

# Nationwide Children's Hospital Behavioral Health Services

With the high demand for children's behavioral health care services and youth suicides on the rise, Nationwide Children's increased its commitment to provide integrated care for kids in crisis. Nationwide Children's launched a national movement [On Our Sleeves](#) to break stigmas around children's mental health in 2018, and in March 2020 opened Big Lots Behavioral health pavilion, a new comprehensive behavioral health treatment and research pavilion for children and adolescents. This case study is part of an AHA Behavioral Health Services [series](#) on innovation and community partnerships.

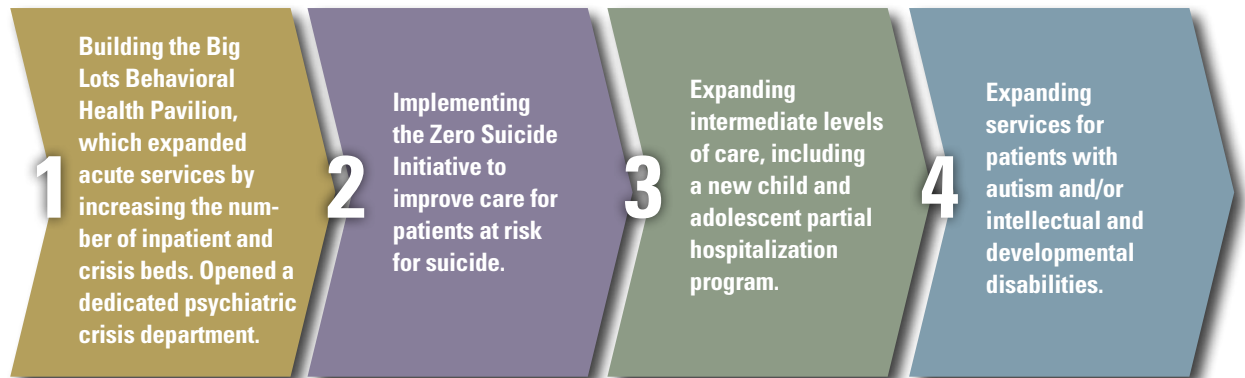
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## Executive Summary

More children and adolescents died by suicide in Franklin County, Ohio, in 2014 than in any year prior. Many people in the community attributed this toll to a lack of access to prevention, early intervention and treatment of behavioral health disorders for children and adolescents. Access to a therapist or psychiatrist often could take months, which is how a children's hospital emergency department (ED) became a crisis intervention center.

Located in Columbus, [Nationwide Children's Hospital](#) is an integrated community health care organization providing a full range of children's services. In 2015, with its board's support, Nationwide Children's increased its commitment to behavioral health. By collaborating and coordinating with existing community-based providers and programs, access to pediatric behavioral health services throughout the region improved.

**To reduce and manage the prevalence of behavioral health disorders, Nationwide Children's committed to:**



In March 2020, through a philanthropic gift, Nationwide Children's opened a new comprehensive behavioral health treatment and research pavilion for children and adolescents. [The Big Lots Behavioral Health Pavilion](#) is the United States' largest and most comprehensive center dedicated exclusively to child and adolescent behavioral and mental health on a pediatric medical campus. A partnership between the [Abigail Wexner Research Institute](#) and [Big Lots Behavioral Health Services](#) allows for the development and implementation of evidence-based prevention strategies. The Big Lots Behavioral Health Pavilion is also home to the Center for Suicide Prevention and Research, which addresses the growing national problem of suicide among youth.

## Community Profile

Nationwide Children's is one of the largest children's hospitals in the U.S., with 551 inpatient beds and a national reputation as a leader in the delivery of children's services. The Nationwide Children's region includes more than 37 counties in Central and Southeastern Ohio and serves 1.5 million people. In addition, Nationwide Children's participates in a more than 700,000-member children's health care network.

