Facing a Broken Mental Health System, Many U.S. Teens Fall Off a Dangerous “Cliff” in Their Care

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The transition from adolescence to adulthood can be a critical time for continuity in mental health care. Data suggest young adults [2] are among those most likely to need mental health care but least likely to receive it. Teens receiving pediatric mental health care may fall off a “cliff” in their care when they turn 18 due to limited access to adult mental health services. These young people may be on their own for the first time and unsure about how to navigate the mental health care system. According to experts, providers can help prevent gaps in care by preparing teens for the transition ahead of time and connecting them with supports. Experts say there is also a need for programs and policies to help link young adults with mental health care. Toward that end, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration is now funding programs nationwide to help increase access to care for young adults with mental health issues.


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