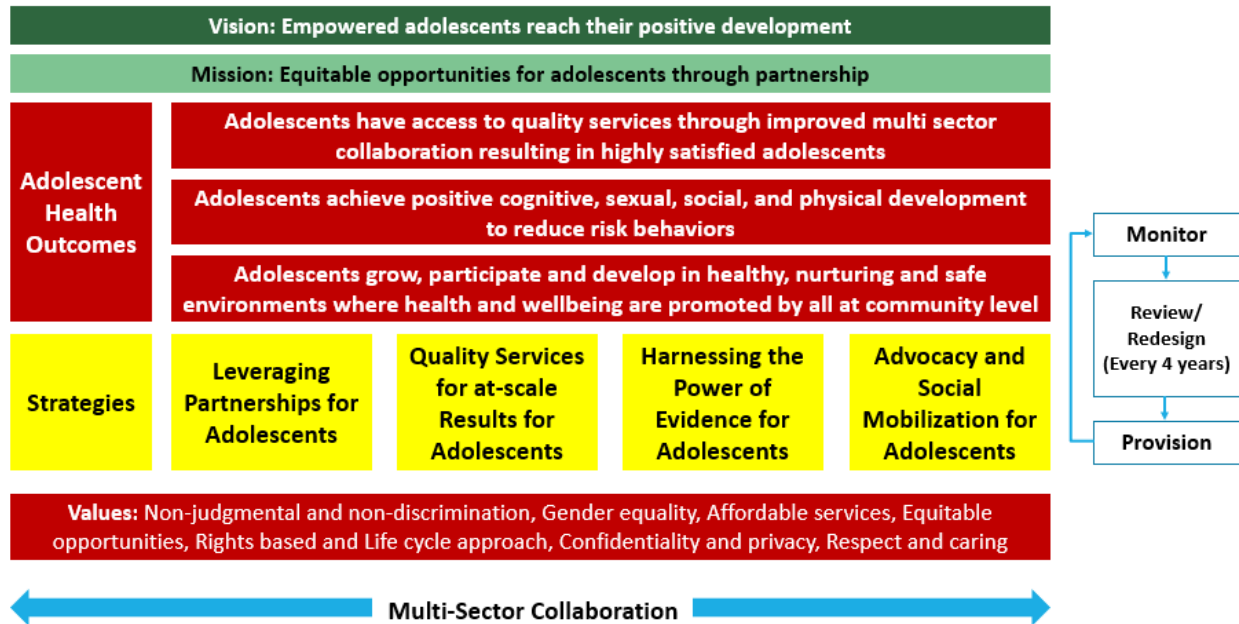


Making Adolescent Mental Health a Priority in Belize

This newsletter profiles UNICEF’s programme support to adolescent mental health in Belize with the specific areas of support aligned to the relevant strategies in the National Adolescent Health Strategic Plan (2019-2030) developed with UNICEF support in 2018.



Strategic Framework for Belize's National Adolescent Health Strategy (2019 - 2030)

Adolescent Mental Health Situation (Please follow this link for detailed data on adolescent mental health in Belize as reported in the Belize Adolescent Health programme digest in 2018: <https://spark.adobe.com/page/WUAB6zJdzkoMX/>)

Strategy One: Quality Services for at-scale Results for Adolescents

The Ministry of Health initiated work to define norms and standards of care for adolescents. The objective is to improve the quality of care for adolescents. The Global Standards for Quality Health Care Services for Adolescents and Adolescent job aid were used as guide for the development of the norms and standards for improving adolescent health. The mental health component will ensure immediate follow-up with adolescents at risk, especially adolescents with mental health problems, at the community level through community health workers. Following the completion of the national adolescent health strategy, Ministry of Health will pilot the delivery and evaluate the effectiveness of routine adolescent health check-ups.

