

Where We Stand:

NAMI believes that no one should be subject to practices that can cause or worsen mental health symptoms, and that public policies to protect individuals should be guided by credible, evidence-based research. NAMI supports public policies that facilitate research into the risks and benefits of social media use and policies that mitigate the risk of social media use on mental health, with a focus on youth and young adults.

Why We Care:

Social media use is [widespread](#) across all age groups in the U.S., and especially prevalent among youth, with U.S. teens spending an average of [nearly five hours](#) daily on social media apps. At the same time, youth are experiencing a mental health crisis with the percentage of high school students who reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness increased by 50 percent from 2011 to 2021. Given the near universal use of social media, parents, caregivers, educators, and policymakers have raised concerns about the impact of social media use on youth mental health.

Studies have found that social media use presents both benefits and risks to mental health. Social media can offer an outlet to express [creativity](#), as well as [opportunities](#) to receive mental health resources and build community with individuals who can offer emotional support. These communities can be especially valuable for people with marginalized identities, such as [LGBTQ youth](#). Social media platforms also have the [potential](#) to provide mental health interventions, and opportunities for moderated peer-to-peer engagement to improve youth and young adult mental health. For example, [one study](#) found that implementing a population-specific social media-based intervention resulted in significant decreases in depressive symptoms.

There are also documented [risks](#) to mental health from social media use, such as depression, social comparison, cyberbullying, fear of discrimination, exposure to harmful content, and [sleep disruption](#). A [recent study](#) found that during a staggered rollout of a social media platform on college campuses, students who had access to social media were more likely to report negative mental health outcomes and that their academic performance was negatively affected by poor mental health. [Researchers](#) have also found that social media use leads to body image concerns, eating disorders/disordered eating, and poor mental health due to body image comparisons. While there is still a need for more research on the impact of social media use on mental health, there are well-documented risks, such that the [U.S. Surgeon General's recent advisory](#) declared that "we do not yet have enough evidence to determine if social media is sufficiently

safe for children and adolescents." Moreover, the [American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry](#), [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), [American Psychiatric Association](#), [American Psychological Association](#), and the [JED Foundation](#) have also acknowledged the need to protect youth and marginalized populations from the significant mental health risks posed by social media use.

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Research is uncovering how protective factors, such as resilience, digital literacy, and the [type of content engagement](#) (i.e., passive vs. active engagement with social media apps), can impact the effect of social media use on mental health. There is still a need for further research to understand the long-term effects of social media use on mental health, as well as how specific features and content impact mental health and the potential for social media apps to provide evidence-based interventions. A specific consideration for youth is that adolescence is also a time of cognitive and social development that is accompanied by structural changes in the brain. [An emerging area of research](#) is studying how social media use might impact adolescents during a time of heightened sensitivity to social acceptance and rejection. However, the lack of transparency and data sharing by social media platforms poses a major barrier to research.

As a result, NAMI supports public policies that facilitate research into the risks and benefits of social media use and policies that mitigate the risk of social media use on mental health, with a focus on youth and young adults.

To learn more about NAMI's work on this issue, visit www.nami.org/Advocacy/Policy-Priorities