Nationwide Children's also co-owns a pediatric accountable care organization called [Partners for Kids®](#) (PFK) and carries full financial risk for about 330,000 children in the Medicaid program. More than half of the children in the Nationwide Children's service area are Medicaid beneficiaries. As PFK took on more risk by serving more Medicaid children, it became apparent that to further improve outcomes and save money in the long run, Nationwide Children's needed to invest in upstream population health activities that addressed social determinants of health, including behavioral health. Taking on full risk for the majority of the patients provides flexibility to improve care and address cost challenges. While there is a substantial commercially insured population, taking on full risk is essential because unlike non-behavioral health services, commercial reimbursement does not provide sufficient revenue to offset underpayments in behavioral health from such governmental payers as Medicaid.

## Nationwide Children's Hospital Behavioral Health Service Line Development

In 2014, Nationwide Children's noticed an increased demand for children's behavioral health care services due to an escalation of youth suicides, in addition to a pronounced need to improve access to behavioral health care services in the region.

Given the community need identified through a comprehensive Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA), and direction from the hospital's board of directors, Nationwide Children's leaders partnered with primary care physicians, other providers, schools and community agencies, and other community stakeholders to do a deeper dive into the specific gaps in pediatric behavioral health. A SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunity and threat) analysis showed a need to increase prevention and research, as well as crisis and inpatient services.

The hospital also formalized financial support in its philanthropic efforts, culminating in a \$50 million "lead naming gift" for the construction of the Big Lots Behavioral Health Pavilion, a 380,000-square-foot facility on its main campus. The pavilion is home to the psychiatric crisis department, where patients experiencing a behavioral health crisis, who typically would visit an ED, are assessed. A 16-bed youth crisis stabilization unit and a 10-bed extended observation suite are also part of the facility. In addition, the Behavioral Health Pavilion houses inpatient units for children and adolescents, with one specifically designed for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Its outpatient programs include a crisis clinic, mood and anxiety program, family-based intensive treatment, and general psychiatry, as well as a partial hospitalization program.

	<b>NETWORK: Nationwide Children's Hospital Behavioral Health Services</b>
<b>Primary focus</b>	Improving access; addressing youth suicide prevention and early intervention; and improving treatment for behavioral health disorders.
<b>Network partners</b>	Community mental health centers, federally qualified health care centers, children's services agencies, community foundations, community agencies, schools, law enforcement, consumers of services.
<b>Aligns with CHNA*</b>	Yes
<b>Legal entity</b>	No formal network
<b>Started</b>	2015
<b>Staffing</b>	Led by Nationwide Children's CEO and the behavioral health leadership team; hired 261 to open the BHP and have since hired 102.9 for ramp-up.
<b>Initial capitalization</b>	Not required for the network. Nationwide Children's has invested millions for programs, research, facilities and accountable care. Initial donor support helped with funding.
<b>Ongoing Funding</b>	Nationwide Children's has provided ongoing support of the effort, in addition to a transformational \$50 million gift from Big Lots and Big Lots Foundation, and other community support.
<b>Role of Nationwide Children's Hospital</b>	Leader/convener
<b>Behavioral health service-line leader role</b>	Direct involvement; key participant/leader
<b>Unique element of network</b>	Partnering with schools to deploy the <a href="#">PAX Good Behavior Game®</a> and <a href="#">On Our Sleeves®</a> movement for children's mental health.

\*Community Health Needs Assessment

Nationwide Children’s enhanced collaborations with primary care providers, including an initiative with PFK designed to increase the capability of primary care providers to care for patients with behavioral health needs, and developed a system of care connecting communities to specialty resources.

Nationwide Children’s primarily played the convener and leader roles in pulling together other organizations to participate and contribute their unique skill sets and resources. About 10 major community mental health centers and federally qualified health care centers, as well as a host of community partners, met regularly to evaluate community needs, develop integrated solutions and responses on access to crisis services or outpatient services, and identify a better way to address these issues.

### **Nationwide Children’s Hospital Behavioral Health Services Goals**

- Expand access to a continuum of pediatric behavioral health care services.
- Establish children’s behavioral health care preventive efforts to turn the tide of alarming youth suicide rates.
- Build a pediatric behavioral health care research portfolio to identify longer-term solutions to these challenges.
- Develop a comprehensive behavioral health care pavilion consisting of emergency and crisis services, day-treatment clinics, outpatient clinics, inpatient services and research.

