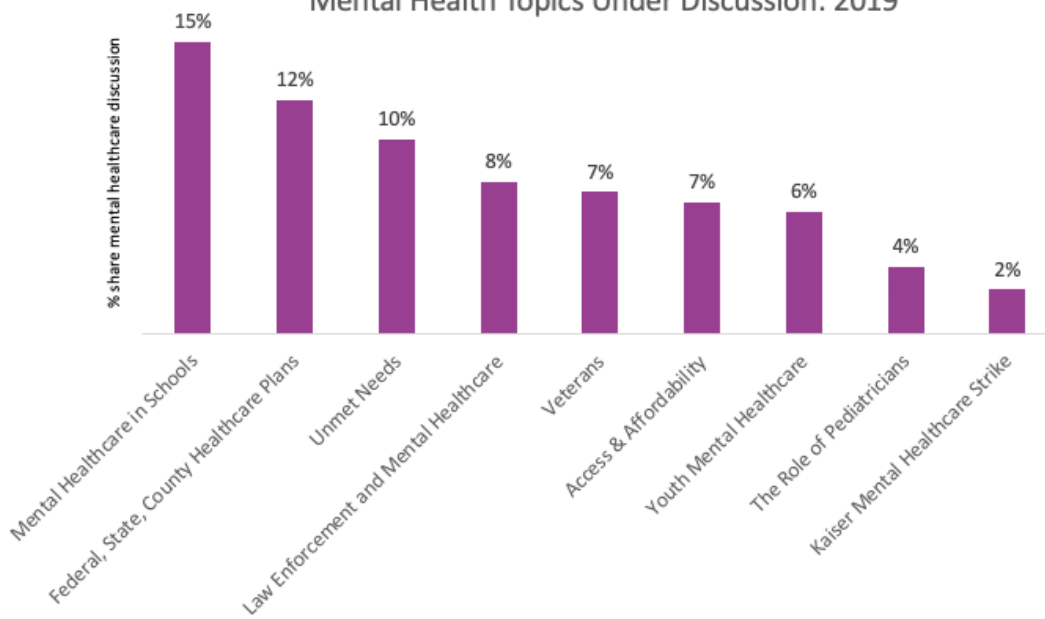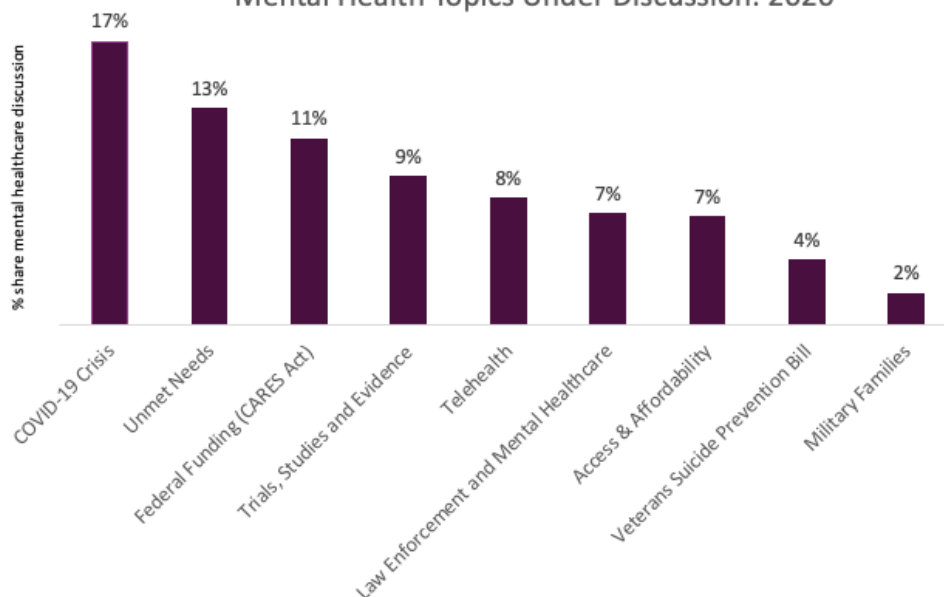# NEXUS Perspectives

A SPECIAL YEAR-END EDITION

It was a year like no other for mental health. As we close out 2020, we wanted to take a step back and look at how the mental health conversation has changed through the pandemic. In this year-end edition of Perspectives, *we shift our focus from the mental health of women, youth, and those in contact with the justice system and look more broadly at the unprecedented changes we have seen since "social distancing" entered and took over our vocabularies.*

Mental Health Topics Under Discussion: 2019

% share mental healthcare discussion

Topic	%
Mental Healthcare In Schools	15%
Federal, State, County Healthcare Plans	12%
Unmet Needs	10%
Law Enforcement and Mental Healthcare	8%
Veterans	7%
Access & Affordability	7%
Youth Mental Healthcare	6%
The Role of Pediatricians	4%
Kaiser Mental Healthcare Strike	2%

Mental Health Topics Under Discussion: 2020

% share mental healthcare discussion

Topic	%
COVID-19 Crisis	17%
Unmet Needs	13%
Federal Funding (CARES Act)	11%
Trials, Studies and Evidence	9%
Telehealth	8%
Law Enforcement and Mental Healthcare	7%
Access & Affordability	7%
Veterans Suicide Prevention Bill	4%
Military Families	2%