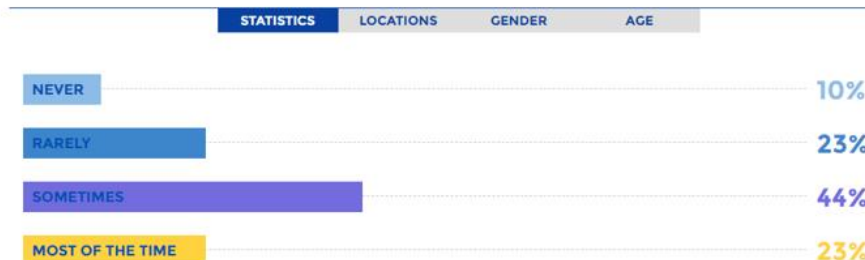
U-Report: UNICEF has committed to support the Ministry of Health in exploring options to improve mental health service delivery for adolescents (building mental health literacy, access to counseling, and referral) using digital health tools. In September 2018, UNICEF launched the U-Report platform together with the government partners from a range of programmes and sectors. U-Report offers a resource for rapid real-time data collection, information dissemination that can support health literacy including information on where to find access. Examples of the kind of information collected through a U-Report Poll on mental health and the information provided on services are shown below.

POLL RESULTS

MAY 27, 2019

In the last two weeks, how often have you felt sad?

981 responded out of 3,337 polled



U-Report Belize
Typically replies within an hour

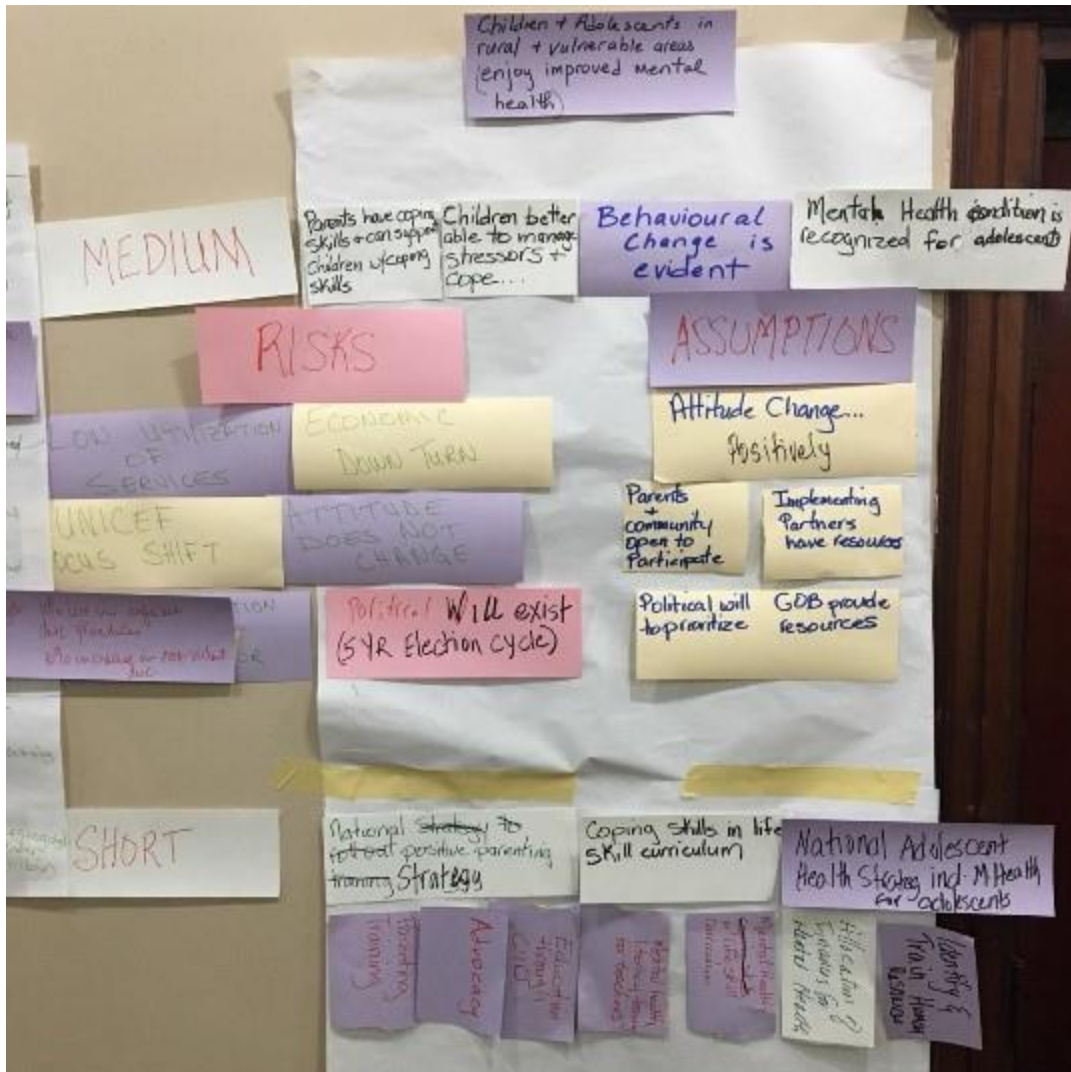
Thank you! Mental Health problems does not discriminate, it can affect anyone of us regardless of our religion, race, gender, social class or economic status. For more support and information please visit or call: The Belize Community Counselling Centre- 2231406 or Mental Health Clinics in Corozal: 402-2078, 402-2082, Orange Walk: 302-1560, 302-1561, Belize City 223-5213, 223-0131, 227-5354, Belmopan: 802-2263, 822-2264, San Ignacio : 804-2066, 804-2761, Dangriga: 522-3831 & Punta Gorda: 722-2161, 722-2145. Remember there is no good health without mental health!

