

## Summary of San Antonio’s Teen Mental Health Survey Conducted Spring 2024

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### Background

In October 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Children’s Hospital Association declared a national emergency in Child and Adolescent Mental Health <sup>i</sup>. The declaration focused on the stress of the COVID-19 pandemic and how the pandemic exacerbated existing societal struggles related to racial justice, therefore impacting certain communities because of pre-existing racial inequalities. The declaration noted the uptick in “emergency department visits for all mental health emergencies, including suspected suicide attempts during the pandemic. This escalated the mental health crisis of youth prior to the pandemic. Data from 2009 to 2019 of high school students nationwide have shown increases in having persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, having seriously considered suicide, and having attempted suicide. This has only been compounded by the effects of COVID-19.<sup>iii</sup> There are some promising signs though. According to the Center for Disease Control’s Youth Risk Behavior Survey, “From 2021 to 2023, there were early signs that adolescent mental health is getting better.” <sup>iv</sup>

The San Antonio Youth Commission is made of 22 members of high school students appointed by the mayor and city council members; Project Worth Teen Ambassadors is a youth program within the Metropolitan Health District of 65 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders who support teen social emotional learning in the community by volunteering and sharing their voices, creativity, and ideas. Both groups came together in December of 2021 to develop a teen mental health survey after discussions on how much their and their peers’ mental health had been impacted by the pandemic. After mental health consultants working with the City of San Antonio reviewed the survey and analysis done on the literacy level of the questions, the first survey was launched in March 2022. This was the first survey made by youth, for youth released on the City of San Antonio’s *SASpeakUp* platform.

Their initial idea has grown into an annual survey overseen by the City of San Antonio’s Department of Human Services and Metropolitan Health District. The 2023 was found inconclusive to analyze to compare to 2022 results. The third survey was launched in March 2024.

Through the data, the commission and ambassadors, and City Staff, have gained more insight on COVID-19’s impact on 12–19-year-olds in the San Antonio community. The previous years’ data has been utilized to allocated resources to assist in the recovery of young adults.

### Methods

#### Data Source

This report includes data from the *SASpeakUp* Teen Mental Health Survey, conducted between March 1 to April 30, 2024. The survey was an online-based survey open to youth ages 12-19 in the San Antonio Community. Participation in the survey was voluntary. It was promoted through paid advertising, community events, and word of mouth within teen serving organizations. A copy of the survey is attached.

In total, 1,550 entries were collected in the 2024 survey. Of this amount, results from 1,455 of the surveys with valid responses were used in this analysis. All ten city council districts were represented in the survey results.

## Measures

Results from the survey are analyzed on the following measures: 1) mental health status; 2) mental health issues experienced; 3) who is used for mental health help; and 4) what affects your mental health. No time frame was specified in the questions.

In addition, the following demographic characteristics were analyzed: gender identity, sexual orientation (heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, asexual, or exploring or unsure), race and ethnicity (American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian or Asian American, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latinx, Middle Eastern, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White, and/or other), and Council District.

## Analysis

Of the 1,455 teen respondents, 22 were non-Hispanic Asian or Asian American, 80 were non-Hispanic Black or African American, 76 were non-Hispanic White, 735 were Hispanic, 12 indicated “another option not listed here” and 540 preferred not to answer or didn’t disclose. 71 participants were gender diverse (marked transgender, “Not a girl or a boy (non-binary/third gender/two-spirit, or self-described their gender) or exploring or unsure of their gender identity. The smaller groups should be evaluated with careful consideration. Data were analyzed and calculated for all study variables among all respondents and by demographic data. All data collected was analyzed by the data teams at the City of San Antonio’s Department of Human Services and Metropolitan Health District. The race and ethnicity of the survey were generally representative of the San Antonio population from the 2020 American Community Survey (5-year estimate) data. However, more girls/women completed the survey than boys/men. All survey results were disaggregated to better understand the mental health of each subpopulation.

