



BORN THIS WAY FOUNDATION
EMPOWERING YOUTH ★ INSPIRING BRAVERY

Youth Mental Health in America:

Understanding Resource Availability and Preferences

Methodology

**BORN THIS WAY
FOUNDATION**
EMPOWERING YOUTH
INSPIRING BRAVERY



**Benenson
Strategy
Group**

On behalf of Born This Way Foundation, Benenson Strategy Group conducted 2,082 online interviews with 13-24 year olds in the United States from January 28, 2019 to February 2, 2019.

January 2019							February 2019						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5						1	2
6	7	8	9	10	11	12	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
20	21	22	23	24	25	26	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
27	28	29	30	31			24	25	26	27	28		



2,082

Online
Interviews

- The margin of error for the entire data set is $\pm 2.03\%$ at the 95% confidence level.
 - *Note: the margin of error is higher among subgroups*
- Due to rounding, answer choices may not always add up to 100%.
- Questions asked only of relevant groups:

¹ **Military:** Asked of those who have served or have had a family member serve in the U.S. military

² **School student:** Asked of those who are currently in middle or high school

³ **University student:** Asked of those who are currently in college

⁴ **Employed:** Asked of those who are currently employed

⁵ **Relationship:** Asked of those who are currently married or in a long-term relationship

Executive Summary

Access to mental health resources for young people in the United States is a serious issue that demands our attention.

While mental health is a priority for nearly all (88%) of the young people we surveyed across the United States, alarmingly, 1-in-3 say they do not have reliable access to mental health resources. The disconnect is not for lack of will or want: 8-in-10 young people are looking to learn coping skills to help them deal with the stresses of every day life. But young people in the United States simply do not have access to mental health resources and face significant barriers to get them.

Broad awareness of resources does not exist: almost half (47%) of all young people do not know where to turn to get mental health support. Where awareness exists, the funds to pay for these resources do not: 4-in-10 young people say even if they did know where to look for help with their mental health, the cost of these services puts them out of reach. And while not the primary barriers to resource access, mental health stigmatization and a lack of trust in existing resources stand in the way of many young people getting the mental health help they need. Concerningly, young people do not have reliable access to the mental health resources they need to handle very serious situations, including when feeling suicidal or dealing with sexual assault.

Young people know the importance of mental health. At the same time, they know they cannot get there alone. They understand it takes a concerted, collective, and on-going effort to support their mental wellbeing and a majority of all young people would feel comfortable using a variety of resources to improve their mental health, including seeing a therapist, support groups and online forums, and on campus resources.

Similarly, while there is widespread agreement that mental health is important and that communication is essential to mental health, only 15% of youth say they discuss their mental health “often” while 49% say they “rarely” or “never” discuss it, demonstrating the need to actively model and support conversations about mental health.

These findings reveal the need to do more to educate young people about the existing resources they can turn to in support of their mental health while also expanding access for those who do not currently have it, including by lowering the costs of mental health care.



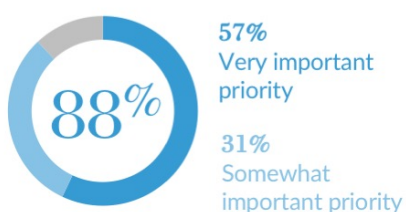
Snapshot: Youth Mental Health at a Glance

Snapshot: young people's mental health at a glance

Young people believe mental health is an important priority, and a majority say it should be addressed on an ongoing basis. At the same time, half say they “rarely” or “never” talk about mental health, and a third of all young people say they “rarely” or “never” have access to mental health resources. Raising further concern, a majority of young people say they do not have access to the resources they need to handle serious mental health challenges, such as online harassment, bullying, sexual assault, and suicide. Stress weighs heavily on young people. A majority say they felt “stressed” “a good bit of the time” or more in the past month, and a third say the same thing about feeling “helpless or sad” and “fearful.”

ALL YOUNG PEOPLE

Prioritization of Mental Health



Felt Frequently in the Past Month

% Who felt this way a good bit of the time or more during the past month...



Frequency of Discussing Mental Health with Anyone



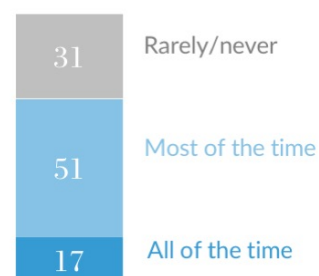
Talk About Mental Health With...

