) launched in January and has partnered with five construction organizations, which each completed needs assessments to identify gaps in policy, awareness, culture, and education that could be filled to improve their suicide prevention efforts.



Illuminated landmarks

Lit in purple and teal in observance of Suicide Prevention Awareness Month:

- Albany International Airport Gateway
- Alfred E. Smith State Office Building
- Empire State Plaza (on page one)
- Fairport Lift Bridge over the Erie Canal
- Franklin D. Roosevelt Mid-Hudson Bridge
- Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge
- Grand Central Terminal - Pershing Square Viaduct
- H. Carl McCall SUNY Building
- Kosciuszko Bridge
- MTA LIRR - East End Gateway at Penn Station
- Moynihan Train Hall
- Niagara Falls
- One World Trade Center
- State Education Building (above)
- State Fairgrounds – Main Gate & Expo Center
- Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park

- OMH is in the second year of the **Promoting the Integration of Primary and Behavioral Health Care** program, a five-year \$10 million federally funded initiative to expand mental health services and use the collaborative care model in youth-serving primary care practices. More than 500 youth from 15 primary care practices have received this care, with nearly all having been assessed for suicide risk.
- Under Governor Hochul's direction, OMH reconvened the **Suicide Prevention Task Force** with a goal of strengthening public health approaches, enhancing health system competencies, improving data surveillance methods, and infusing cultural competency in the state's suicide prevention strategy. Specifically, this task force has a charge to look at special populations in New York, including rural communities.

Clinical Summit

SPCNY held a summit on September 15 and 16 for clinical leadership from behavioral health providers in the Capital Region and from the original 13 Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics that are participating in its Zero Suicide program.

Titled **'Advancing Suicide-Specific Care,'** the summit provided information on Capital Connect initiatives, best practices and evidence-based interventions in suicide care for youth and adults, efforts to culturally-infuse suicide care to better serve all populations and examine strategies to systemically implement and monitor suicide-specific practices and policies.

The summit offered two tracks to tailor the learning experience: one focused on acute care, including emergency departments and inpatient settings, and another on outpatient care, such as Mental Health Outpatient Treatment and Rehabilitative Services clinics and Personalized Recovery Oriented Services programs.

Suicide Prevention Conference 2025

This year's New York State Suicide Prevention Conference, to be held on October 22 and 23 at the Hilton Garden Inn in Troy, will focus on mental health and suicide prevention efforts for uniformed personnel, including corrections, emergency communications centers, emergency medical services, firefighters, law enforcement, and military veterans.

The conference will feature national speakers and subject-matter experts who will provide evidence-based training, workshops, and best practice models that apply universally to first responders, uniformed personnel, organizational leadership, and associated agencies and practitioners.



Spreading the word

Staff from OMH and SPCNY have been traveling throughout the state to share information on mental health and wellness.



From left: SPCNY Director of School and Youth Initiatives **Kristen Stanton**, OMH Deputy Director Office of Prevention and Health Initiatives **Tricia Hartnett**, and SPCNY Youth Project Manager **Emily Derrenbacher** attended the New York State LGBTQIA+ Convening this month which brought together policy-makers and government officials from state agencies to hear directly from advocates about the most pressing needs for the LGBTQIA+ community.



Stanton and Jennifer Haggerty, New York State Office of Addiction Services and Supports Upper Hudson Region Program Manager, gave a presentation at the InUnity Conference in Saratoga Springs this month on how both agencies are uniting to support students.



SPCNY Communications Manager **Gregory Eves** (second from left) visited Siena University on September 9, which is called **'988 Day,'** to spread the word about the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline to students and faculty.

Investing in youth

New initiatives to increase access to mental health services

New York State is making major investments in services and supports to protect the mental health of young people and promote student success in the digital age.

