

## DHCS PROVIDES UPDATE ON BEHAVIORAL HEALTH VIRTUAL SERVICES PLATFORM FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

**SACRAMENTO** — The Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) today announced it will launch the Behavioral Health Virtual Services Platform, a new technology-enabled services solution for all children, youth, and families in California, in January 2024. The platform is part of Governor Newsom’s [Master Plan for Kids’ Mental Health](#) and the Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative (CYBHI), a \$4.7 billion investment in youth behavioral health.

**WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT:** This platform will support the delivery of equitable, appropriate, and timely behavioral health services from prevention to treatment to recovery. The platform will also provide support and resources, such as interactive digital education, self-monitoring tools, application-based games, and mindfulness exercises, as well as offer access to free, on-demand one-on-one coaching and counseling supports. It will be available as a downloadable smart phone application (on IOS and Android devices) and via a website portal and telephone.

### **WHAT STATE HEALTH LEADERS ARE SAYING:**

“This platform will increase access to early, upstream supports that over time will reduce the overall need for services delivered in emergency departments and psychiatric hospitals, as well as through crisis services, by providing young people with an outlet to address loneliness, sadness, anxiety, school and family stressors, and other issues affecting children, youth, and young adults,” said **Dr. Mark Ghaly, Secretary of the California Health & Human Services Agency**. “Our goal is to offer an upstream option for young people to get the support they need.”

“Through this initiative, we are reimagining behavioral health, emotional well-being, and resiliency for all children, youth, and families in California by delivering equitable, appropriate, timely, and accessible mental health and substance use services and supports through an innovative and upstream focused approach, including accessibility via a smartphone application,” said **DHCS Director Michelle Baass**.

### **HOW WE GOT HERE:**

Over the past 18 months, DHCS engaged with more than 1,000 unique and diverse stakeholders and key implementation partners across California, including youth, families (including caregivers), local educational agencies and educators, health care providers and payers, behavioral health experts, and community-based organizations, among others.

DHCS prioritized hearing from children, youth, and families, with more than 300-plus children and youth engaged via focus groups, surveys, and regular advisory body meetings. DHCS also engaged diverse populations, regions, and age groups, including individuals from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual (LGBTQIA+) communities, as well as other historically underserved populations (e.g., rural communities, families experiencing homelessness, justice-involved individuals, and foster youth).

In planning and designing this new solution, DHCS vetted more than 450 vendors with existing digital behavioral health platforms and content. This was done through an extensive market scan, a Request for Information, and numerous vendor demonstrations.

DHCS selected [Kooth](#) to support the delivery of equitable, appropriate, and timely behavioral health services to youth and young adults (ages 13-25). Kooth will also integrate with other partners to provide a seamless user experience, including providing services and supports to children (ages 0-12) and their parents/caregivers.

Additionally, DHCS is working with potential vendors to provide a statewide e-Consult service for pediatric and primary care providers to connect with behavioral health providers. This will strengthen the workforce and improve the capacity of primary care providers and pediatricians to provide behavioral health treatment to children, youth, and young adults. To date, DHCS has engaged extensively with leading experts on e-Consult services and, in the coming weeks, will launch a workgroup representing primary care providers, pediatricians, and behavioral health experts to inform the design of this statewide solution.

**BACKGROUND ON PARTNERSHIP WITH KOOOTH:** Founded in 2002, Kooth is a pioneer in youth-focused digital behavioral health. Its platform is accessible to more than eight million teens and young adults, providing a welcoming place for support without barriers, waiting lists, or stigma. “We’re excited to partner with DHCS and the State of California to help transform access to digital behavioral health support for youth across the state. Working together, we believe this represents a step-change in providing early and responsive access to behavioral health care to help address the growing youth mental health crisis,” said **Kooth CEO Tim Barker**.

In partnership with DHCS, Kooth will conduct extensive user-testing to obtain input from youth, families, and key partners about the design, content creation, and functionality of the platform to ensure it meets the needs of California’s youth. These activities will continue prior to and post go-live in January 2024. Also, through partnerships with key partners, such as schools, primary care providers, and behavioral health experts, Kooth will help build awareness and drive adoption of the platform before and after launch.

For more information, please visit the DHCS CYBHI [webpage](#).

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