

Health Indicator Profile: Serious Mental Illness



The prevalence of Serious Mental Illness (SMI) was estimated using the Kessler 6 (K6) scale. The K6 scale consists of six items asking about the frequency of emotional states experienced in the past 30 days including feeling nervous, hopeless, restless/fidgety, so depressed nothing could cheer you up, everything was an effort, and worthless. For each, the respondent is asked to rate the frequency on a 5-point scale where 0 = none of the time, 1 = a little of the time, 2 = some of the time, 3 = most of the time, and 4 = all of the time. For each respondent the items are summed to create the K6 score. If the score is greater than 13, the respondent is experiencing Serious Mental Illness.

The 2021 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) provides a national benchmark for comparing Santa Barbara County estimates.

Table 1. Percentage of Adults Reporting Serious Mental Illness in 2022

	2019 Santa Barbara CHNA	2022 Santa Barbara CHNA	2021 NHIS Benchmark
	% (95% CI)	% (95% CI)	% (95% CI)
Overall	7.8 (5.1, 10.5)	12.9 (9.7, 16.0) [^]	5.5*
Male	5.7 (2.7, 8.8)	8.7 (4.5, 12.9)	
Female	9.9 (5.6, 14.3)	16.3 (11.7, 20.8) [^]	
Hispanic	3.6 (0.9, 6.3)	15.4 (9.2, 21.7) [^]	
Non-Hispanic White	10.9 (6.4, 15.4) [^]	8.1 (5.3, 11.0)	
Other	6.4 (0.0, 13.9)	22.2 (11.3, 33.1) [^]	
Age 18-44	10.1 (5.5, 14.6)	21.7 (15.5, 28.0) [^]	
Age 45-64	7.2 (3.4, 11.0)	7.3 (3.3, 11.3)	
Age 65+	2.2 (0.0, 4.7)	5.2 (1.6, 8.7)	
< High School	2.6 (0.3, 10.7)	9.9 (1.1, 18.7)	
High School Grad	10.9 (2.7, 19.0)	10.3 (1.9, 18.7)	
Some College	10.6 (5.7, 15.5) [^]	21.2 (14.3, 28.2) [^]	
College Grad	2.8 (0.0, 5.7)	8.0 (4.9, 11.2)	
<\$35,000	11.7 (6.6, 16.8) [^]	22.1 (13.3, 31.0) [^]	
\$35,000-\$74,999	6.3 (1.1, 11.6)	16.2 (8.6, 23.7) [^]	
\$75,000 or greater	3.7 (0.1, 7.4)	8.3 (5.0, 11.6)	

[^] Significant difference between point estimate and 2021 NHIS Benchmark.

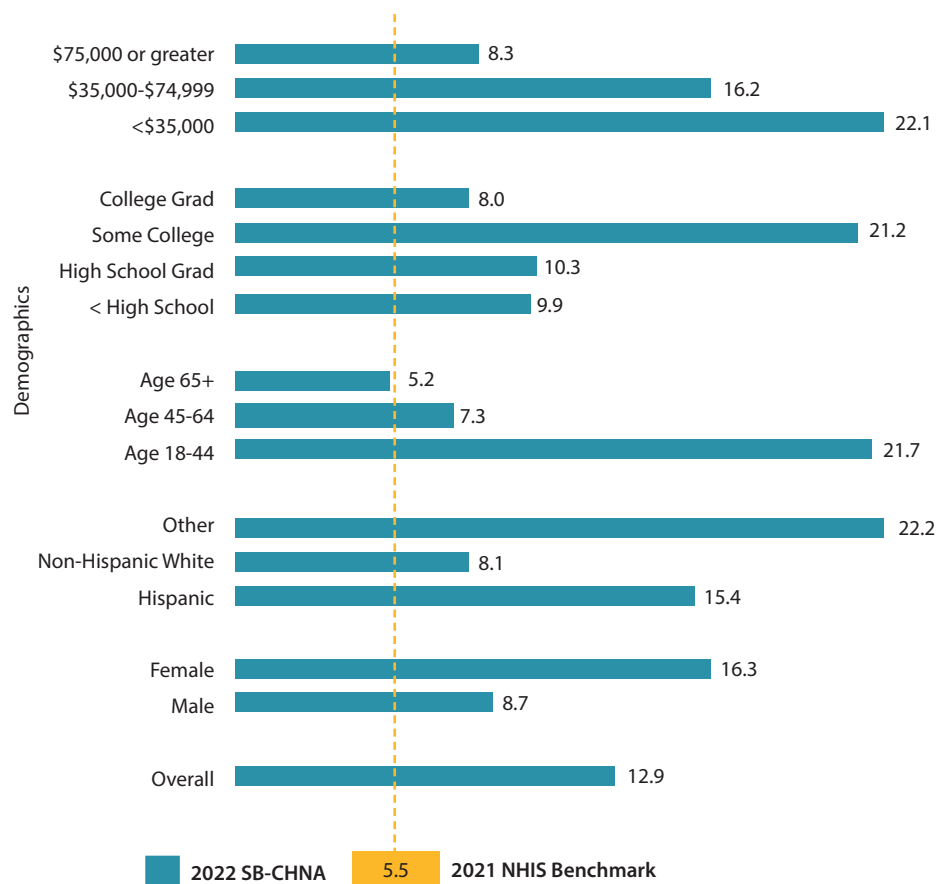
* NHIS 2021 SMI estimates were generated from a prediction model created from clinical interview data collected on a subset of adult NSDUH respondents who completed an adapted (past 12 month) version of the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV-TR Axis I Disorders.

