

Kaiser Permanente Research Brief

Mental Health

This brief summarizes the contributions of Kaiser Permanente Research since 2007 on the topic of mental health, including depression, anxiety, and other affective and stress disorders.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines mental health conditions as those characterized by alterations in thinking, feeling, mood, or behavior associated with distress or impaired functioning.^[1] Anxiety disorders and depressive disorders are the first and second most common mental health conditions in the United States.^[2] The CDC estimates that more than 50 percent of people in the U.S. will have a mental health condition at some point in their lifetime, and that 1 in 25 people lives with a serious mental illness such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or major depression.^[1] Suicide was the 10th leading cause of death in 2014, accounting for nearly 43,000 deaths in the U.S.^[1,3]

Mental health is an important area of study for Kaiser Permanente Research. Scientists across the program have used our rich and comprehensive data to advance knowledge in the areas of understanding risk, improving patient outcomes, and translating research findings into policy and practice. We have published approximately 600 articles related to mental health conditions over the past decade; together, these articles have been cited nearly 17,000 times.^[4] These articles are the product of observational studies, randomized controlled trials, meta-analyses, and other studies led by Kaiser Permanente scientists. Our unique environment – a fully integrated care and coverage model in which our research scientists, clinicians, and leaders collaborate – enables us to contribute important knowledge about mental health, and many other topics of research.

Kaiser Permanente Publications Related to Mental Health since 2007



Source: Kaiser Permanente Publications Library and PLUM metrics, as of 23 March 2018.

a Number of citing journal articles, according to Scopus.

b Number of references in PubMed guidelines.

c Citations in DynaMed Plus, a point-of-care clinical reference tool.

This brief summarizes a selection of the publications contained within the Kaiser Permanente Publications Library, which indexes journal articles and other publications authored by individuals affiliated with Kaiser Permanente. The work described in this brief originated from across Kaiser Permanente's eight regions and was supported by a wide range of funding sources including internal research support as well as both governmental and non-governmental extramural funding.

Understanding Risk

Who is at risk for developing mental health conditions?

Kaiser Permanente researchers have contributed to understanding risk factors for developing mental health conditions, including family history,^[5,6] adverse life experiences (such as abuse, neglect, intimate partner violence),^[7-9] and life course events (for example, childbirth, menopause).^[10-12] For youth, depression risk has also been linked to parental depression.^[13,14] Some severe medical conditions have also been linked to depression and suicidality (suicidal ideation, suicide plans, and suicide risk), such as psoriasis,^[15] active dialysis,^[16] chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD),^[17] and acute coronary syndrome events.^[18]

There is emerging evidence that some prenatal exposures may contribute to risk of mental health conditions for children. Our research has tentatively linked both maternal tobacco use during pregnancy^[19] and maternal influenza^[20] to bipolar disorder. Other studies have found associations between schizophrenia spectrum disorders in male offspring and perinatal exposure both to maternal stress^[21] as well as to elevated maternal homocysteine (an amino acid) levels.^[22]

What other health risks do people with mental health conditions face?

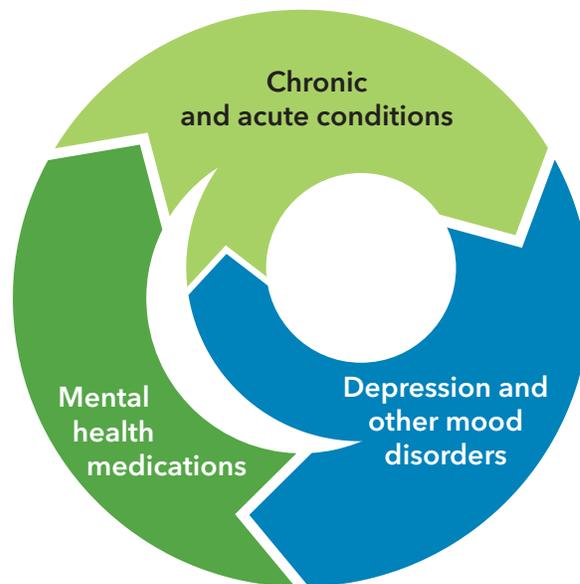
People with mental health conditions experience a range of health risks, including medication-related risks. Our research has demonstrated that people with bipolar disorders or schizophrenia have greater odds of having medical comorbidities (2 or more co-occurring chronic conditions) than counterparts without these serious mental illnesses.^[23,24] People with serious mental illnesses also experience greater risk of obesity and diabetes, both independently and because of the side effects of medications.^[25]

