



The impact of COVID-19 on mental well-being in the U.S.

Health Pulse Survey Results
2021

Our country is at a mental health breaking point.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated mental health issues in the U.S. at an astonishing rate with a swell of stress and anxiety that has consistently worsened since last spring. Aside from fear of catching and spreading this deadly virus, extreme isolation from friends and family, mass job loss, an unstable economy, and widespread social and political tensions have all contributed to a mental health crisis in this country like no other — the “hidden fourth wave of the pandemic.” No group has struggled more than **young adults**.

Tragically, there has been a 35% increase in suicides nationwide, and suicide is now the second leading cause of death for those aged 10–24.** Kids and young adults have lost school, lost connections, and lost hope. At the other end of the age spectrum, senior citizens have experienced even more isolation than they had previously. Health care professionals, essential workers, and first responders have been coping with stress, sleeplessness, and darker emotions. Then there are the millions of unemployed who have faced mounting financial pressures and possible home eviction. There isn't a population, geographic area, or community that hasn't been impacted by the pandemic, a heartbreaking reality.

The good news is that death rates are declining, and vaccine distribution is well underway. And yet, while there is much to be optimistic about, albeit cautiously, we are not out of the woods in terms of the mental health crisis: Our country will be coping with the emotional and mental fallout from COVID-19 for years to come. For this reason, we must take immediate action to confront it *now*, with comprehensive diagnostics, curative treatment, and preventative care.

* Farhad Manjoo, *The Hidden “Fourth Wave” of the Pandemic*, The New York Times, December 9, 2020

** U.S.A. Suicide: 2018 Official Final Data, American Association of Suicidology



Social Determinants of Health

Why have some communities been harder hit than others during the pandemic? Why are many Black and Brown Americans struggling to trust and access COVID-19 vaccinations?

There are numerous factors outside of the clinical setting that influence health outcomes, including the environments in which we live, work and worship. These economic, physical and social conditions can impact, among other things, access to quality health care, including professional mental health treatment and support.

For this reason, Aetna®, a CVS Health® company, is firmly committed to addressing the Social Determinants of Health (SDoH) as part of our broader agenda to show members we are there every step of the way on their health care journey — because we care. This includes providing resources that address anxiety, depression, and a variety of mental health issues related to the pandemic that may be further compounded by Social Determinants of Health.

Aetna, a CVS Health company, has the unique ability to touch all aspects of a person's health, including their mental well-being.



The Health Pulse Survey

Purpose

Gaining a deeper understanding of the mental and emotional toll the past year has taken on our local communities — and the nation at large — is vital. It's one step in our long-standing commitment to normalizing mental health issues, and providing preventative support and increased access to proper mental health care.

Methodology & Demographics

This Aetna® Mental Health Pulse Survey was conducted between January 22–January 25, 2021 among a national sample of **2,200 adults ages 18–65+**.

Interviews were conducted online and the data were weighted to approximate a target sample of adults based on gender, educational attainment, age, race and region.

Of the 2,200 participants surveyed, **209 indicated they had tested positive for COVID-19** or had been told by a health care professional they had the virus.

Morning Consult asked participants to answer 10 multiple-choice questions organized by the research objectives indicated above. Results from the full survey have a margin of error of plus or minus two percentage points.

About Morning Consult

Morning Consult is a global data intelligence company delivering insights on what people think in real time. By surveying tens of thousands across the globe every single day, Morning Consult is unmatched in scale and speed: It determines the true measure of what people think and how their decisions impact business, politics and the economy. Industry leaders rely on Morning Consult's proprietary technology and analysis for real-time, intelligent data to transform information into a competitive advantage.

Research Objectives

In partnership with Morning Consult who conducted the Health Pulse survey, our goal was to gain insights into:



COVID-19 and Mental Health

- Impacts of a COVID-19 diagnosis on mental health
- Impacts of the pandemic in general on mental health



Mental Health Concerns and Perceived Obstacles

- Confidence in ability to address concerns
- Perceived barriers to care



Vaccine Sentiments

- Emotional outlook and mental health concerns related to the COVID-19 vaccine



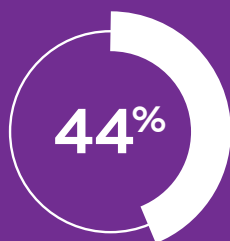
Telehealth Sentiments

- Perceptions of and likely utilization of telemedicine services

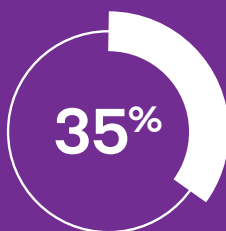
Covid-19 and mental health



Concerns around physical and mental health of family and friends



Concerns around increased isolation



Overall Findings

It will come as no surprise that COVID-19 has taken a heavy toll on the physical and mental well-being of millions of people in the United States. An **early survey** we conducted in April 2020 and this recent data show much of the mental health disruption is related to concerns around the physical and mental health of family and friends (44%) and increased isolation (35%), both directly related to the pandemic.