## Results

### Mental Health Struggles

Participants notated several challenges with mental health. However, there was a promising decrease in stated struggles when compared to the 2022 survey. When asked about a variety of depressive traits, 25% stated an inability to perform day to day tasks, down from 37% in 2022; 36% stated feeling helpless, hopeless, numb, or like nothing matters, down from 49% in 2022; and 10% stated smoking, vaping, or using drugs, down from 24% in 2022. While a higher percentage of LGBTQ+ reported experiencing depressive traits than their straight/heterosexual counterparts, there was a decrease across all categories for LGBTQ+ youth, the percentages are higher than the heterosexual counterparts. When examining results by race/ethnicity, all categories reported a decrease in mental health struggles, except those who selected “Another option not listed here” or “I prefer not answer” which experienced an increase in feeling helpless, hopeless, or numb, like nothing matters.

A breakdown of the results is presented in Table 1.



**Table 1: Population Breakdown and Percentage of Youth Experiencing Mental Health Struggles**

	Number		Population Breakdown		Inability to complete tasks		Feeling helpless, hopeless, or numb, like nothing matters		Smoking, vaping, drinking alcohol, or using drugs	
	2022	2024	2022	2024	2022	2024	2022	2024	2022	2024
<b>Total (ages 12-19)</b>	846	1,455	100%	100%	37%	25%	49%	36%	24%	10%
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>										
Straight/Heterosexual	434	619	51%	43%	25%	21%	39%	31%	19%	9%
LGBQ+	253	234	33%	12%	58%	43%	71%	57%	38%	17%
<b>Ethnicity/Race</b>										
Hispanic	542	735	64%	51%	38%	26%	52%	36%	27%	11%
NH-White	152	76	18%	5%	38%	36%	53%	50%	20%	8%
NH-Black or African American	50	80	6%	6%	38%	21%	48%	31%	22%	10%
NH-Asian or Asian American	29	22	3%	2%	45%	27%	59%	50%	28%	5%
Another option not listed here	13	12	2%	1%	46%	25%	31%	58%	23%	17%
I prefer not to answer	60	81	7%	6%	12%	9%	13%	23%	5%	0%

NH = non-Hispanic

### Self-Harm and Suicidal Ideation

When asked about experiencing mental health struggles, overall, 25% stated an inability to perform day to day tasks. There was a decrease from 26% in 2022 to 11% in 2024 of youth reporting self-harm (hurting oneself like cutting skin, pulling hair, burning skin) and from 28% in 2022 to 14% in 2024 of youth reporting suicidal ideation (thoughts or feelings about ending one’s own life). Both LGBQ+ and straight/heterosexual youth experienced a decrease in both categories, but LGBQ+ youth were over 3x more likely to report self-harm and/or suicidal ideation. Non-Hispanic White youth had an increase from 28% to 29% in reported suicidal ideation, while all other ethnicity/race categories experienced a decrease in suicidal ideation. Non-Hispanic Asian or Asian Americans reported the highest percentage of youth experience suicidal ideation. For self-harm, “I prefer not to answer” was the other ethnicity/race category to show an increase, from 5% in 2022 to 6% in 2024. Non-Hispanic White youth reported the highest rate of self-harm overall. Females reported higher struggles compared to their male counterparts. LGBQ+ and gender diverse youth reported higher on average than their heterosexual counterparts when reporting the inability to perform day to day tasks and feeling helpless, hopeless, numb, or like nothing matters, this is consistent with 2022 survey results.

**Table 2: Percentage of Youth Reporting Self-Harm and Experiencing Suicidal Ideation**



	Hurting oneself like cutting skin, pulling hair, burning skin		Suicidal ideation: thoughts or feelings about ending own life	
	2022	2024	2022	2024
<b>Total (ages 12-19)</b>	26%	11%	28%	14%
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>				
Straight/Heterosexual	11%	6%	14%	9%
LGBQ+	52%	24%	55%	30%
<b>Ethnicity/Race</b>				
Hispanic	28%	11%	30%	14%
NH-White	30%	21%	28%	29%
NH-Black or African American	20%	8%	28%	14%
NH-Asian or Asian American	28%	9%	45%	32%
Another option not listed here	23%	17%	15%	0%
I prefer not to answer	5%	6%	7%	2%

NH = non-Hispanic

### Lack of Safe Spaces and Trusted Adults

When asked about where to go for mental health issues, overwhelmingly, youth reported a preference to talk with their friends (Table 3.1). This was consistent with the 2022 findings. However, there was a decrease in the percentage of youth utilizing social media and/or the internet to find mental health help (Table 3.2). A staggering 16% of youth reported they do not feel comfortable talking to anyone, which only slightly down from 17% in 2022 (Table 3.3). Only 14% of youth reported having a trusted adult at school to talk to regarding mental health struggles (Table 3.1).