Health Disparities

In Santa Barbara County, the percentage of those with SMI has increased since 2019 and is more than two times the national estimate (12.9% vs. 5.5%). All demographic groups except those age 65+ presented in Table 1 had a point estimate higher than the benchmark. Significant increases since 2019 were observed for Hispanics and those age 18-44. The groups reporting the highest percentage of SMI include those racially and ethnically categorized as other, those age 18-44, and those with some college. The percentage of females reporting SMI was nearly twice that of males. A graded relationship was observed between SMI and age, with SMI prevalence decreasing nearly four-fold between the younger and older subpopulations. A similar relationship is observed with income, such that with increasing household income a decrease is seen in the percentage of reported SMI.

Most impacted demographic subgroups include those with yearly household incomes less than \$75,000, those with some college, those age 18-44, those racially and ethnically categorized as other, Hispanics, and females.

Figure 1. 2022 Percent Reporting Serious Mental Illness by Demographic Group



Factors and Health Outcomes Associated with Serious Mental Illness

While controlling for demographics, the odds of reporting SMI increased 55-fold for those reporting 15+ poor mental health days in the past 30 days. An approximate three to five-fold increase in odds was reported for no dental care in the year, physical inactivity, low resilience, and depression.

Figure 2. Percentage of Adults Reporting 15+ Poor Mental Health Days by Significant Related Factors

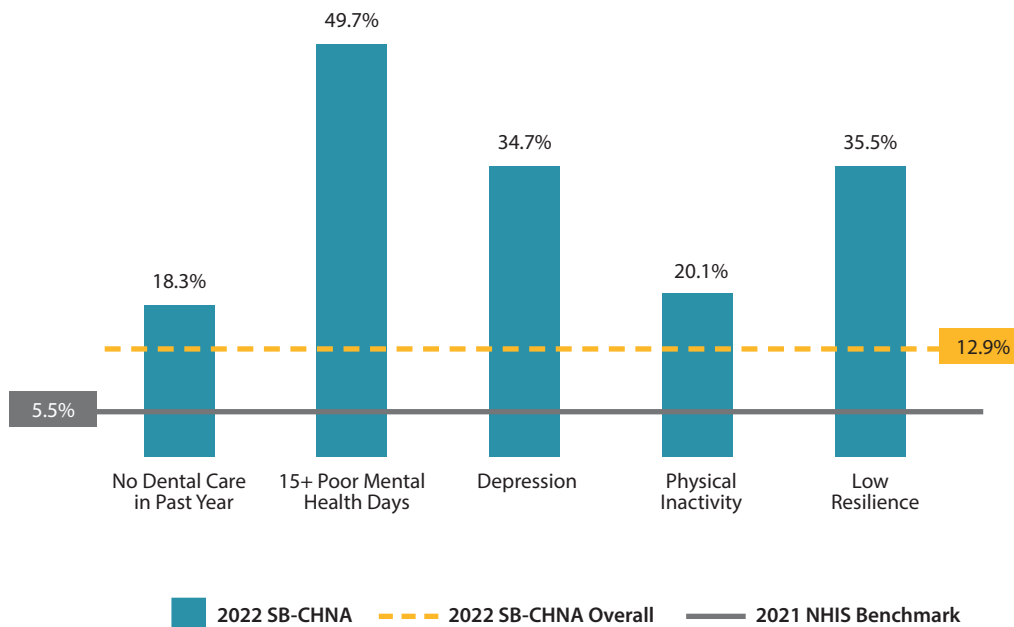


Table 2. Odds Ratio Estimates for Serious Mental Illness by Significant Related Factors