U-Partners: To further build this new technology innovation, in coordination with the Ministry of Health, mental health counselling will be progressively made available countrywide, through the unique U-Partners function which enables delivery of scheduled, confidential and quality-assured one-on-one counseling through trained operators via mobile phone, to help bridge the gap in access resulting from the limited number of specialized mental health professionals to offer basic information and counselling. It also offers an opportunity for earlier facilitated referral to a health facility. Training of operators is being planned for 2019.



Strategy Two: Leveraging Partnerships for Adolescents

UNICEF Belize supported the main partners in the formulation of a more specific Theory of Change (ToC) on adolescent mental health. Mental health is affected by multiple health, social and environmental determinants and it has a wide range of individual, social and economic effects. This ToC will guide multisectoral response to adolescent mental health issues in Belize. At the same time, adolescent mental health is an area of learning for UNICEF as well as for the government and partners and UNICEF Belize has worked closely with health teams in LACRO and HQ for guidance and additional capacity. The image below shows the summary ToC. As a next step, UNICEF will work with the Ministry of Health to finalize and support implementation of a draft C4D strategy to support this ToC.

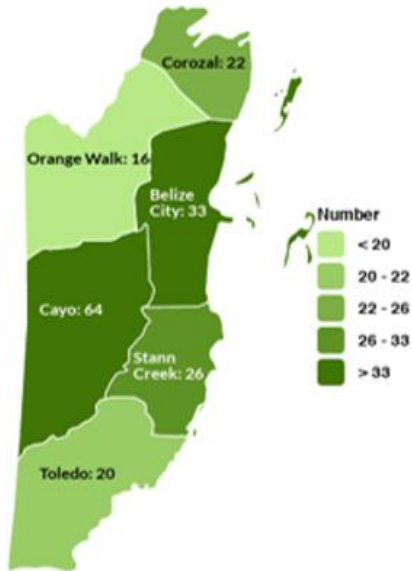


Mapping exercise: With technical support from UNICEF, a mapping exercise provided baseline information on adolescent mental health in Belize. This exercise was identified in a meeting between UNICEF and the Ministries of Health and Human Development to be a necessary first step to enable strengthened coordination and partnership among government sectors (human development, education and health) and better optimization of resource use. The mapping exercise invited partners to describe the nature of the services that they offered, the target clients, their geographic coverage and specific hours of service delivery. For more information on the detailed results from the mapping, please [click here](#).

