

# Dept. of Health Services: OCMH highlights importance of universal screening

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When schools and doctors' offices check to see how all children are feeling – not just those kids who display symptoms of mental distress – they are implementing universal screening, an important strategy in addressing youth mental health.

Universal screening can catch kids who are dealing with anxiety, depression, or suicidal thoughts and get them resources to help. Screening also helps kids identify what resources and skills they already have, and what strengths they can draw on, to cope with challenges in their lives.

Because youth don't always turn to their parents when facing a problem, many parents don't realize what stressors their child is facing or know how effectively their child is coping with that stress.

Embedding universal screening into pediatric primary care and school settings is a strategic way to catch kids who may be struggling and to educate families on coping skills, emotional literacy, and mental health. Schools are particularly well-suited for these checks, because kids spent the vast majority of their time at school.

“Being mentally healthy is more than the absence of illness. It is the ability to manage stress, cope with setbacks, and develop resilient mindsets. Developing mental well-being is critical for all kids,” said Linda Hall, Director of the Office of Children's Mental Health (OCMH). “If we were to make mental health screening universal and as routine as vision screening, we'd not only improve early detection and be able to intervene before a child is in crisis, but we'd also be saving money by using less intensive, costly services.”

Detailing universal screening as a best practice, today the Office of Children's Mental Health issued a new fact sheet with actions we can take to implement universal screening:

- Parents can opt in, allowing their children to participate in mental health screens.
- Pediatric providers can make mental health screens as routine as vision and hearing checks.
- Schools can start screening in one grade and build up over time to reach more children. Begin with a pilot and cultivate support.
- Policymakers can fund universal mental health screening in schools.
- Policymakers can require health insurance companies to cover annual mental health screens, as is done for annual physicals.

See the [complete fact sheet](#).

See [previous fact sheets](#).