

Policy Proposal for Strengthening Youth Mental Health in India: A Multi-Ministerial, Youth-Driven National Strategy

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Submitted to:

- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Women and Child Development
- Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
- Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports
- Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment
- Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
- Ministry of Labour and Employment
- Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)
- Local MLAs

I. Executive Summary

India's youth, the largest in the world, face mounting mental health challenges ranging from stress and anxiety to severe depression and self-harm. Stigma, lack of access, and limited caregiver support exacerbate these issues, leaving diagnosed youth underserved and undiagnosed youth invisible.

This policy identifies key gaps and proposes a multi-ministerial, youth-driven strategy to make mental health an overarching dimension of youth well-being. It ensures that all young people (diagnosed, undiagnosed, or at risk) along with their caregivers, receive support through awareness, early detection, equitable services, integration with education, and strong youth participation.

II. Policy Gaps Identified

1. Limited Awareness and Stigma

- Mental health remains taboo in many communities
- Lack of structured mental health literacy in schools and colleges

2. Inadequate Early Detection

- No universal screening for emotional well-being
- Teachers and frontline workers lack mental health training

3. Lack of Accessible Services

- Limited specialists and infrastructure at district hospitals
- Rural youth face affordability and accessibility barriers

4. Neglect of Undiagnosed Conditions

- At-risk youth facing bullying, substance abuse, or distress remain unaddressed
- Current programs primarily target diagnosed conditions

5. Insufficient Caregiver Support

- Families lack awareness, respite services, and financial aid
- Stigma and stress burden caregivers heavily

6. Weak Integration with Education and Youth Development

- Mental health is siloed from schools, skill programs, sports, and digital ecosystems
- Few formal mechanisms link mental health with youth development schemes

7. Limited Youth Voice in Policy-Making

- Young people rarely engage in shaping mental health policies
- Peer-led initiatives lack institutional support

III. Objectives of the Proposed Policy

1. Normalize mental health as a public priority within youth development.
2. Ensure universal access to early detection, counselling, and treatment.
3. Establish district-level youth-friendly mental health clinics.

4. Provide structured support systems for caregivers.
5. Embed mental health in education, sports, and digital ecosystems.
6. Institutionalize youth voices in policy design and monitoring.
7. Achieve measurable reductions in untreated conditions, stigma, and suicide rates by 2035.

IV. Proposed Initiatives & Multi-Ministerial Collaboration

1. **National Youth Mental Health Literacy Mission (NYMHLM)**

Lead: Ministry of Education + Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

- Mental health literacy integrated into school/college curricula
- Training for teachers and peer mentors
- Annual “Wellness Weeks” in all institutions

2. **Early Detection and Screening Program (EDSP)**

Lead: Ministry of Health + Ministry of Youth Affairs

- Non-stigmatizing screenings in schools/colleges
- Mobile mental health units in rural districts
- Confidential digital self-assessment linked to helplines

3. **District Youth Mental Health Clinics (DYMHCs)**

Lead: Ministry of Health + Ministry of Rural Development

- One dedicated clinic per district offering counselling and psychiatry
- Integrated with PHCs under Ayushman Bharat
- Subsidized/free medications and therapies

4. **Caregiver Support and Empowerment Program (CSEP)**

Lead: Ministry of Women and Child Development + Ministry of Social Justice**

- Psychoeducation workshops for parents and guardians
- Support groups for caregivers, both offline and online
- Respite care services and caregiver assistance schemes

5. **Digital Well-being and Crisis Response Platform (DWCRP)**

Lead: Ministry of Electronics & IT + Ministry of Health

- 24x7 youth helpline and AI-enabled chat support

- Anonymous online counselling and referrals
- Collaborations with social media platforms to address cyberbullying

6. **Youth Mental Health Policy Council (YMHPC)**

Lead: Ministry of Youth Affairs + Ministry of Education

- District-level youth representatives (50% young women)
- Quarterly reviews and annual Youth Mental Health Summit
- Direct reporting into national policy frameworks

V. Implementation and Monitoring Framework

- **National Implementation Committee (NIC):** Housed under the PMO for inter-ministerial coordination
- **State Mental Health Task Forces:** To localize initiatives and ensure rural outreach
- **Pilot Programs:** Start in 100 high-population districts
- **Capacity Building:** “Train the trainer” model for teachers, ASHAs, and youth leaders
- **Accountability:**
 - Independent youth-led audits
 - Public dashboards and citizen feedback tools
 - Regular social audits and transparent evaluations

Monitoring Tools:

- Real-time data dashboards at state and district levels
- Independent youth-led audits annually
- National youth well-being surveys every 3 years

VI. Funding Sources

- Consolidation of existing schemes (NMHP, Ayushman Bharat)
- CSR partnerships (health-tech, EdTech, digital platforms)
- International development aid (WHO, UNICEF, World Bank)
- State matching grants and district-level budgets

VII. Conclusion and Call to Action

This policy offers a holistic, equity-driven framework to ensure every young Indian has access to care, compassion, and resilience-building opportunities. By embedding mental health across

education, health, and youth programs, India can secure its demographic dividend and prepare resilient leaders of the future. We urge the Government of India to adopt this **multi-ministerial, youth-driven mental health policy** by **World Mental Health Day, October 10, 2026**.

Respectfully submitted by:

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