Governor Hochul's \$1-billion mental health initiative and the 2025 State Budget significantly expanded access to mental health care and provided resources for young people and their families. Then, in the 2026 State Budget, the Governor secured a landmark agreement to create a statewide standard for distraction-free schools and eliminate smartphone use in classrooms. This summer saw the launch of two more initiatives:



Youth Safe Spaces

Four nonprofit community-based organizations received a total of \$7.5 million to launch Youth Safe Spaces – a program to address the evolving behavioral health needs of teens and young adults. These peer-led, non-clinical programs will serve youth ages 12 to 24 in welcoming, community-based settings, offering safe spaces, resources, and connections to help them navigate mental health challenges:

- AIDS Center of Queens County
- Delphi Drug and Alcohol Council of Wayne County
- Friends of the CanTeen
- LaSalle School Inc.

This initiative was originally driven by feedback Governor Hochul received during her Youth Mental Health Listening Tour, which culminated in the state's inaugural Youth Mental Health Summit in June 2023.

Youth and Family Peer Advocate Workforce

Ten community-based organizations have started a state-funded effort to expand the state's youth and family peer advocate workforce and address existing shortages. With individual one-time grants of \$275,000, these not-for-profit organizations are now starting outreach efforts to identify, train, and credential individuals with lived experience or family caregivers for those living with mental illness or behavioral health issues to become youth and family peer advocates:

- Brooklyn Bureau of Community Services
- Central Nassau Guidance and Counseling
- Housing Options Made Easy, Inc.
- Integrated Community Alternatives
- Interborough Developmental
- Mental Health America of Dutchess County
- MHA of Erie County
- MHA of Rochester/Monroe County
- Pesach Tikvah Hope Development, Inc.
- Vanderheyden Hall Inc.

Governor Hochul's focus on youth mental health has led to the creation of 10 new **Youth Assertive Community Treatment** teams to support young people with serious emotional disturbances who are either at risk of entering, or are returning home from high-intensity services, such as inpatient settings or residential services. The new Youth ACT teams will join 20 others, which are now operating in 27 counties.

In addition, Governor Hochul signed into law the **Safe for Kids Act** last year, requiring social media companies to restrict addictive feeds on their platforms for users under 18. She also signed the **New York Child Data Protection Act**, prohibiting online sites and connected devices from collecting, using, sharing, or selling personal data of anyone under the age of 18, unless they receive informed consent or unless doing so is strictly necessary for the purpose of the website.

Governor Hochul also **expanded school-based mental health clinics**, which help students get a licensed mental health care provider in a familiar stigma-free setting on their school campus. Since funding this expansion last year, the state has added 71 new clinic satellites – including 40 in high-needs districts – to the more than 1,100 that now exist statewide.

Homeless support

SOS teams are conducting successful outreach

Five new Safe Options Support teams are now at work in New York City, helping to connect individuals who are experiencing chronic homelessness with the services and supports they need to bring them lasting housing stability.

- An **Older Adult and Medically Fragile Support SOS** team was launched in April.
- One **Breaking Ground SOS** team was launched in Staten Island in January, with a second launched in Far Rockaway in May.
- Two **Young Adult SOS** teams were launched in July.



*Housing and Homeless Services Medical Director Dr. **Carine Nzodom** (third from left) and Manhattan Psychiatric Center Medical Director Dr. **Caitlin Stork** (far left) participated in the very first New York City Street Psychiatry Conference hosted in July by the Center for Urban Community Services.*

This brings the number of SOS teams in New York City to 20, with 17 daytime teams and three overnight teams. There are a total of 11 'Rest of State' teams operational outside of New York City.

Managed by OMH's Homeless Support Unit, multidisciplinary SOS teams use **Critical Time Intervention**, an evidence-based practice that helps find housing and supports for vulnerable individuals in crisis – including critical mental health services. Teams work with referred members in every phase of their recovery including street, shelter, and medical rehabilitation. They help individuals to strengthen their skills and support network so that they can be successfully housed, and their care can be transferred to community-based providers.

In addition to providing psychiatric services, SOS offers a **harm-reduction program** for people with co-occurring disorders. This involves using motivational interviewing, education about medication-assisted treatment options, and thoughtful approaches around harm-reduction interventions.

The SOS program was initially provided \$25 million for the 2023 state fiscal year to create teams in New York City. Governor Hochul expanded funding to nearly \$34 million in 2024 to expand the program to upstate and Long Island.

Inspiring success

Some of the teams recently shared stories about the individuals they've helped during the past several months.

