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TRACKING CHILDREN WITH MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

NEW YORK CITY – Researchers at the National Center for Children in Poverty have developed a chart book and an interactive tracking tool to measure the trajectory of mental health problems and illness, patterns of treatment and service use, cost of mental health care and quality of care, and life measures for children, adults and the elderly in the United States. The policy analysts at NCCP, a research center based at Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health, studied nine different national and local surveys to track the data over a course of more than a decade.

“The chart book and online tools we’ve developed as a result of this research provide comprehensive information on people with mental health challenges,” says Yumiko Aratani, PhD, interim director of Health and Mental Health at NCCP, who helped create a companion chart book and interactive tools for the study, which was led by Sherry Glied, PhD, professor of health policy management at the Mailman School. “What we’ve put together from this research should help give policy makers a better understanding of the prevalence of mental health problems and illness and how we as a country deliver mental health services to children, adults, and the elderly in needs.”

In particular, says Aratani, “Our unique mental health tracking tool will inform state policymakers about their state’s specific trends and help them understand how their states are doing in terms of addressing mental health needs of their population.”

Key findings reveal:

• increasing rates of emergency room visits by children with mental health problems.
• problems in access to and affordability of care among people with mental health functional limitations;
• overall increases in the rate of mental health problems among children and in the rates of mental health diagnosis among adults and seniors;
• reductions in mental health out-of-pocket expenses for all age groups;
• that the proportion of inpatient hospitalization among people with a mental health diagnosis has remained stable over time;
• that the proportion of psychiatrists participating in insurance programs has remained steady and shows a slight increase in the recent years;
• the share of people with social security disability insurance (SSDI) due to mental illness has remained stable over time; and
• continued growth in the number of people with mental illness incarcerated in jails and prisons.

The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) is one of the nation’s leading public policy centers and is dedicated to promoting the economic security, health and well-being of America’s low-income families and children. Part of Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health, NCCP uses research to inform policy and practice with the goal of ensuring positive outcomes for the next generation.