

# Behavioral Health



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## Overview

Bellevue, like many communities, continues to face growing demand for behavioral health services, including mental health support, substance use disorder treatment, and trauma-informed care. Youth, working adults, and seniors alike report challenges related to stress, anxiety, depression, and isolation, often intensified by financial strain, discrimination, and family instability.

Local providers offer individual counseling, group therapy, substance use disorder recovery programs, and culturally responsive wellness services. This reflects an understanding that behavioral health is central to overall health and community safety, and that reducing stigma while expanding access is critical to improving long-term outcomes for Bellevue residents.

## Key Findings & General Trends

Washington State is experiencing a troubling surge in behavioral health crises, particularly related to substance use and youth mental health. This crisis mirrors a broader statewide pattern, for Washington is one of only four states in the country where overdose deaths continue to rise despite national plateaus (Washington State DOH). The trend represents a delayed but sharp arrival of fentanyl in the Pacific Northwest, posing heightened



risks for local communities, including Bellevue.

Across Washington, suicide remains one of the leading causes of death for Washington State is experiencing a troubling surge in behavioral health crises, especially related to **substance use** and **youth mental health**.

- **Substance Use & Overdose Deaths** – In King County alone, there have were over **1,000 overdose deaths in 2024**, primarily driven by fentanyl (King County Overdose Dashboard). This reflects a delayed but sharp arrival of fentanyl in the Pacific Northwest and mirrors a statewide pattern in which Washington is one of only four states where overdose deaths continue to rise despite national plateaus (Washington State DOH).
- **Youth Suicide & Mental Health** – Suicide remains one of the leading causes of death for young people.
  - In 2023, youth aged **10–24 accounted for over 16% of all suicide deaths statewide** (Washington State Department of Health, 2024).
  - In the 2023 Healthy Youth Survey:
    - **30%** of students reported feeling so sad or hopeless that they stopped doing usual activities.
    - Nearly **15%** had seriously considered suicide
    - Anxiety is also widespread, with **60% of 10th graders** and **over 65% of 12th graders** reporting frequent nervousness or anxiety.
    - Nearly **70% of 10th graders** expressed hope for the future, suggesting fragile but notable resilience.



- **Barriers to Care** – Many students—especially those from marginalized communities—face significant barriers to care. School counselors often exceed recommended caseload ratios, and community-based mental health providers report **months-long waitlists** for youth therapy. Delays are particularly harmful for students with co-occurring trauma or housing instability.
- **System Strain & Capacity Gaps** – Demand for behavioral health services is rising faster than provider capacity. Between 2017 and 2022:
  - The share of Washingtonians with a mental health diagnosis on insurance claims rose from **11.8% to 17.4%**.
  - Treatment costs increased **69%**, driven mainly by outpatient care (Washington State OIC, Mental Health Trends Report).
  - Washington ranks in the **bottom five nationally** for inpatient psychiatric bed availability.
  - Jail-based competency evaluations now average **over 83 days** in wait time (WSHCA, 2023).

*Photo provided by International Community Health Service*



These trends reveal a behavioral health system under intense strain and show the urgent need to expand **crisis response, harm reduction, and youth-focused prevention programs**. For Bellevue, failure to act risks overwhelming local services while state-level infrastructure remains stretched thin.

## Community Voice / Lived Experiences

Behavioral health emerged as one of Bellevue's most pressing human service needs. Experts and residents consistently pointed to a gap between need and accessible, culturally relevant services.

Service coordination gaps persist, especially for residents with both mental health and substance use challenges.

“Mental health is always one of the top needs we see... People don't know where to turn, or there's waitlists.” – SME

“Substance use and behavioral health services are needed but not well coordinated.” – SME





“Clients with dual diagnosis issues—mental health and substance use—fall through the cracks.” – SME

Cultural and linguistic accessibility is a recurring concern.

“We need more therapists that are culturally aware and speak multiple languages.” – SME

In a city where many residents speak a language other than English at

*Photo provided by IKRON*



home and come from immigrant or refugee backgrounds, culturally responsive care is essential. Without it, residents face alienation, lower trust, and poorer outcomes.