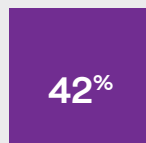
Accessing mental health services — especially for those communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 — will help greatly stem the long-term effects of this mental health crisis across all demographics. When it comes to finding help, there is disparity among Black and Brown communities: While 40% of Black Americans indicated being *very confident* they can find mental health support, 30% of Hispanics *doubt* they can find mental health help.



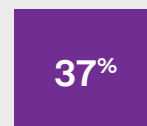
Findings from those who have had COVID-19.

More than a third of Americans who responded they had contracted COVID-19, also indicated they were still living with the physical and emotional side effects of the virus. The latter is likely due to a variety of factors, including sudden quarantining from family and friends, fear for personal health and financial stability, anxiety around infecting loved ones, and possible judgement around how COVID-19 was contracted. This data suggests health care providers may have an opportunity to make patients aware of mental health repercussions and available resources at the time of their COVID-19 diagnosis, and provide ongoing monitoring of their mental well-being even after recovery.

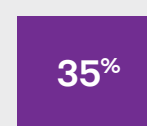
Still felt lingering side effects



Feared the impact COVID-19 would have on their family's financial situation



Had increased feelings of isolation



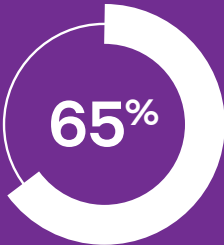
Data also shows Americans continue to experience worsening diets and negatively impacted sleep cycles, difficulty accessing food and other essential items, and financial fears all due to the coronavirus outbreak. The compounding effects of these stress factors, on top of pervasive anxiety and depression due to COVID-19 along with pandemic fatigue, illustrate how layered the state of mental health is in this country.



Mental health concerns & perceived obstacles

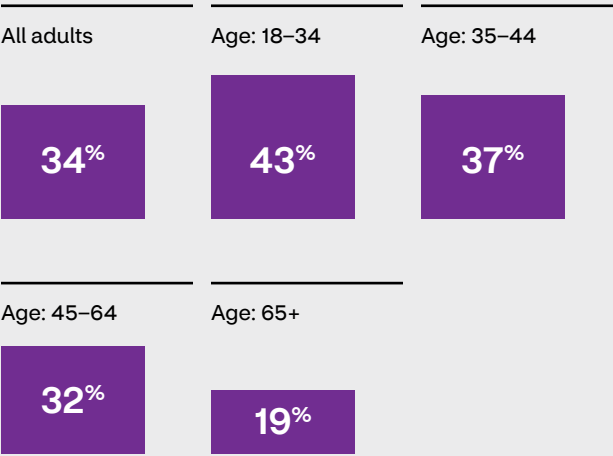


18–34 year olds having concerns about mental health since COVID-19



When asked to indicate concerns about mental health — their own or others’ — respondents showed the highest rates of concern for their own mental welfare overall. Again, the 18–34 age group showed signs of struggling the most personally. These survey results align with a [June 2020 survey](#) conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in which respondents from the 18–24 age group indicated the highest prevalence of “adverse mental health outcomes” directly related to COVID-19.

I’ve had concerns about my own mental health.



One-in-ten Americans see fear of contracting COVID-19 and cost as the two biggest barriers to seeking mental health care. Not knowing what kind of help or where to find treatment are also perceived as impediments by 10% of adults.

Overall Findings

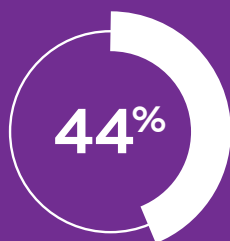
While all age groups have struggled with the realities of COVID-19, a staggering 65% of Americans ages 18–34 have had concerns about their own mental health or that of household members, family or friends since the COVID-19 outbreak.

