

Montana Set to Become First State to Launch Free Digital Mental Health Tool for Youth

Northwestern University's Lab for Scalable Mental Health and Koko partner with the State of Montana, Frontier Psychiatry, and Montana Pediatrics.

BILLINGS, MT, UNITED STATES, April 23, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Montana has announced plans to become the first state in the nation to make single-session digital mental health interventions available statewide at no cost to children and their families. Each self-guided "single-session digital intervention" is designed as a standalone experience; in ~10 minutes, youth walk away with a concrete lesson, skill, or plan to make a difference for their mental health. The groundbreaking initiative, known as Project YES (Youth Empowerment & Support), will deliver scientifically proven mental health support to adolescents across Montana's rural and urban communities through an innovative digital toolkit currently under development.

The initiative addresses a critical need in Montana, which faces one of the nation's highest adolescent suicide rates, with approximately 43.3% of Montana youth reporting persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness. With 51 of 56 Montana counties designated as mental health professional shortage areas, Project YES aims to provide accessible support for youth who might otherwise go without care.

"Project YES represents a transformative approach to addressing the youth mental health crisis in Montana," said Dr. Jessica Schleider, principal investigator, Associate Professor of Medical Social Sciences at Northwestern University, and Director of the [Lab for Scalable Mental Health](#). "By creating this specialized toolkit for Montana's communities, we're working to ensure these evidence-based interventions will reach youth when and where they need support most."

This work is currently progressing through a collaborative co-design process between [Montana Pediatrics](#) and the Northwestern University Lab for Scalable Mental Health. Together, the teams are actively engaging youth through asynchronous focus groups, ensuring that the voices of adolescents are central to the design and development of new digital mental health interventions.

Dr. Chelsea Bodnar, CEO of Montana Pediatrics, champions these efforts across the state: "Youth voices are essential. In Montana, where context matters deeply, their lived experience ensures our efforts are relevant. The success we've seen in research is promising, and these insights will help make these interventions real, accessible, and impactful."

In parallel, the project is creating a customized dissemination toolkit tailored to Montana's unique geographic and community challenges, including rural areas where some youth reside more than 200 miles from the nearest mental health provider. This toolkit will facilitate implementation across primary care settings, schools, and homes statewide.

Dr. Eric Arzubi, CEO of [Frontier Psychiatry](#), emphasized the initiative's importance: "This partnership allows us to integrate these powerful interventions into existing systems, reaching youth who might otherwise fall through the cracks. We're particularly focused on making these resources accessible in Montana's most underserved and hard-to-reach communities."

The project is funded through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), delivered through the State of Montana's Access to Pediatric Psychiatry Network (MAPP-NET), and supported by a generous anonymous donor in Montana. Implementation planning is currently underway, with a launch date to be announced. In the meantime, interested parties in the dissemination work are welcome to reach out to get involved.

"It's exciting to see a public-private partnership like this one deliver an innovative solution to a pressing problem," said Casey Collins, MAPP-Net Program Specialist with the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services.

About the Lab for Scalable Mental Health:

The Lab for Scalable Mental Health, housed within Northwestern University and directed by Dr. Jessica Schleider, conducts research at the intersection of digital health, public health, dissemination and implementation science, and clinical psychology. The Lab's mission is to create, evaluate, and disseminate brief, scalable supports that bridge historically-unfillable gaps in mental healthcare ecosystems, with a focus on harnessing technologies to serve youth facing structural barriers to treatment. LSMH has pioneered a new area of intervention science—single-session interventions (SSIs) for mental health—that opens tangible paths toward reducing mental health problems at scale. Via multiple federal, foundation, and industry-funded grants, LSMH has led dozens of clinical trials and large-scale evaluations of digital and lay provider-delivered SSIs. Through these initiatives, LSMH's SSIs have served more than 80,000 young people to date.

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