Significant Related Factor	Point Estimate	95% Confidence Limits	
No Dental Care in Past Year	2.8	1.0	7.1
15+ Poor Mental Health Days	55.7	19.7	157.5
Physical Inactivity	5.1	1.6	15.8
Low Resilience	4.1	1.6	10.4
Depression	3.1	1.1	8.7

NOTE: The degrees of freedom in computing the confidence limits is 1339.

Findings from the 2022 Santa Barbara County Listening Tour

Serious Mental Illness encapsulates mental, behavioral, or emotional disorders that result in serious functional impairment, substantially interfering with one's activities of daily living. Through the 2022 Listening Tour, providers and parents identified how Serious Mental Illness impacts our community, and particularly referenced a **lack of mental health support**. Providers frequently indicated **COVID-19 as having a direct correlation to a rise in intensive mental health cases**. Providers and those seeking care consistently described a lack of mental health resources, especially a lack of youth mental health providers, and challenges accessing services for the most vulnerable populations, which is in turn creating a more pronounced mental health dilemma.

Rise in Intensive Mental Health Cases

Providers described seeing a **rise in intensive mental health cases during COVID-19**. This includes eating disorders, lack of self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and violence. It was predicted that the long-term mental health impacts of the pandemic will have a tremendous impact on our youth.

I think some of the mental health providers were reporting a 55% increase in requests for mental health services. There was a lot of increase in crisis calls to our mild to moderate health vendor provider during the pandemic. So I think we're going to see the impact of the pandemic, long term and impacting our youth, for sure, especially in the eating disorders. – Service Provider

We've noticed a greater increase in referrals for our poorest neighborhoods in Santa Maria for resources, along with what everybody else had a lot of increase in—gender issues, body dysmorphia, self-esteem, anxiety, depression, a lot of violence, school community violence has increased. – Service Provider

Mental health, definitely, is an issue that's been very prevalent prior to the pandemic and just magnified given the pandemic. – Service Provider

Not Enough Capacity

Not having the capacity to provide the mental health support needed after a rise in intensive cases has providers grappling with meeting the needs of Santa Barbara County. Parents described the struggle to find providers for their children, and providers brought up the lack of intensive care for youth in Santa Barbara County. The county also lacks a live-in center where patients with severe cases can seek aid, resulting in these residents having to travel outside of Santa Barbara County to receive the care they need.

Interviewees described a **lack of mental health resources to meet the needs of the rise in mental illness**.

It just felt like we're seeing a lot more Serious Mental Illness within our shelter as well, and not just in Santa Barbara. I mean, I think we're seeing it, like, across the state. You know, we're a statewide organization. And so we're having conversations about having to reimagine traditional service delivery models that we have and looking at them differently, to make sure that we're actually meeting the needs and not operating as a band-aid. – Service Provider

I also think Santa Barbara County, when it comes to mental wellness, is not really networked well for the services that do exist. And I think we're inadequate when it comes to mental health, just for beds in this county to treat people. So I think it probably kind of comes from lack of knowledge, lack of resources, to lack of the services that are here. How do people know about them? How do you access them? I think [we have an] inadequate number of services for a population of our size. – Service Provider

Limited Resources in Schools

While participants in the 2022 Listening Tour mentioned some of the ways schools are supporting students with Serious Mental Illnesses, a common theme was that schools were under-resourced.

Youth go to their schools [to seek help], but schools often don't have resourcing. – Parent

Mental Health is not the priority in public schools– meaning you don't have a 1:20 ratio of care to students. One school counselor for 700 kids is not resources. – Parent

[I have] friends with panic disorder... School didn't get it properly addressed through the school nurses. –Student

Conclusions

Santa Barbara County has seen a rise in serious mental health cases, especially since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. More services that are linguistically and culturally relevant are needed. Youth, especially, are impacted by the lack of accessible service providers and the limited resources to support mental health needs.