Of those who discuss mental health

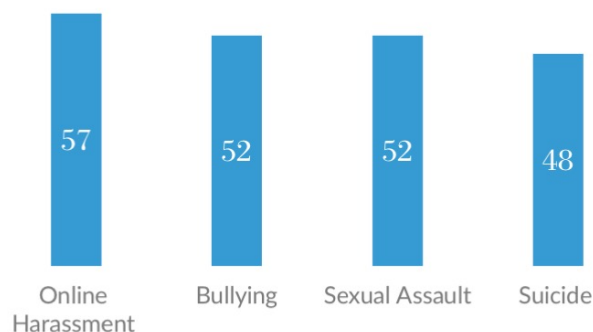


Resource Accessibility

“Do young people in your city have access to mental health resources...?”



Feel They Don't Have Access to the Mental Health Resources to Deal with...



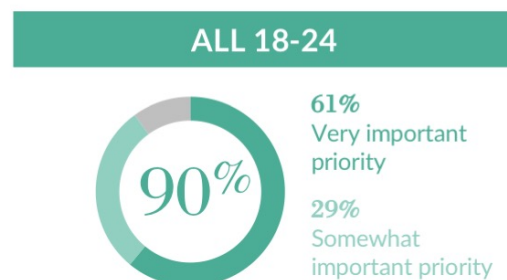
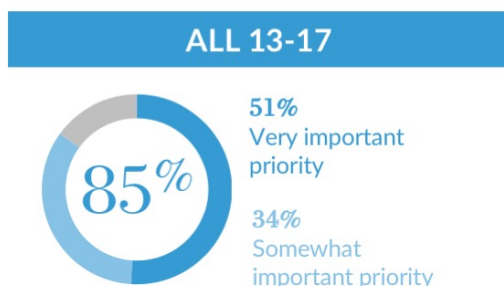
Best Way to Work on Mental Health



Snapshot: young people's mental health at a glance

Mental health is important to young people of all ages. However, relative to their younger peers, 18-24 years olds prioritize mental health more intensely. The tendency of 18-24 year olds to say their mental health is a priority likely reflects the fact that this age group rates their mental health less highly than 13-17 years olds. They are also less likely to speak openly about mental health. When each group does open up on the topic, the people they turn to differs: 13-17 year olds are more likely to turn to their parents/guardians, while 18-24 year olds look to their romantic partners. Strong majorities of both groups are also likely to turn to friends to talk about mental health.

Prioritization of Mental Health

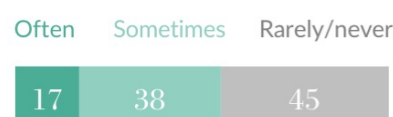


Felt Frequently in the Past Month

% Who felt this way a good bit of the time or more during the past month...



Frequency of Discussing Mental Health with Anyone



Resource Accessibility

"Do young people in your city have access to mental health resources...?"



Talk About Mental Health With

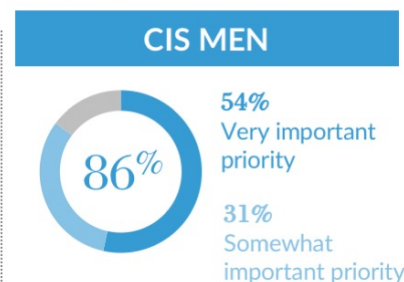
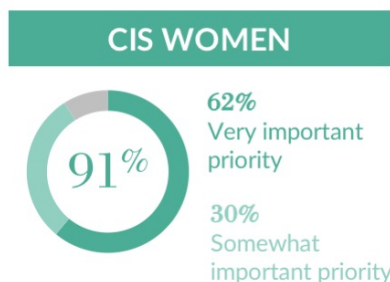
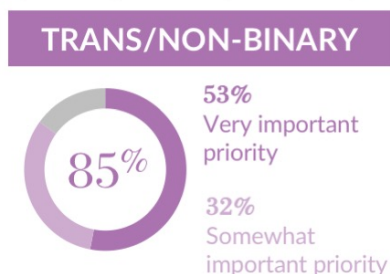
Of those who discuss mental health



Snapshot: young people's mental health at a glance

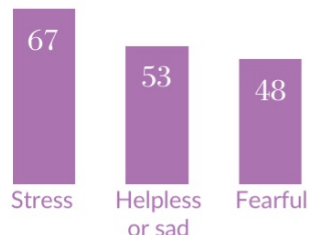
Different gender identifications have distinct experiences of mental health. Trans/non-binary young people report the highest levels of emotional distress and feel the most insecure about their access to mental health resources. Meanwhile, young cis women and young cis men discuss mental health less often than their trans/non-binary peers. Who these groups talk to about mental health also differs. Trans/non-binary and cis women most commonly turn to friends, while cis men talk to friends and parents/guardians in roughly equal measure. Notably, young trans/non-binary are significantly less likely to discuss their mental health with their parents.

