

## Resident Pediatricians' Reflections on Mental Health Care in Kansas: Findings from a Focus Group

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**Introduction.** Kansas faces a critical pediatric mental health (MH) workforce shortage, leaving many children without timely access to specialty care. As a result, pediatric primary care physicians (PCPs) are increasingly responsible for MH care despite limited training, time, and system support. Understanding PCP perspectives is essential to developing interventions that expand pediatric MH capacity.

**Methods.** A qualitative focus group was conducted at the Kansas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics' 2025 Progress in Pediatrics Conference in Wichita, Kansas. Practicing physicians participated in guided discussions exploring experiences with pediatric MH, confidence, barriers, and recommendations. Sessions were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis informed by grounded theory, with independent coding and consensus-based theme development.

**Results.** Nine resident physicians participated. They described growing awareness and acceptance of pediatric MH needs. Helpful supports included co-located MH professionals, electronic health record prompts, required training, and programs such as KAAP and KSKidsMAP. Persistent barriers included limited time, referral challenges, poor continuity, and limited knowledge of community resources. Parents were viewed as essential partners, though they sometimes hindered care because of stigma or communication difficulties. Residents felt confident managing anxiety and depression but preferred referral for more complex conditions. Participants emphasized the need for streamlined referrals, expanded training, and stronger collaborative care models.

**Conclusions.** Findings highlight ongoing system- and knowledge-related barriers and reinforce the need for programs that support PCPs in addressing pediatric MH gaps in Kansas.