Data also shows that one of the demographics most vulnerable to the physical impacts of COVID-19 — those aged 65+ — actually had the lowest rates of concern for their own mental health or that of household members, family or friends due to the pandemic.

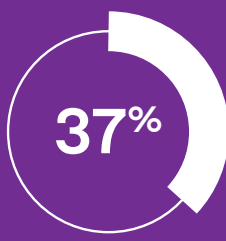
Vaccine sentiments



Belief the COVID-19 vaccine will help alleviate personal stress



Indications it will have no impact on their emotional well-being



Overall Findings

With vaccinations underway, most adults (58%) indicated they now feel more hopeful and 43% of adults indicated they will receive the vaccine. However, there is a nearly equal level of concern (56%) that not enough people will receive the vaccine.

Will the vaccine help us return to normal?

55% of Americans believe the answer is “yes” and 54% believe the vaccine will allow them to safely reconnect with family and friends. 50% responded it will alleviate the impact COVID-19 has had on the way they live.

More than half (51%) think concerns for their physical health will be alleviated once vaccinated, with those age 65+ coming in highest at 66%.

While 44% of Americans believe receiving the COVID-19 vaccine will help alleviate personal stress, 37% indicated it will have no impact on their emotional well-being.

Why the pessimism?

Those ages 45–64 years represent the most populous age group surveyed, but nearly 1 in 5 disagreed about the vaccine making them hopeful and over half expressed concerns about enough people getting vaccinated.

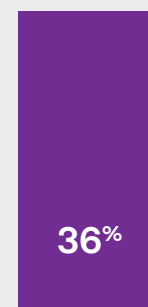
Disagree the vaccine will allow them to safely connect with family friends



Disagree the vaccine will alleviate the impact COVID-19 has had on their lives



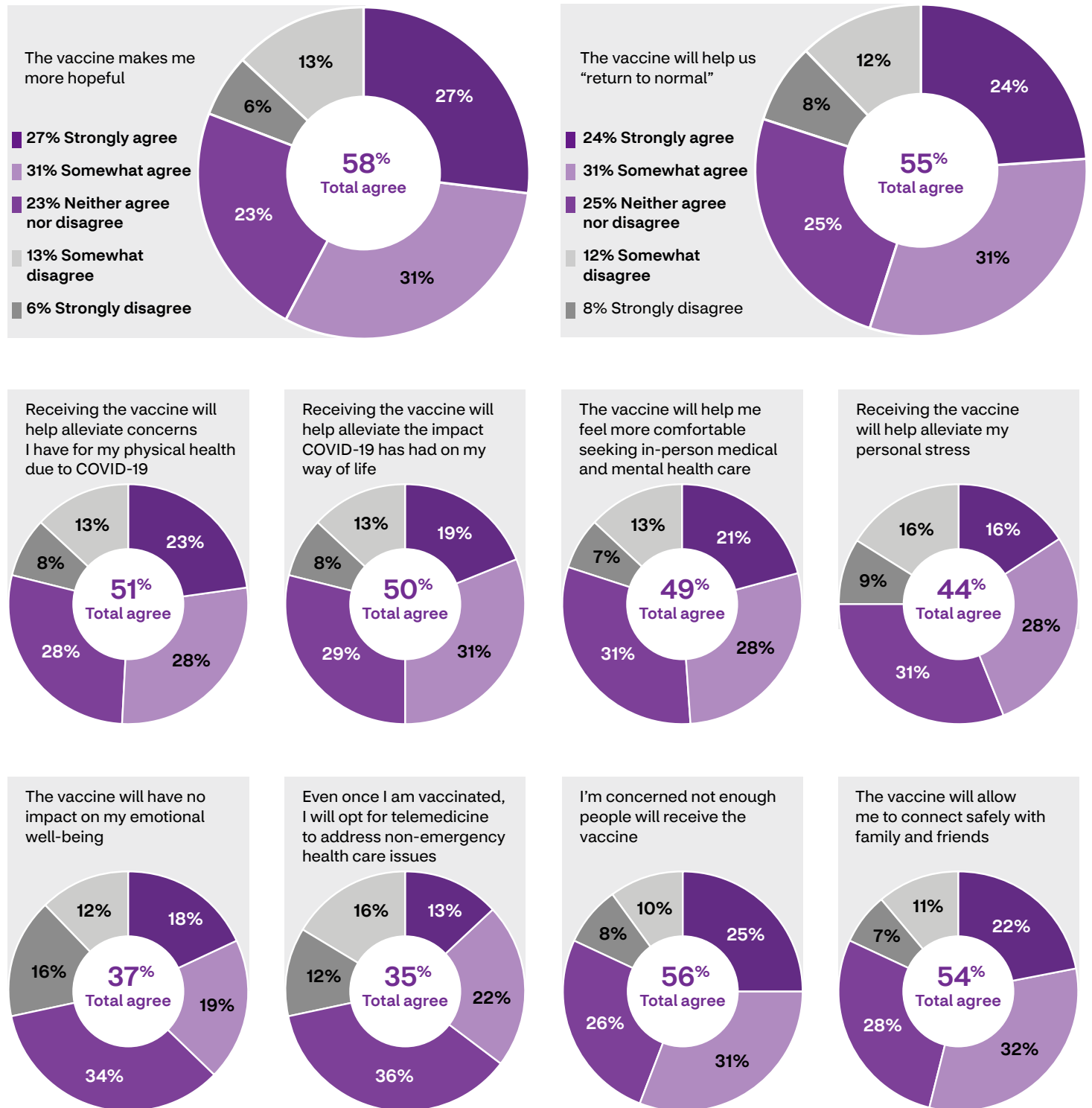
Believe the vaccine will have no impact on their emotional well-being



