

WHEN YOUTH LEAD MENTAL HEALTH SOLUTIONS, MONTANA THRIVES:

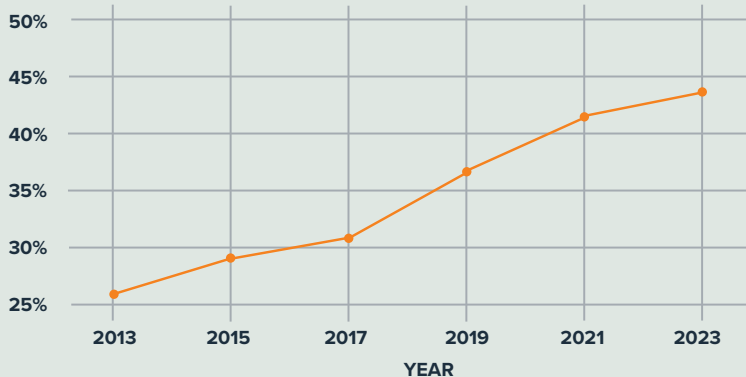
Strengthening Belonging and Well-being for Every Young Person

Young people's mental health shapes the future of Montana's communities. But many youth are struggling, and these challenges are not felt evenly. Some young people face greater barriers to support, belonging, and opportunity —especially youth experiencing discrimination, isolation, or limited access to care.

When young people most affected by these challenges are trusted to help lead solutions, programs better reflect real needs, strengthen belonging, and improve mental health.



Montana High School Students Feeling Sad or Hopeless (2013-2023)



Youth Mental Health Challenges:

- Montana youth report rising rates of sadness and hopelessness¹
- Western Montana faces a severe mental health workforce shortage²
- Federal funding cliffs and uncertainties threaten existing programs.

What the Data Tell Us

25%

MT students are bullied, compared to 19% nationally¹

33%

MT students reported poor mental health most of the time or always in the previous 30 days¹

25%

of MT youth seriously considered suicide and 10% attempted suicide¹

Strengths to Build On

- **Belonging builds both well-being and leadership.** When youth feel connected and respected, they are more likely to be mentally healthy, trust others, and see themselves as leaders.
- **Community roots run deep.** Local youth know what their communities need.
- **Youth leadership works.** When young people are trusted to lead, they build confidence and hope.
- **Innovation starts young.** Young people bring new ideas to tough, long-standing challenges.

Mental health challenges don't affect all young people equally

1 in 4

MT students reported being treated poorly or unfairly at school because of their race or ethnicity.¹

Nearly **1 in 5**

MT high schoolers — and almost 1 in 4 middle schoolers — are teased or called names because someone thinks they're gay, lesbian, or bisexual.¹

39%

of LGBTQ+ young people seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year.¹



Young people thrive when they are listened to, trusted, and supported.

Only
54%
of Montana's
youth are
thriving¹

Here's what happens when youth thrive — and what's at stake when they don't.

When youth are not thriving, they are more likely to:

- Lack curiosity and motivation to learn
- Struggle to finish tasks and follow through on goals
- Turn to unhealthy coping behaviors
- Have difficulty forming healthy relationships, leading to isolation



When young people thrive, they strengthen Montana's future as learners, leaders, caregivers, and problem-solvers.



Together, we can ensure that all Montana youth thrive.

Nonprofit Leaders

- Listen to young people and involve those most impacted in shaping programs and solutions.
- Share what you're learning about disparities and what's working and partner with others to reach more youth.

Philanthropy Leaders

- Invest in youth-led and youth-informed efforts, prioritizing communities facing the greatest barriers.
- Provide stable, multi-year support so organizations can build trust and respond to what young people say they need.

State Leaders

- Include young people, especially those most affected, in designing policies and programs.
- Invest in community-based support and remove barriers so youth in rural and Tribal communities can access care and connection.

Endnotes

1 Montana Office of Public Instruction. (2023). Youth Behavior Risk Survey (YBRS). <https://opi.mt.gov/Leadership/Assessment-Accountability/Youth-Risk-Behavior-Survey>

2 Rural Health Information Hub. (2025, October). Health Professional Shortage Areas: Mental Health, Geographic, by County. Retrieved from <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/charts/7>

Turning Investment into Action

Headwaters Foundation supports organizations that build leadership and a sense of belonging with families, elevate their voices to policymakers, and create the conditions for meaningful change to happen.

Learn more about our work and grantees at www.headwatersmt.org