Tables 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 show the full results.

**Table 3.1: Preferred Resources for Mental Health Help**

	Friends		A trusted adult that is <u>not</u> a family member		A trusted adult that works in your school	
	2022	2024	2022	2024	2022	2024
<b>Total (ages 12-19)</b>	41%	42%	10%	10%	10%	14%
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>						
Straight/Heterosexual	36%	40%	9%	11%	10%	13%
LGBQ+	49%	56%	12%	10%	11%	13%
<b>Ethnicity/Race</b>						
Hispanic	44%	44%	10%	10%	11%	13%
NH-White	43%	53%	9%	13%	5%	18%
NH-Black or African American	48%	34%	14%	13%	14%	15%
NH-Asian or Asian American	38%	45%	10%	18%	10%	23%
Another option not listed here	15%	33%	0%	8%	0%	8%
I prefer not to answer	12%	21%	7%	7%	5%	11%

NH = non-Hispanic

**Table 3.2: Preferred Resources for Mental Health Help**

	Place of worship	Social Media	Internet Search
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	2022	2024	2022	2024	2022	2024
<b>Total (ages 12-19)</b>	5%	8%	8%	5%	12%	7%
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>						
Straight/Heterosexual	7%	10%	4%	4%	7%	5%
LGBQ+	4%	5%	15%	9%	21%	14%
<b>Ethnicity/Race</b>						
Hispanic	5%	8%	8%	5%	12%	7%
NH-White	8%	12%	12%	4%	16%	13%
NH-Black or African American	2%	6%	2%	8%	12%	8%
NH-Asian or Asian American	3%	9%	3%	14%	21%	18%
Another option not listed here	8%	8%	0%	8%	8%	0%
I prefer not to answer	0%	4%	3%	1%	2%	2%

NH = non-Hispanic

**Table 3.3: Preferred Resources for Mental Health Help**

	I don't have anyone to go to		I don't feel comfortable talking to anyone	
	2022	2024	2022	2024
<b>Total (ages 12-19)</b>	4%	5%	17%	16%
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>				
Straight/Heterosexual	4%	6%	13%	16%
LGBQ+	15%	6%	23%	19%
<b>Ethnicity/Race</b>				
Hispanic	5%	5%	18%	16%
NH-White	5%	4%	16%	16%
NH-Black or African American	2%	9%	10%	18%
NH-Asian or Asian American	3%	9%	21%	23%
Another option not listed here	8%	8%	23%	17%
I prefer not to answer	2%	0%	13%	7%

NH = non-Hispanic

### Top Mental Health Stressor: School

When asked about areas that affect mental health, 62% of respondents reported school as having a negative impact on their mental health compared to 59% in 2022 (Table 4). The factor with the second highest percentage of youth reporting a negative impact on mental health was family/home life at 40%. There was a decrease in youth reporting a negative impact from work/job, but an increase in all other categories (i.e., school, extracurricular/after-school activities, family/home life, and social media). LGBQ+ youth reported a small decrease in school having a negative effect on their mental health, but it remains higher than their straight/heterosexual counterparts. LGBQ+ youth also reported a greater proportion of negative impact across all other categories. All ethnicities/races reported an increase in the negative impact of extracurricular/after-school activities from 2022 to 2024. While all youth reported school the highest for negatively impacting their mental health (63%).

A breakdown is found in *Table 4*.