Possible vaccine side effects are a concern for 35% of Americans and 22% expressed concern about the vaccine's efficacy in preventing COVID-19.

Vaccine sentiments

Most Americans say the vaccine makes them more hopeful.

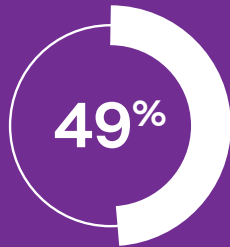


Strongly agree Somewhat agree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat disagree Strongly disagree

Telemedicine sentiments



Adults who are now considering telemedicine



Concerned about absence of in-person health visits



Overall Findings

Phone and video appointments with health care providers have skyrocketed since the pandemic, and two-thirds of all adults agree it will continue to rise. In fact, from April 2020 through December 2020, more than 60% of outpatient mental health visits were conducted via telemedicine, up from just 1% in 2019. There was also a substantial increase in the need for help with psychological distress, including anxiety, grief and loss, and trauma.

Previously underutilized, telemedicine has allowed for providers of non-emergency medical care to attend to patient needs and conduct remote monitoring while practicing social distancing. Telemedicine has also been instrumental in providing mental health services during the pandemic. Aetna® is hopeful it will continue to be a key method of maintaining levels of care while helping prevent the further spread of COVID-19. And we're not alone.

49% of adults are considering telemedicine now and as a part of their medical care even after the pandemic is over. This suggests telemedicine will become more and more popular with those seeking non-emergency medical and mental health services. 53% of respondents, however, expressed concern about the absence of in-person health visits. Further, 36% indicated being uncomfortable with more non-emergency health care conducted remotely.

While a large number of respondents are clearly hesitant about telemedicine, as it becomes more popular, we anticipate a cultural shift that will normalize this kind of intervention. Telemedicine has proven to be particularly effective for mental health care, as it allows for greater convenience in connecting with a provider, and can be a good option for those who are apprehensive about receiving this kind of care in person.