There is also some evidence of a link between depression or anxiety and worse outcomes in

some chronic conditions, including diabetes,^[26] COPD,^[27-29] and others.^[30] These associations may reflect the impact of these mental health conditions on patients' abilities to complete self-management activities, such as taking medications as prescribed.^[26,30]

Kaiser Permanente researchers have documented risks for fetuses exposed to some mental health medications in utero.^[31,32] Understanding the risks of medication use during pregnancy has become increasingly important because the number of pregnancies exposed to some classes of mental health medications has been growing over time.^[33]

Reinforcing risks between select physical and mental health conditions



Particularly among youth, there has been substantial controversy about the appropriateness and safety of some mental health medications.^[34] Our researchers have studied the safety of specific medications in youth and found a small increase in the risk of suicidality.^[35,36] These findings have helped galvanize efforts to reduce prescribing of these drugs to youths,^[37] and have also prompted studies comparing effectiveness of different treatment pathways for youth who are not responsive to their initial prescribed treatment.^[38]

Kaiser Permanente research scientists have also authored studies evaluating the risks of suicide and non-suicidal self-injury^[39,41] and assessing screening methods for suicidality.^[42] There is evidence of elevated suicide risk for adolescents following their initial diagnosis with a psychotic disorder.^[43-45] Our researchers have also demonstrated that adolescents with treatment-resistant depression^[39] and people treated for bipolar disorder^[41] – among others – are at high risk for self-injury outcomes, highlighting that effective treatment strategies are needed.

Improving Patient Outcomes

What strategies are effective in preventing mental health conditions?

Although opportunities for primary prevention of mental health conditions are limited, Kaiser Permanente researchers have assessed some prevention strategies for high-risk populations.

For example, recent studies demonstrated a decrease in newly-occurring depression among at-risk adolescents who participated in group cognitive behavioral therapy.^[14,46,47] Our researchers have also completed a meta-analysis of studies focused on the “Coping With Depression” psychoeducational intervention, which they found was effective as a preventive strategy to reduce the risk of major depression.^[48] The link between environmental exposures (such as adverse childhood experiences or perinatal exposures) and mental health outcomes may offer an opportunity to prevent mental health conditions.

A meta-analysis found that participants in prevention oriented psychoeducational intervention using the “Coping with Depression” course had **38% LOWER RISK** of developing a depressive disorder than controls.^[48]

How does early identification of mental health conditions affect outcomes?

Screening for mental health conditions is essential to timely diagnosis. Our researchers have assessed the evidence for screening in studies focused on specific populations and conditions, including child and adolescent depression,^[36,49] adult depression,^[50] perinatal and postpartum depression,^[10,51,52] suicidality,^[42] and others.

A Kaiser Permanente clinical trial compared the effectiveness of 3 early intervention staffing models for adolescents reporting substance use and depression symptoms,

ONLY 36% OF PATIENTS newly diagnosed with depression initiated treatment within 90 days.^[55]



General Internal Medicine

47% OF DEPRESSED PATIENTS receiving treatment in primary care experienced improvement in their depression symptoms after 6 months.^[57]



Psychiatric Services

Standard telephone, video-conferencing, and web-based **INTERVENTIONS ARE EFFECTIVE** for treating a range of mental health conditions.^[60]



General Hospital Psychiatry

and found that offering a behavioral health clinician within primary care settings was the most effective model for controlling the progression of depression symptoms.^[53] Early recognition of mental health conditions is also important because of the risk of self-harm for patients with mood disorders. One study found that most patients were seen in at least one health care setting in the year before suicide, but half did not receive a mental health diagnosis.^[54]

What are the key factors in effective treatment of people with mental health conditions?