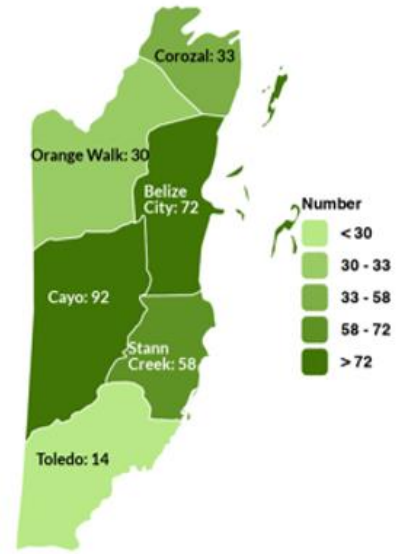
Strategy Three: Harnessing the Power of Evidence for Adolescent Mental Health

Adolescent Health Situational Analysis: Through the development of the national strategy, existing data has been disaggregated for adolescents aged 10-14 and 15-19. Disaggregated data on key indicators for mental health are included in one of the AH fact sheets. As shown in the graphs below, Belize and Cayo districts have the highest numbers of attempted suicides and depression among adolescents aged 10 – 19. This information align with other health indicators is now available to support formulation of programmes and services for adolescent health that respond to the unique sub-national health profiles and priorities.

Cumulative number of attempted suicide by district, Belize, 2013-2017



Number of Reported Cases of Newly Diagnosed Depression in Adolescents aged 10-19, Belize 2013-2017



Population-based data on mental health conditions among adolescents can help identify adolescents' needs and populations at greatest risk and inform appropriate interventions to address the mental health needs of adolescents. Testing of the Mental Health among Adolescents at the Population Level (MMAP) approach was introduced to Belize. The Population level (MMAP) tool is to measure prevalence and burden of mental ill-health among adolescents (ages 10-19) at the population level, including indicators of anxiety, depression, behavioral problems, functional impairment, and suicide ideation/attempt.

With support from UNICEF and technical support of Dr. Brandon Kohrt, George Washington University, MOH arranged a workshop and training on MMAP. The workshop started with an in-depth presentation of the research methodology that will be used to generate valid and reliable mental health data. Two local language experts translated the MMAP Tool into the language that Belizean adolescents could understand. Three local mental health experts adapted the translated tool into the Belize context to reflect local interpretation of survey items.

At the same time, UNICEF Belize introduced the Helping Adolescents Thrive (HAT) project, which is a multi-country initiative to support the development of guidelines on mental health promotion and preventive interventions for adolescents as well as a package addressing inter-personal violence, mental health, substance abuse, SRH as well as identified local priorities. With support from UNICEF and technical support of Dr Jackie Stewart, Stellenbosch University, MOH arranged workshop and training of local facilitators on the concept and strategies to be used for the qualitative research through focus group discussions with adolescents. The other countries participating in the HAT project are South Africa, Argentina, Nepal, Kazakhstan, and Mongolia.

100% of the research team were trained in ethical guidelines for conducting MMAP and HAT research and a post test was administered to assess learning. Both MMAP and HAT training concluded with mock exercises to build participant skills in conducting focus group discussions.

After the training of facilitators, two research team conducted a total of eight (8) focus group sessions with 52 adolescent males and females, ages 10-14 and 15-19. Participants of all eight focus groups

demonstrated a high level of interest and provided invaluable insights. The purpose of the focus group discussion for MMAP was to ensure that the questions in the tool were relevant to the Belizean context, that the tool was comprehensible to the target group, that the questions were complete, and that the response sets were appropriate to yield the desired responses from the target population. A final set of focus group discussions will be conducted with parents. Feedback from all sessions are being transcribed and will assist greatly in finalizing the tool. Data from transcripts will then be analysed and utilized to adjust the MMAP tool. The revised tool will then be tested through Cognitive Interviews with 300 adolescents during the month of July. Data from Cognitive Interviews will be utilized to finalize the tools for use in the Belizean setting.

The HAT focus groups followed a semi-structured session guide and explored some key themes, adolescent understandings of mental health, as well as proposed intervention components (interpersonal skills, mindfulness, problem solving, emotional regulation, and stress management). These sessions have been carefully structured to be suitable for young adolescents aged 10-14 as well as older adolescents aged 15-19 from different backgrounds. Facilitators gathered a range of perspectives as relate to these discussion topics.