### **Residents also described:**

- Long waitlists (sometimes six months or more)
- Stigma around mental illness and substance use
- Reliance on patchwork supports through schools, pediatricians, and case managers
- Confusion about when and how to seek help, especially in immigrant communities Behavioral health needs intersect with other challenges such as housing instability, isolation, and chronic illness—especially for seniors.
- Residents emphasized the importance of:
  - Trauma-informed care
  - Bereavement counseling
  - Mental health support around chronic illness and aging
  - Youth- and senior-focused therapy
  - Expanded culturally competent providers

### **Community Survey Results for Behavioral Health**

- Among survey respondents who used or tried to access counseling services, **25.0%** were satisfied with the support they received.
- For emotional and mental health services overall:
  - **27.4%** of respondents said services were available in their community.



- **24.5%** said services met their cultural and language needs.
- According to King County data, **Black and Hispanic youth** were **overrepresented in emergency mental health responses** and **less likely to receive follow-up outpatient care**.

## City-Funded Initiatives & Impact

Behavioral health continues to be a top human service need in Bellevue, particularly for youth, families, and communities of color. The City supports a wide range of nonprofit partners that provide prevention, intervention, and treatment services—many of which are culturally and linguistically responsive to Bellevue’s diverse populations.

Bellevue’s Behavioral Health & Housing Stability funds (HB 1590) prioritizes funding a range of evidence-based Behavioral Health treatments, including same-day SUD and mental health assessments, medically assisted treatment, culturally specific services, and embedded behavioral health support in affordable housing sites.

## *Youth and Family Mental Health*

Organizations such as **Youth Eastside Services (YES)** deliver comprehensive behavioral healthcare for children and youth. Services include early childhood interventions that promote healthy emotional and cognitive development, and culturally grounded Latine youth programs focused on leadership and mental health resilience. **Friends of Youth** addresses youth and family mental health needs through its Healthy Start Home Visiting Program, which supports families facing multiple stressors





with in-home visits by trained Family Support Specialists. The organization also provides mental health and substance use disorder counseling tailored to youth.

### *Integrated and Wraparound Behavioral Health Services*

Providers such as **IKRON of Greater Seattle** and **Therapeutic Health Services** offer integrated models of care that combine mental health counseling, substance use treatment, and medication management. These wraparound services ensure holistic, coordinated care for clients navigating complex behavioral health challenges.

### *Peer-Led and Community-Based Approaches*

**NAMI Eastside** contributes through peer-led models that center lived experience. Its Community Mental Health Education & Support Programs deliver workshops and peer support for families and individuals, while its Youth Mental Health Resilience Program strengthens coping skills and emotional well-being among youth. Similarly, **4 Tomorrow's** Mental Health Coordination & Gap Therapy Program plays a critical role in bridging access gaps, especially for individuals waiting for or unable to access longer-term, culturally responsive therapy.

### *Culturally and Linguistically Specific Behavioral Health*

To meet the behavioral health needs of immigrant and refugee communities, **Indian American Community Services (IACS)** provides culturally attuned services to Asian Indian individuals and families.

**International Community Health Services (ICHS)** integrates behavioral



health into its medical care model, offering comprehensive support to underserved populations. **Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS)** supports Asian, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander residents through multilingual, multicultural mental health services for low-income youth and families, as well as whole-person care for adults with chronic mental illness.

### *Crisis Response*

**Crisis Connections** operates a 24-hour crisis line providing free and confidential telephone crisis intervention, safety planning, information, referrals and support services to individuals in emotional crisis.

### *Bellevue Funded Program Outcomes for 2024*

- **23,034** hours of counseling services completed
- **2,978** crisis phone calls answered
- **2,745** students received suicide prevention education
- **1,485** hours of behavioral health educational groups delivered
- **1,521** hours of behavioral health case management provided

These investments demonstrate Bellevue's commitment to addressing behavioral health through prevention, early intervention, and community-based care models, ensuring services are not only accessible but also culturally meaningful and responsive.