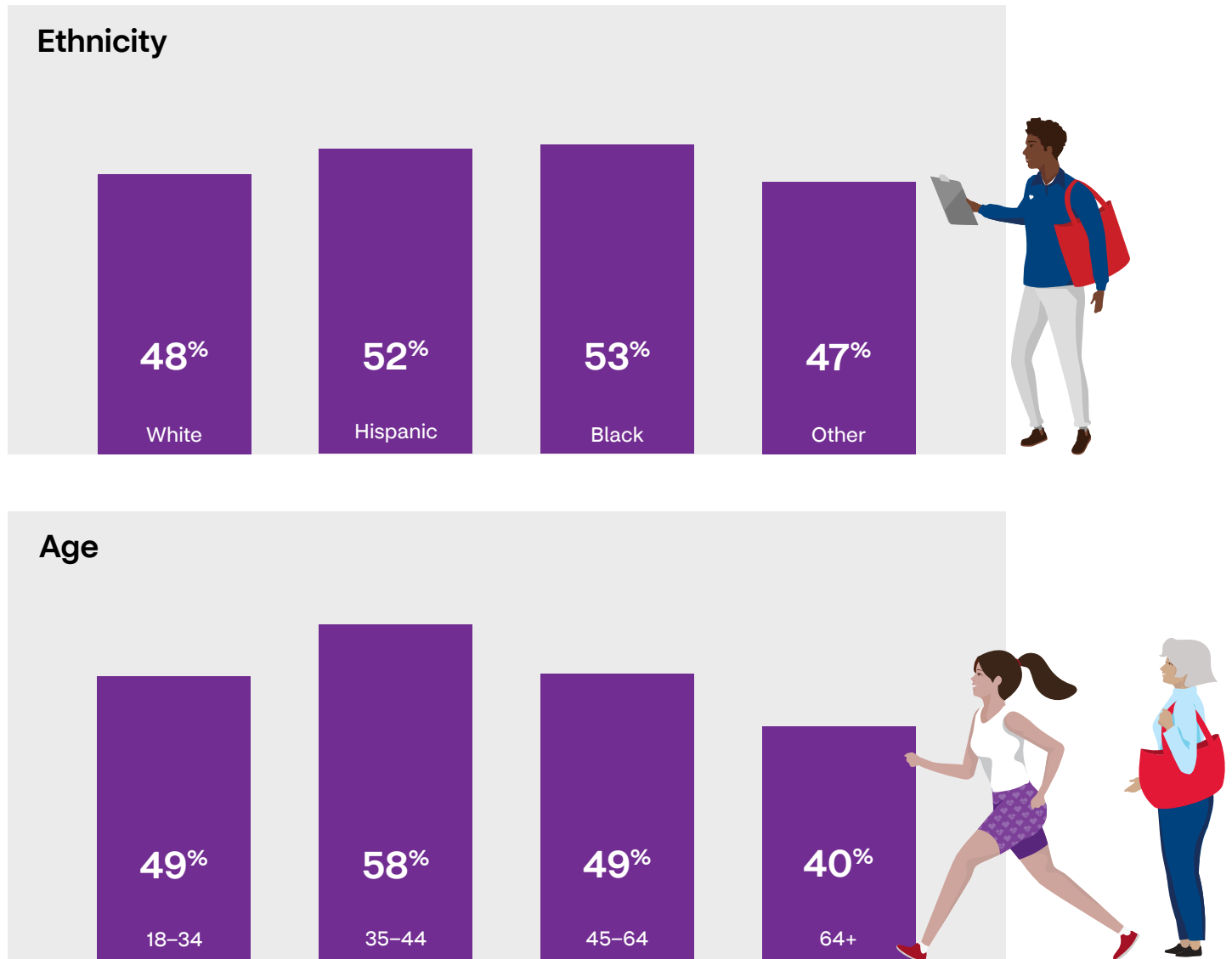
Can telemedicine help save on the cost of health care?

Nearly half of Americans would be comfortable giving up face-to-face doctor visits if it does.



Telemedicine sentiments

More than half of Black Americans, as well as six-in-ten adults ages 35–44, say they will consider utilizing telemedicine in the future.



As you may know, some health care providers are conducting appointments via phone or video chat, otherwise known as telemedicine. Thinking about telemedicine, do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
Showing % agree that, due to COVID-19, they are more inclined to consider utilizing telemedicine in the future.



Mental Health Support

The need for mental health care is critical now more than ever — and will continue to be for the foreseeable future. Even when our country returns to “life as usual,” Americans are anticipated to struggle with varying degrees of PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) due to coronavirus. In fact, Post-COVID-19 Stress Disorder (PCSD) is becoming an increasingly popular term among mental health professionals when referring to COVID-19-related anxiety and depression that is expected to linger for possibly years after the pandemic is over.

The path to mental wellness is not always an easy one. Seeking care can be difficult amid the complexities of our country’s health care system, and within a society that can make people feel ashamed for needing support. That is why Aetna® has the unique ability to touch all aspects of a person’s health, including their mental well-being. We believe now is the moment to make mental health care more accessible, more affordable, and simply better.

Our Commitment to Mental Well-being

Through every moment of your mental wellness journey, we are here for you. Even during these challenging times, know you are never alone. We’ll meet you where you are, and help you prepare for and achieve your goals for mental well-being.