- Last summer, the **Catholic Charities of Cortland/Tioga/Tompkins** team met a man in his 50s who had been living on the street for many years. He said he found it difficult to manage his medication and finances. The SOS team met with him often to build rapport and discovered he enjoyed creative pursuits and wanted to open his own business.

After a couple of months, the man agreed to enroll in the program and worked with the SOS staff to identify his goals and find an apartment. He has since found a part-time job, attends his mental health and dental appointments, and volunteers in the community.

- **HONOR**, from the Hudson River region, met a man in his late 60s who was living unsheltered, in unsafe conditions, due his hoarding disorder. After multiple evictions, he had found temporary shelter at HONOR's shelter, but his situation was precarious.

The SOS team was able to build a rapport by visiting him weekly, offering hands-on support and coaching to help him build new habits and maintain a clean, safe home. After five months of dedicated work, he moved into a private, rented room, marking his first stable home in years. He learned to manage his clutter, stay organized, and take pride in his living space – understanding that maintaining his home was key to staying housed. Three months later, his room remains clean, organized, and well-cared for. He's now connected to medical services and, for the first time, open to exploring mental health treatment – a major step in his journey to stability.

- **Liberty Resources** of Western New York recently found housing for an elderly veteran who, because of his past trauma, spent nearly 20 years unsheltered. He refused several offers for housing and services – preferring to live outside, even in below freezing temperatures, and refused to leave the neighborhood.

The SOS team collaborated with veteran services, church organizations, a local restaurant owner, a local hotel, and local hospitals to find outpatient services that he would accept. The team used its service funding to help pay for his hotel room, honoring his autonomy. He finally moved into an apartment through the Housing First initiative. It turned out to be exactly what the man wanted, and he talked about feeling heard and seen by his team.

- The **Long Island Coalition for the Homeless** team met

a woman in her 50s at a local encampment who had been estranged from her family. She was reluctant to stay at a shelter and would often be admitted to

hospitals, frequently leaving against medical advice. The team met with her several times per week. During initial meetings, she struggled to manage her emotions and would frequently have outbursts that would make it challenging for the team to provide her with help. The team noticed she was more receptive to in-person communication and increased frequency of their meetings to build rapport. The next month, she agreed to enroll in SOS and identified her goals of finding housing and reuniting with her family. SOS helped her find a primary care physician and move into permanent housing.

- The **Monroe Plan for Medical Care of Chemung and Stueben** counties team met a woman in her early 60s who was living in an encampment, mourning the loss of a family member and struggling with a terminal illness and substance use disorder. At first, the woman wasn't interested in any help but quietly listened to the team's outreach efforts. After a brief period of lost contact, the woman experienced a medical crisis that led her to ask the hospital social worker to reach out to the team.

With the help of the SOS team, she was able to engage in services, become sober, and re-establish connections with her family. After months of hard work, the woman was able to secure permanent housing. The SOS team referred her to local agencies for help with applying for Social Security Disability and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. They also helped her get a cell phone, which allowed her to stay connected with her family and access services.



Getting results

Since the start of the initiative during the last three months of 2023, through August 29, 2025, 'Rest the State' SOS teams are making an impact in finding help for people experiencing homelessness in upstate New York and Long Island.

- Outreach encounters: **28,403**
- Referrals received: **4,678**
- Enrollments into SOS program: **872**
- Total temporary bed placements: **744**
- Total individuals placed into stable housing: **544**

Emergency preparedness

Training to provide mental health services after a disaster

In July, a team from OMH's **Bureau of Emergency Preparedness and Response** participated in a live exercise for disaster mental health responders.

The event was held in collaboration with the State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services, the American Red Cross, Onondaga County Animal Response Team, New York State Office Fire Prevention and Control, and the Oneida County Sheriff's Department.

Psychological first aid

The exercise provided opportunities for trained responders to practice disaster mental health and psychological first aid skills in a realistic setting and prepared trained responders for deployment in support of communities experiencing disasters and traumatic events.

The exercise simulated the second day of Red Cross shelter operations with a hurricane passing through south central New York, after making landfall along the coast of New Jersey and tracking northeast through Pennsylvania.