Access to and Engagement in Treatment.

An essential factor in treating mental health conditions is to engage individuals in treatment. Many patients who might benefit from treatment do not receive it.

A recent Kaiser Permanente study assessed treatment initiation patterns for adults with depression. Researchers found low rates of treatment entry among those for whom it was recommended (35.7 percent of newly diagnosed patients overall), with disparities among racial and ethnic groups.^[55] The study concluded more research is needed to understand both patient- and system-level factors that may influence treatment initiation.

For adolescents, system-level barriers to accessing care have been described by our researchers, and include provider payment models, clinical linkages across disciplines, and confidentiality policies limiting information sharing between disciplines.^[56] Even among patients who seek treatment, outcomes are not consistent. For example, in one study of response to depression treatment in primary care, only 47 percent of patients experienced a large improvement in their symptoms after 6 months.^[57]

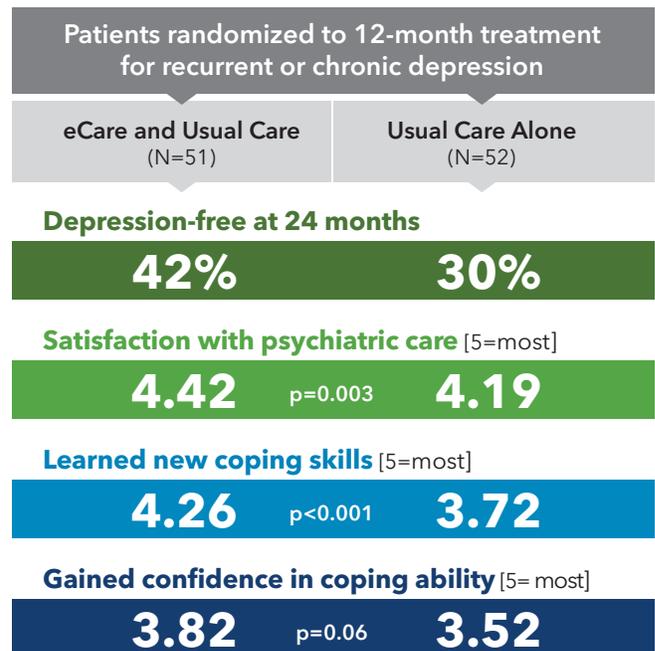
Stigma associated with mental health treatment can be a barrier to entry for some populations.

^[58] Recent research suggests that health information technologies may extend access to mental health care in many ways, including by offering treatment methods that patients may find more acceptable.^[59,60] A qualitative study focused on youth with schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, bipolar disorder, or affective psychosis suggested several recommended themes for better engaging patients in treatment.^[61]

Person-Centered Treatment with Psychotherapy and Medications.

Many psychotherapeutic approaches are widely proven to be valuable – either alone or in combination with medications – for treating an array of specific populations and condition.^[62-65] In recent years, this has included web- and smartphone-based programs that show great promise.^[59,66-69] Kaiser Permanente studies have also contributed to our understanding of the many complexities to medication treatment related to combining medications, switching medications, and adjusting dosages.^[38,70,71]

Internet-Delivered Care Management Can Help Improve Outcomes for Patients with Recurrent or Chronic Depression ^[69]



Ensuring that treatment is person-centered is an important issue for mental health care. Disparities in mental health treatment have been documented by our researchers.^[55,72-75] However, it is not always clear whether these differences reflect variation in patient preferences for treatment; more research is needed in this area.