In the care model decision-making process, Nationwide Children’s utilizes direct input from families, ranging from parent support specialists, a family advisory council, “Family as Faculty” (parents who describe their care experiences) and family-based training to help orient new staff.

### **Innovative Approaches**

A series of specific initiatives were deployed as part of the network, including partnering with schools to use the [PAX Good Behavior Game®](#), an evidence-based universal prevention model comprising behavioral strategies implemented by teachers in the classroom. This proven approach improves classroom behavior and academics by enhancing self-regulation and co-regulation with peers. It also has been shown to provide lasting benefits in reducing substance use and suicidality. The model targets children in kindergarten through fifth grade.

Nationwide Children’s is implementing the [Zero Suicide](#) initiative in its communities and has launched the [On Our Sleeves®](#) movement to raise awareness and educate community and national audiences about the importance of pediatric behavioral health care and prevention.

In addition, the hospital partnered specifically with the criminal justice system to link youths in the detention system with care providers in the community – an effort to match the individual with the most appropriate treatment available.

### **Impact of the Pandemic on Nationwide Children’s Hospital and Beyond**

Amid school closures, family stress, social isolation and economic challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic put children and adolescents at increased risk for anxiety, suicide and post-traumatic stress. Nationwide Children’s needed to pivot quickly to telehealth/telemental health. Within four weeks, the hospital converted 90% of its appointments to telehealth, and staff were able to do psychological testing and assessments and provide appropriate care in ambulatory settings. The infrastructure was in place and staff were already working to expand telehealth within the behavioral health service line. For some children, being at home in their natural environments was more comfortable.

Big Lots Behavioral Health Pavilion opened four days before the COVID-19 shutdown. The space allowed for proper social distancing and alternative ways to use rooms. For a child in crisis, the child and a family member were placed in a consult room instead of a waiting area. Extended observation suites were set up in two rooms to manage COVID-19-positive children or those who presented to the crisis department with high-exposure risk. With the number of crisis assessments for mental health concerns up by almost 15% in the second half of 2020 compared with that of 2019, David Axelson, M.D., chief of psychiatry and behavioral health at Nationwide Children’s Hospital, said it’s hard to imagine what the last year would have been like without the addition of the pavilion and its clinics.

Throughout 2020, the psychiatric crisis department had approximately 4,600 visits, which took significant pressure off the hospital's main ED and greatly improved care. Most of the kids evaluated within the psychiatric crisis department were connected to an appropriate level of care that did not include inpatient admission.

"Our community work is intentionally designed to support local providers and agencies to address mental health conditions at less-intensive levels, rather than refer to us," Axelson said. "We're also hoping that our comprehensive community approach will reduce ED use for crisis patients and reduce readmissions.

## Key Learnings and Takeaways

Nationwide Children's identified essential components for any community collaborative with a goal of increasing access to behavioral health treatment for children and adolescents.

### Success Factors

- 1** The project must have full support of the community-based agencies already providing care and addressing social determinants of health.
- 2** The support of the hospital/health system's board from a leadership, strategic and philanthropic perspective is imperative.
- 3** The right leadership must be in place to lead the initiative. Hospital and/or health system CEO commitment, as well as having a dedicated service-line executive for behavioral health care services in the organization are central to ensuring full implementation of the network.
- 4** Creativity and flexibility are needed to allocate and use resources, including the organization's staff.

### Barriers

Nationwide Children's encountered some barriers, several of which persist today, and include:

- A general lack of defined behavioral health care resources and limited workforce.
- Overall stigma regarding behavioral health care services.
- Significant regulatory burdens that slow effective implementation of creative networks in rapid timeframes.

### Success Measures

Nationwide Children's has provided a robust measurement and metrics system to evaluate the outcomes of its investments and community collaborative. The three primary measures of success are:

- Improving access.
- Reducing inpatient readmission rates.
- Decreasing the number of youth suicides.