

Perspectives

THE STATE OF PLAY

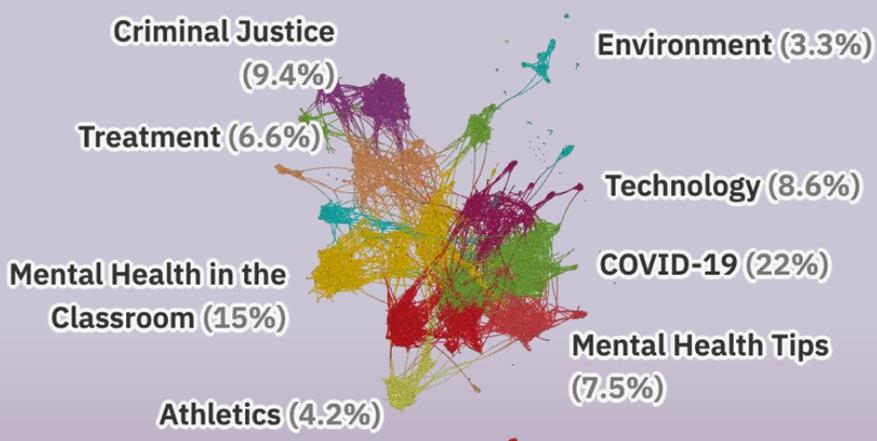
Each month, we examine how the mental health conversation is evolving, with a focus on youth, women, and the justice system. Last month, we shared learnings from our recent stakeholder summit, *Prioritizing Trauma*. This December, we will do a *Year in Review*, reflecting on current events that shaped conversation around mental health and trauma in 2021.

The top trends in the national conversation concerning mental health in 2021 are illustrated below. Takeaways include:

At greater risk: people with pre-existing mental health conditions

Throughout 2021, the pandemic waged a persistent war on mental wellbeing. We're now learning that COVID-19 also poses an acute risk to people with pre-existing mental health diagnoses. One study, analyzing data from hospitals in the Yale New Haven Health System, found that **the risk of death increased by 50% for people with a mental illness**. Recently, the CDC has added people with mental disorders to the list of those who should be prioritized for vaccines or boosters.

Mental Health & Trauma 2021



Racial inequity and mental health: greater risk, more barriers to treatment and care.

In 2020, conversations about race reached new volume. In 2021, research took greater urgency to understand the mental health needs and challenges within communities of color. One study from UCLA found that **young adults who face consistent discrimination are 25% more likely to experience psychological distress, to be diagnosed with a mental illness, or to report excessive drug use.**

Young populations are grappling with “eco-anxiety.”

It's not just Greta Thunberg. As policymakers and industries dawdle on climate, youth mental health struggles to come to terms with climate change. One study, released this fall, asked youth around the world about the consequences of climate change on their mental health. Of the 10,000 respondents across 10 countries, **nearly 60% reported feeling 'very worried' or 'extremely worried'** and **45% of participants said their feelings about climate change impacted their daily lives.**

THOUGHT STARTERS

A roundup of thought-provoking pieces on mental health for youth, women, and the justice system.



Youth Mental Health: More cops than counselors - and why shootings persists in U.S. schools.

In 2021 in the US, there were at least [149 incidents of gunfire on school grounds, resulting in 32 deaths and 94 injuries](#). In a [Washington Post op-ed](#), U.S. Representative Jamaal Bowman makes a case for why gun control reforms aren't enough to stop the next school shooting:

"If we want to prevent the next school shooting, we need to see the warning signs... In America today, [14 million students](#) have police officers in their schools but no counselor, nurse, psychologist or social worker. That means there are fewer people to recognize the warning signs, fewer people for struggling students to turn to when they need help, and fewer people to stop these tragedies from occurring in the first place."

Women's Mental Health: Maternal mental health issues hurt Black women.

In the United States, Black women are faced with higher rates of maternal mental health conditions— particularly postpartum depression and anxiety. A [Health Affairs research article](#) identifies strategies and pathways to address racism and inequities in maternal mental healthcare across minority populations:

"Maternal mental health issues among Black women are largely underreported, and symptoms often go unaddressed. Structural and social detrimants are increasingly recognized as contributing factors to mental health; social and economic diasters exacerbate inequities in mental health outcomes and wellbeing and have implications for pregnant and postpartum populations... The perspectives and experiences of Black birthing people in maternal mental health research are key to identifying practice and treatment solutions."

The Justice System: Spiking solitary confinement rates sound alarm for inmate mental health concerns.

The number of incarcerated people put into solitary confinement – isolating prisoners for weeks, months, years and sometimes decades – has increased six-fold since the pandemic began. Now, advocates across academia, journalism and criminal justice are calling attention to this crisis. A recent [NPR article](#) outlines the issue and reports on personal accounts from lived experience individuals:

"Research has long shown that solitary confinement has devastating effects on [prisoners'] physical and mental health... At the height of the pandemic last year, up to 300,000 incarcerated individuals were in solitary, according to estimates from [Solitary Watch and The Marshall Project](#), non-profits focused on criminal justice... An [analysis by researchers with the University of Colorado and Human Rights Watch](#) suggests that more than half of all prison suicides occur in solitary confinement. A [study conducted by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene](#) found that the rate of self-harm among those in solitary is 10 times that of the general prison population."

THE PUNCHLIST

3

WAYS TO TAKE ACTION IN THE NEW YEAR.

1

Listen:

In our latest episode of **Voices of NEXUS**, college student and advocate Francesca Bas discusses her coming-of-age story as it relates to her journey with mental health.

2

Attend:

On Monday, January 24, the California Council of Community Behavioral Health Agencies will be holding their Winter Policy Forum entitled **Reimagining the Behavioral Health Workforce: Promoting Health Equity Through Access and Care**. The event will convene policy makers, leaders in the mental health arena and community members to discuss issues of concern including youth behavioral health; the opioid epidemic; homelessness; and the behavioral health workforce crisis.

3

Read:

We hope that you enjoy reading *NEXUS Perspectives* as much as we enjoy sharing it. We invite you to look back at **NEXUS Perspectives 2021 editions**, and share your thoughts with us. What content resonates with you the most? Which topics would you like to see covered in the coming year? We'd love to hear from you.

Check out our [website](#).

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