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When it comes to behavioral health, digital support matters for Florida's teens

Melody Bonomo Your Turn

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The Florida Department of Health reports that half of all lifelong behavioral health conditions begin by age 14, making early identification and treatment significant. But as more teens experience conditions such as depression and anxiety, many are struggling to find the help they need.

With a background in behavioral health, I have long been an advocate for solutions to address the needs of Florida's teens. My past work with this age group, especially those suffering from trauma, reinforced the importance of early intervention and finding effective ways to reach those who are struggling.



Stock photo showing pills next to a manometer to measure blood pressure and a stethoscope in a hospital, conceptual image.

As conversations continue around the state on the role of telehealth in behavioral health care, my hope is that we keep Florida's youth at the forefront of these talks, especially in the ways online tools can help create new doorways for younger generations to get the care they need.

In addition to the many stress factors that come with adolescence, teens who are struggling can also battle with the stigma of expressing their feelings or thoughts. This same stigma can make

teens reluctant to meet with a therapist in person or even approach a traditional brick-and-mortar behavioral health center. Instead, we need to meet them in the spaces they occupy and where they feel comfortable. For many, that environment is the same digital space where telehealth services are provided.

With an understanding of these needs, AmeriHealth Caritas Florida has been providing members with the full continuum of care, delivered via telehealth, through our partnership with Brave Health. This collaboration allows members to access online appointments when they need medication management, individual and group therapy, and even Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) for emotional regulation issues, which are common for teens. MindRight, another resource we offer, makes behavioral health support accessible exclusively through text messaging for our Medicaid members from ages 13-25.

These technologies can be a lifeline for teens because they are a convenient and accessible mode of support that has the added benefit of privacy—something many young people desire as they go through a period of rapid physical, emotional, and psychological development. Online behavioral health services also bridge the shortage of behavioral health professionals. It is an especially critical solution to accessing care for teens who live in underserved areas and who would otherwise run the risk of being left with untreated conditions that could persist into adulthood.

Teenagers are a unique population, so the solutions we offer them must be unique as well. There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to behavioral health care. Instead, we must focus on reaching teens through multiple checkpoints and channels of communication, including leveraging the benefits of telehealth, as we work collaboratively to preserve the well-being of Florida's youth.

Melody Bonomo is AmeriHealth Caritas Florida's Market President and a lifelong Florida resident. Her past work as a Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC), includes working with families and teens, especially those who have experienced trauma.