**Table 4: Percentage of Youth Reporting a Negative Impact on Mental Health by these Factors or Environments**

	School	Work/job	Extracurricular/After-school activities	Family/home life	Social Media
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	2022	2024	2022	2024	2022	2024	2022	2024	2022	2024
<b>Total (ages 12-19)</b>	59%	63%	25%	22%	16%	23%	33%	36%	22%	36%
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>										
Straight/Heterosexual	49%	53%	18%	12%	16%	17%	27%	32%	23%	26%
LGBQ+	73%	68%	40%	14%	18%	30%	43%	56%	19%	35%
<b>Ethnicity/Race</b>										
Hispanic	60%	58%	25%	9%	16%	20%	34%	37%	19%	28%
NH-White	59%	67%	27%	14%	16%	25%	29%	46%	27%	32%
NH-Black or African American	47%	49%	14%	15%	6%	15%	21%	35%	18%	28%
NH-Asian or Asian American	68%	55%	15%	18%	27%	32%	67%	41%	32%	45%
Another option not listed here	N/A	67%	N/A	33%	N/A	50%	N/A	58%	N/A	33%
I prefer not to answer	55%	47%	50%	5%	21%	14%	23%	31%	30%	20%

NH = non-Hispanic

### Social Media and Stress

In May 2023 the United States Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy released the Surgeon General’s Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sq-youth-mental-health-social-media-advisory.pdf> which stated that “While social media may offer some benefits, there are ample indicators that social media can also pose a risk of harm to the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents.” The Surgeon General is issuing a call for urgent action by policymakers, technology companies, researchers, families, and young people alike to gain a better understanding of the full impact of social media use, maximize the benefits and minimize the harms of social media platforms, and create safer, healthier online environments to protect children.

A higher percentage of teens reported social media as a negative impact on their mental health in 2024 (36%) compared to 2022 (22%). School and comparing yourself to others were the highest rated stressors for the youth in 2024.

As this survey shows the same as 2022, poorer mental health disproportionately affected LGBQ+ and gender diverse youth who even pre-pandemic experienced “higher rates of mental health challenges and increased health complications” compared to their heterosexual peers.<sup>v</sup> Unlike their heterosexual counterparts, the LGBQ+ teens also show an increase in negative impact when around their family in 2024. In addition, LGBQ+ teens continue to more frequently report stress in these settings and situations compared to their straight and heterosexual peers (Table 4).

### Gender Diverse Youth

Between 2022 and 2024, the City of San Antonio elected to change the language of gender demographic questions. As a result, we analyzed gender diverse youth independently and did not compare results to the 2022 survey. Here, we are looking at transgender (marked transgender as “yes”, n=36) or diverse youth (marked not a girl or a boy, non-binary/third gender/two-spirit, exploring or unsure, or self-described their gender identity, n=71). When asked about a variety of depressive traits, 35% stated an inability to perform day to day tasks, 51% stated feeling helpless, hopeless, numb, or like nothing matters, and 10% stated smoking, vaping, or using drugs. 30% of gender diverse/exploring or unsure youth reported self-harm, and 34% reported suicidal ideation. Additionally, 75% indicated





school had a negative impact on their mental health, while 58% said their family had a negative impact. Transgender youth reported even higher numbers: 53% stated an inability to perform day to day tasks, 58% stated feeling helpless, hopeless, numb, or like nothing matters, 22% stated smoking, vaping, or using drugs, 47% reported self-harm and 50% reported suicidal ideation. Furthermore, 72% of transgender youth reported that school had a negative impact on their mental health and 67% reported that family had a negative impact. These figures are more than double for every category when compared to cisgender youth.

### Most Helpful for Mental Health

The City of San Antonio opted to add additional questions to the 2024 survey to find what youth found most helpful for improving their mental health. Since these questions were not asked in 2022, the findings only look at 2024 data. 44% of youth reported that listening to music helped their mental health, 30% reported napping helped, 30% reported hanging out in person helped, 26% reported watching something on TV helped, and 25% reported video games helped. Only 2% of teens stated that nothing helped.

### Conclusion

Young adults throughout San Antonio are continuing to face significant mental health challenges. LGBTQ+ and gender diverse youth in San Antonio show disproportionately higher percentages of mental health challenges compared to their peers. However, there are some improvements. The City utilized ARPA funding to invest in youth mental health. We need to continue having a strong focus on mental health support for youth as ARPA funding ends. Funding and support created for youth mental health recovery should specifically address the unique needs of LGBTQ+ and gender diverse youth.

<sup>i</sup> See <https://www.aap.org/en/advocacy/child-and-adolescent-healthy-mental-development/aap-aacapcha-declaration-of-a-national-emergency-in-child-and-adolescent-mental-health/> for the full declaration.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report: 2013–2023*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2024

<sup>v</sup> American Psychological Association, 2011; National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2011