“The stress, grief and isolation stemming from COVID-19 continue to negatively impact the mental health of Americans nationwide. Vaccines are an exciting development and our light at the end of the tunnel, but the trauma may have implications far beyond this pandemic. We need to remain focused right now on improving access to care and shattering stigmas to meet the expected need. A collective focus on our mental well-being will be crucial to moving past COVID-19.”

*Cara McNulty, DPA, President,
Aetna Behavioral Health*

Our mental health resources

If you or someone you know is struggling with anxiety, depression, or any mental health issue — whether it's directly related to COVID-19 or not — help is available.

What to know about COVID-19 vaccinations and mental health

Aetna members and non-members alike can stay informed about COVID-19 vaccinations, learn how to talk about getting vaccinated with kids, and access a variety of support services to cope with vaccine-related stress.

COVID-19 mental health resources

The impact of the pandemic on mental health in the United States is rampant. That's why we've created a public toolkit to help those who are struggling to find the right resources. Access information on how to cope with COVID-19 anxiety, find tips on managing finances, locate grief and loss resources, and much more.

Self-assessment tools for mental health

It's not always easy to know when or how our mental health is being impacted. But by answering a few questions, you'll get the answers and suggestions you need so you can get the support you deserve. Click a button below to get started.

Licensed clinical social workers at select CVS® HealthHUB™ locations

In January 2021, CVS Health® began offering consumers access to licensed clinical social workers (LCSW) in select HealthHUB locations in partnership with MinuteClinic®. These professional mental health care providers offer counseling that address feelings of stress, anxiety, grief, depressed moods and more.

Here 4 U

Young adults have a unique set of challenges and they are struggling, especially during the pandemic. Connecting with peers is vital to their navigating these difficult times while in isolation. That's why we created programs designed specifically for those ages 18–24. They facilitate connection and conversation among young adults, Black young adults, and LGBTQ+ young adults.

Suicide prevention

CVS Health is committed to reducing suicide through a range of specially tailored suicide prevention resources and support. These include suicide prevention screenings, touching base with patients who have been discharged from an inpatient stay after a suicide attempt, and partnering with leading organizations — like the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and The Jed Foundation — to bring mental wellness resources to consumers.

Support for frontline health care workers

Give An Hour offers personalized counseling to hospital-based clinical and non-clinical employees, and loved ones of essential hospital workers in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut to help manage trauma responses including, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress.

Reasons for hope

As the data in this survey clearly indicate, the past year has been an emotional rollercoaster for nearly everyone, especially for our nation's young adults. And while the road out of the pandemic will be long, we are making strides against COVID-19 and the mental health crisis.

People are talking about mental health.

If there can be a silver lining to COVID-19, it's that since the pandemic people have been increasingly talking about mental health issues publicly, sharing their own stories of struggles with anxiety and depression. These conversations — many happening on social media — are bringing much needed attention to this topic despite long-standing stigmas around it. It's also creating greater awareness of those who are at a higher risk of mental health struggles due to social inequalities, or those with real barriers to care due to the high cost or low availability of mental health resources.

Millions are now being vaccinated.

While we have a long way to go before the United States reaches herd immunity, we are well on our way. There are multiple FDA-authorized COVID-19 vaccines being widely administered across the country.

In addition to launching more than 4,800 COVID-19 test sites at our nearly 10,000 CVS Pharmacy® locations nationwide, CVS Health® has provided more than 10 million vaccinations to residents and staff at more than 40,000 long-term care facilities and through the Federal Retail Pharmacy Program. We are also committed to driving wider access to vaccinations by offering them at select CVS Pharmacy locations across the country. We have the capacity to administer 25 million vaccinations per month at our nearly 10,000 retail locations when supply is available. To learn more about our COVID-19 testing and vaccine administration solutions, visit our [**COVID-19 Resource Center**](#).

4800

COVID-19 test sites

10K

CVS Pharmacy locations

40K

Long-term care facilities

25M

COVID-19 vaccinations per month



Health is everything.®

ABOUT CVS HEALTH®

CVS Health is a different kind of health care company. We are a diversified health services company with nearly 300,000 employees united around a common purpose of helping people on their path to better health. In an increasingly connected and digital world, we are meeting people wherever they are and changing health care to meet their needs. Built on a foundation of unmatched community presence, our diversified model engages one in three Americans each year. From our innovative new services at HealthHUB® locations, to transformative programs that help manage chronic conditions, we are making health care more accessible, more affordable and simply better. Learn more about how we're transforming health at www.cvshealth.com.