A recent Kaiser Permanente study that sought to better characterize patients' recovery objectives concluded that patients' goals are varied and change over time, and that services must be flexible to accommodate each patient's current priorities.^[76] Recognizing progress in treatment through Feedback-Informed Care – in which patient-reported symptoms are tracked over time and used to inform treatment decisions – is an example of partnering with patients to make shared decisions.

Overall Health and Wellness. The management of co-occurring health conditions and maintenance of general wellness is also essential to the care of people with mental health conditions. This includes addressing harmful health behaviors, such as problematic alcohol use, through screening and intervention programs.^[77-81]

Although people with mental health conditions face some added risks for a variety of chronic conditions, our researchers have demonstrated that the use of recommended preventive services is more complete among individuals with serious mental illnesses than in the general population,^[82] possibly reflecting strong connectivity to care. Other work has offered encouraging results about the feasibility of engaging people with serious mental illnesses in self-management programs. Several Kaiser Permanente studies have described the development and testing of health promotion programs adapted specifically for people with serious mental illnesses, and found that the programs can successfully lead to weight loss and decreased cardiovascular risk.^[25,83,84]

Feedback-Informed Care: Patients and therapists use patient-reported symptom information to track progress and improve outcomes



Patients **complete a questionnaire** about their feelings at each visit



Global Distress Score
Questionnaire results are tallied into a score



Scores are **tracked over time** by patients and their clinicians



Patterns over time are used to **guide treatment** decisions

Translating Research into Policy and Practice

How has Kaiser Permanente research on mental health conditions contributed to changes in policy and practice?

Kaiser Permanente is a learning health care organization that works to systematically use research to inform and improve practice both within Kaiser Permanente and beyond. Our researchers help lead the Mental Health Research Network (MHRN), which is funded by the National Institute of Mental Health to improve mental health care by connecting research, practice, and policy.^[85,86] The MHRN includes participating research centers from 13 health care systems, including 7 of Kaiser Permanente's regional entities.

MHRN has collaborated with health systems to understand the relationship between suicidal ideation, depression, and subsequent suicide attempts.^[40,87] Their collaborative response to evidence of persistent suicide risk for patients reporting thoughts of suicide on the standard screening tool (the PHQ-9) is an example of the impact possible from partnerships between researchers and health systems.^[40,88] MHRN members put in place both practice changes and complementary research plans to address the previously unrecognized sustained suicide risk in this population.^[88] Also, The Joint Commission issued a recommendation that all patients be screened for suicidal ideation, based in part on the MHRN findings.^[89]

Research, clinical, and operational partners within Kaiser Permanente have tested a range of interventions to identify and treat mental health conditions or improve outcomes for people with mental health conditions. These have included using web- and smartphone-based psychotherapy methods,^[69,90] universal perinatal depression screening,^[51] reducing high-risk medication regimens,^[37,38,91] and using models of integrated care and collaborative care.^[92-97] Work related to the launch, spread, and scale of the collaborative care model exemplifies Kaiser Permanente's ability to link research and clinical operations.^[94,97-99]

Our research contributes not only to changes in policy and practice within Kaiser Permanente, but has also advanced national understanding of mental health and wellness. Since 2007, Our research articles on mental health have been cited 42 times within PubMed guidelines and practice guidelines, and 51 times in the point-of-care clinician reference tool DynaMed Plus.

In addition, our scientists have directly authored several practice guidelines and systematic reviews, including screening for and treatment of depression during pregnancy and the post-natal period,^[10] screening for suicidality in primary care,^[42] and screening for depression in primary care.^[50] We have also contributed to reviews and practice guidelines for adolescent depression screening and treatment in primary care.^[36,100,101]

Kaiser Permanente's nearly 170 research scientists and more than 1,600 support staff are based at 8 regional research centers and 1 national center. There are currently more than 2,500 studies underway, including clinical trials. Since 2007, our research scientists have published more than 12,000 articles in peer reviewed journals. Kaiser Permanente currently serves more than 12 million members in 8 states and the District of Columbia.

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