Thirty-two responders interacted with 18 role-players, acting as shelter clients exhibiting a variety of expected stress reactions.

Role players were given character profiles that provided a personal story and history, along with tools for escalating or de-escalating their emotional responses, based on how they were approached by responders. Responders used their psychological first aid skills to support shelter clients.

Support from several agencies

The program was supported by approximately 35 staff, controller-evaluators, partner agency representatives, and observers from several organizations.

Homeland Security Services provided the facility, role-players, safety officer, participant lodging, food, and exercise planning expertise, while Red Cross volunteers and employees simulated shelter and feeding operations.

Additional simulations were provided by the Onondaga County Animal Response Team, New York State Office of Fire Prevention and Control, and the Oneida County Sheriff's Department. Due to the nature of the simulation, controller-evaluators and crisis counselors were available to provide support, should participants start to feel stress from the exercise.



Transitions

Ben Rosen named OMH Executive Deputy Commissioner

This summer, **Ben Rosen** was named OMH's new Executive Deputy Commissioner.

In his new role, Ben directs agency operations for OMH, which provides public mental health services and supports to more than 800,000 New Yorkers each year. With a state workforce of nearly 15,000 employees and a multi-billion-dollar budget, the agency promotes the mental health of all New Yorkers with a mission to foster hope, recovery, and resilience for individuals living with mental illness and serious emotional disorders, and their families, each and every day.

With more than 20 years of public service in both the Executive and Legislative branches of government, Ben has worked to advance social and economic justice issues for all New Yorkers.

As chief of staff at OMH, Ben was instrumental in developing and rapidly implementing Governor Hochul's historic \$1-billion investment in mental health services and subsequent actions to strengthen New York's mental health infrastructure.

In previous roles, Ben served as both director of the OMH Planning Office and director of the OMH Public Information Office, where he organized the agency's comprehensive response to the COVID-19 pandemic, directed agency-wide strategic planning efforts, and oversaw hundreds of millions of dollars in community-based services reinvestment funding.

Ben also served as Director of Communications for the New York State Department of Health, managing the daily media relations and strategic communications of the agency. He began his career in government working for the State Assemblymember from Central Harlem, as his Special Assistant and then Communications Director. In this capacity, he assisted hundreds of constituents and helped secure passage of landmark legislation, including the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights.

Ben is a graduate of John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York.



Cody Catalfamo named Acting Associate Commissioner, Medical Informatics

This summer, **Cody Catalfamo** was named Acting Associate Commissioner, Medical Informatics.

Cody is a forward-thinking leader in leveraging technology in service of mental health and recovery, dedicated to enhancing the lives of individuals served by New York State. Cody has a foundational understanding of compassionate care, emphasizing the importance of service and support throughout all stages of life.

With a Master's Degree concentrating on Social Welfare Management from the State University of New York at Albany, Cody has been a champion for improving mental health services since joining the agency in 2011. His career path took a transformative turn in 2018, when he joined the Medical Informatics team, using technology as a vehicle for promoting recovery and improving care.

Cody has played an instrumental role in the strategic redesign of OMH's application portfolio, overseeing application rationalization and driving large-scale modernization initiatives. As a leader in the OMH Electronic Health Record implementation effort, he focuses on utilizing modern tools to facilitate person-centered care.

Dedicated to recovery-oriented practices, Cody advocates for solutions that prioritize the needs and experiences of individuals. Cody's leadership not only enhances operational efficiencies but also fosters empowerment and hope within the communities served. Cody remains committed to transforming mental health care in New York, ensuring that every individual has access to the resources necessary for a successful recovery journey.



On the road

Visiting Venture House

Earlier this month, OMH Commissioner **Dr. Ann Sullivan** (front row, center) visited the clubhouse program at Venture House in Queens, accompanied by New York State Assemblymember **Stacey Pheffer Amato** (first row, far right). Venture House started in 1988, through funding from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, using a space in the local YMCA in Jamaica. Shortly after, with funding from OMH, it began expanding its programming. It now serves more than 2,500 individuals with clubhouses in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island.