Strategy Four: Advocacy and Social Mobilization for Adolescent Mental Health

UNICEF Belize has been building up its advocacy around this neglected priority area affecting adolescents. In September 2018, UNICEF, PAHO and the Ministry of Health jointly hosted an Open House on AH with a focus on mental health in Belize. This event was organized as an informal “Town Hall” forum for the exchange of information and ideas and to allow for the public to engage with experts

in a conversation on adolescent mental health. Awareness and understanding of the adolescent mental health issues were increased among partners and stakeholders from the government, NGOs/CSOs, academia and media. In June 2019, in combination with the launch of two adolescent mental health projects (MMA and HAT), the kick-off meeting featured opening remarks by Dr. Marvin Manzanero, Director of Health Services, remarks by Dr. Susan Kasedde, UNICEF Belize Country Representative, and key note address by Ms. Kim Simplis Barrow, the Special Envoy for Children and Women.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Manzanero acknowledged that the issues of adolescent mental health are always neglected in the health agenda. He acknowledged that there are gaps in the provision of mental health services. However, he highlighted the progress being made by the MOH in strengthening its response to mental health which includes: ongoing efforts to build human resource capacity, development of adolescent health national strategic plan (2019-2030), establishing partnership with UNICEF and PAHO, and the presence of a mental health policy. The Ministry of Health (MOH) acknowledged the important role that results from the MMA and HAT study will play in assisting the MOH with informing the implementation of the adolescent health national strategic plan and in shaping policies.



Dr. Susan Kasedde highlighted the situation of mental health by informing the gathering of stakeholders that some 264 million people worldwide are dealing with the effects of depression. She pointed to the fact that mental health is a universal challenge yet significantly marked by stigma and silence. She indicated that the MMA and HAT initiatives, will help establish better understanding about the experience of adolescents and opportunities to improve response involving government, civil society, families and young people themselves.

In her key note address Mrs. Kim Simplis Barrow thanked MOH for spearheading the activities as well as UNICEF for always answering the call to respond to the challenges facing young people. She acknowledged that mental Health is a challenge facing young people, pointing to the fact that half of all mental health cases start at 14 and that globally 20 million school children world-wide have been diagnosed with some type of mental disorder. The Special Envoy called for greater investment in mental

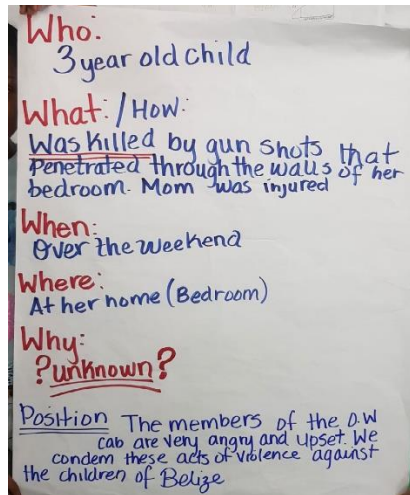
health, highlighting the fact that only 2% of Belize's health budget covers mental health. She also called for increased actions to address stigma and discrimination and greater responses in the areas of access to education and information, community response to mental health, increase availability of counsellors in schools, recognition of the stress that young people are under and validating their feelings when expressed.



The Special Envoy shared a video testimonial from a young person who has been affected by mental health. The testimonial pointed to the limited access to support services, and high levels of stigma and discrimination resulting in many persons suffering in silence.

The global, regional, and country situation of adolescent mental health was presented by Nurse Eleanor Bennett, Head of Mental Health Unit in the Ministry of Health, Dr. Jorge Polanco, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Belize, Dr. Sofia Carolina Cuello Royert, UNICEF LACRO, Ms. Liliana Carvajal and Dr. Cristina De Carvalho Eriksson, UNICEF HQ. Nurse Bennett highlighted the key mental health interventions by the MOH which included a mental Health Policy and the provision of mental health services through a community based mental health model which reduces stigma, prevents human rights violations, and increases access.

Communication for Development – Adolescent Mental Health



Child Advisory Board (CAB) members of Dangriga participated in training on communications and working with the media. The flip-chart was prepared by children in the training where they chose recent issues that they wished to make a statement on in order to advocate for action on behalf of other children.

Communication and advocacy will continue to play a critical role in raising awareness and transforming norms and practices around mental health at all levels, including shame, silence and stigma. UNICEF Belize continues to work with the MoH and partners as well as experts to develop resources to complement this advocacy and public awareness effort. Some of the more recent communication materials including short expert videos and television shows are available at the links below.