HOW THE MENTAL HEALTH CONVERSATION CHANGED IN 2020

In 2019, there was much discussion around the need for better mental healthcare – especially **in response** to school shootings – and policymakers at all levels, particularly those with **presidential aspirations**, were making mental healthcare a priority. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic expedited real action through CARES Act funding, expanded access to telehealth and the passage of a **groundbreaking Congressional bill** to help prevent veteran suicide.
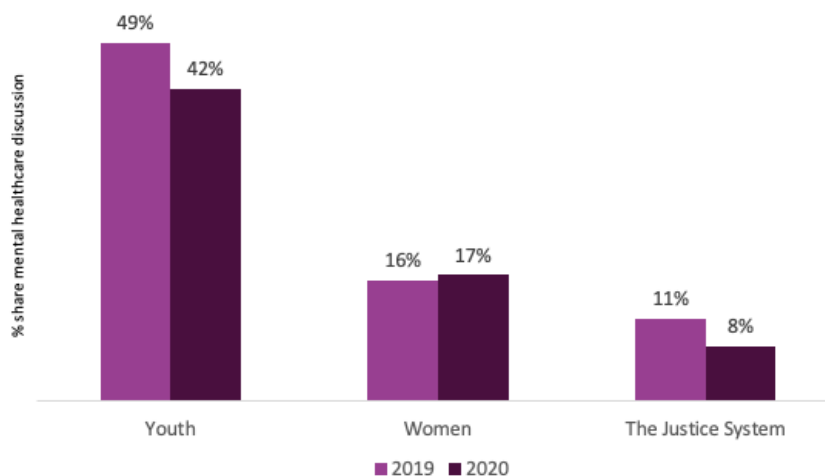
Recognition of the unmet mental health needs in the U.S. was amplified in 2020. Populations that face high barriers to care – including **rural populations** and **communities of color** – or those that often do not seek care due to stigma, such as healthcare professionals and athletes, made up 10% of the conversation in 2019 and became an even larger issue in 2020.

Youth mental health was a prominent focus of the conversation in 2019 but folded into other issues in 2020. In 2019, virtually a quarter of the mental healthcare conversation addressed the needs of youth.[1] In 2020, youth mental health was discussed in tandem with the **COVID-19 mental health crisis** that has impacted virtually every demographic.

The intersection of mental healthcare and law enforcement is a consistent issue. The issue of mental healthcare and law enforcement drove a pronounced portion of the mental healthcare conversation in both 2019 to 2020. The social justice movement of the summer of 2020 ignited debates about whether law enforcement professionals and **response teams** need more mental health expertise and how to improve mental healthcare in **prisons** and **jails.**

Conversations about the mental healthcare of youth, women, and the justice system remained strong, even in the midst of the pandemic. Even as issues like telehealth and evidence-based interventions rose to the surface, discussion of women, youth, and the justice system stayed fairly consistent from 2019 to 2020 and comprised a sizeable share of the mental health conversation. The graph below illustrates.

NEXUS Pillars and Mental Healthcare

y-axis label: % share mental healthcare discussion

	Youth	Women	The Justice System
2019	49%	16%	11%
2020	42%	17%	8%

Legend: ■ 2019 ■ 2020

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[1] See "Mental Healthcare in Schools," "Youth Mental Healthcare," and "The Role of Pediatricians.

THE BEST READS OF 2020

Below, we share our favorite reads on mental health from 2020. We hope you enjoy these long reads as you take a holiday break.

"What if a Pill Can Change Your Politics or Religious Beliefs?"
Scientific American reviews the new research on psilocybin, the psychedelic compound found in "magic mushrooms." The evidence suggests that psilocybin has the potential to revolutionize psychotherapy and morph "values, politics and social narratives."

Google's open-source search for a depression biomarker
Alphabet X, Google's "Moonshot Factory," worked for three years to identify a specific biomarker for depression to help healthcare professionals diagnose and treat depression – without success. But "Project Amber" achieved important conclusions that – since they were recently shared – opened up the project to the broader scientific community. From this setback progress may come.

Mental illness in film
A group of researchers took a critical look at how suicide and psychiatric illness have been depicted in film and found that films on mental illness gross both dollars and awards.

"Why do psychiatric conditions exist?"
Psychiatry has, as this author puts it, a "chequered past." Methods of treatment for psychiatric conditions have changed drastically, as have the explanations for the conditions themselves, ranging from psychodynamics to chemical imbalances. Enter evolutionary psychiatry, an approach that "has the potential to reinvigorate the field."

About that "lived experience"
There is a strong push to include more individuals with "lived experience" in the process of developing, delivering and assessing mental healthcare. But is there a "catch-22"? Are those that are "experts by experience" both undervalued and exploited?

Links provided in NEXUS Perspectives are for informational purposes only and do not constitute endorsement or approval by Otsuka. If you have questions about NEXUS or suggestions for a future issue of NEXUS Perspectives, email us at nexus@highlanterngroup.com.