Restorative practice

OMH's Office of Prevention and Health Initiatives recently partnered with First Presbyterian Church of Albany in offering a variety of community-based providers – such as CARES NY, Inc. Navigators, and 518 SNUG Violence Prevention – opportunity to engage in OMH-sponsored restorative practices training.

In July, OMH held such a session for the staff, volunteers, and interns of Albany County District Attorney **Lee Kindlon's** office. The training offered an integrated

set of explicit approaches and skills that seek to foster conditions to restore access to those internal and external resources individuals need to survive and thrive in the face of trauma. Kindlon offered his support for implementing alternative ways to address the harm done by others and praised Bureau Chief **Renee Merges** (second row, far left), for her decades of service and dedication to the individuals in her office who carry out this work. Restorative practice training is offered by OMH Mental Health Program Specialist 2 **Jon Rice** (first row, far left).

InUnity Alliance conference

From left, Executive Deputy Commissioner **Rosen**; Deputy Commissioner for the Division of Community Program Policy and Management **Bob Moon**, and Deputy Commissioner and Chief Fiscal Officer **Joe A. Katagiri** were among several OMH leaders to speak at the recent InUnity Alliance Conference in September in Saratoga Springs.

InUnity Alliance is a grouping of nearly 200 community-based organizations and professionals that provide essential substance use disorder and mental health services to individuals and families throughout New York State. The alliance provides strategic advocacy and representation, offers workforce training and credentialing, and convenes cross-sector partners to develop solutions that safeguard and advance access to substance use disorder and mental health services.



Resources

Report: Access and Quality of Mental Health Services in Rural and Urban America

This report from the University of South Carolina Rural Health Research Center documents recent trends of mental health care access and quality in urban and rural communities.

According to this study, rural residents are more likely than urban residents to experience mental health disorders, or more importantly, serious mental illness – defined as “serious functional impairment that substantially interferes with or limits one or more major life activities.”

Key findings:

- Access to mental health facilities: Nearly 18 percent of large rural and more than 40 percent of small or isolated rural ZIP Code Tabulation Areas were located at least 30 minutes from any type of mental health care facility compared to less than 10 percent of urban ZCTAs.
- Digital divide exacerbating access: Both rural and urban ZCTAs located more than 30 minutes away from the nearest mental health facility had a higher proportion of households without access to essential telecommunication devices.
- Quality of rural mental health facilities: Rural facilities generally demonstrate better performance compared to urban facilities in terms of continuity of care measures and lower rates of physical restraint and seclusion usage.

The report notes that mental health conditions require timely and appropriate treatment. Untreated conditions can result in substance use disorders, unemployment, homelessness, suicide, incarceration, deterioration of physical health, shorter lifespan, and increased co-occurrence of chronic diseases such as diabetes, obesity, epilepsy, cancer, and cardiovascular disease.

For information on this report, visit:

<https://www.ruralhealthresearch.org/alerts/668>.

Figure 2. Driving time to any mental health facility and digital health access across ZIP-Code Tabulation Areas in the United States

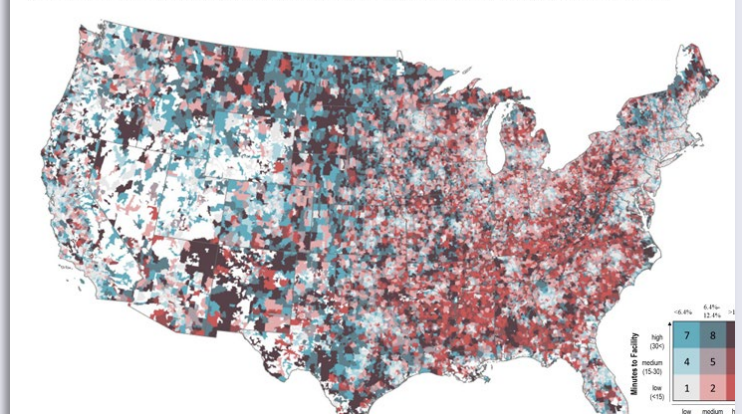


Figure 1. Locations of Mental Health Facilities by Setting or Services