Prioritization of Mental Health

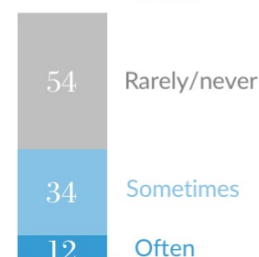
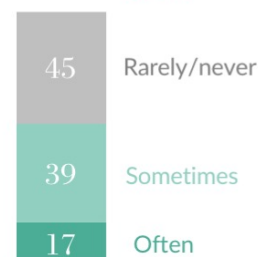
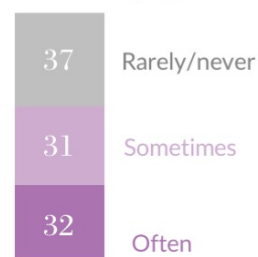


Felt Frequently in the Past Month

% Who felt this way a good bit of the time or more during the past month...

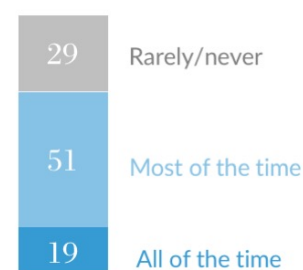
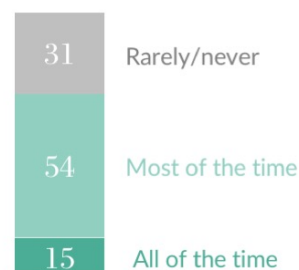
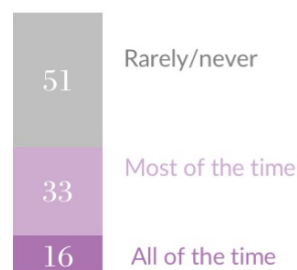


Frequency of Discussing Mental Health with Anyone



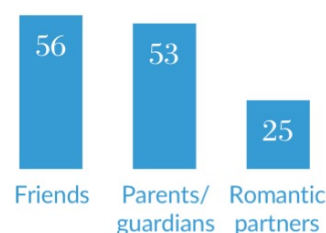
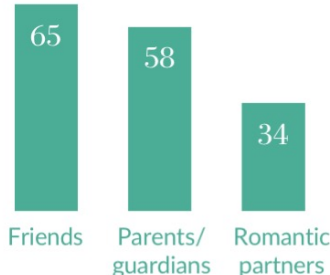
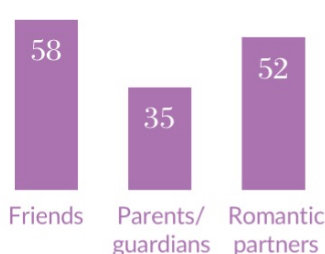
Resource Accessibility

"Do young people in your city have access to mental health resources...?"



Talk About Mental Health With

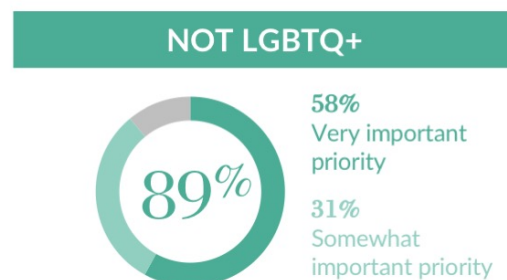
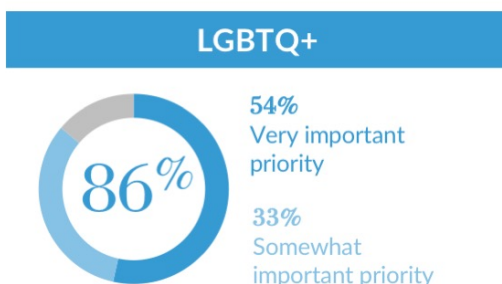
Of those who discuss mental health



Snapshot: young people's mental health at a glance

Both LGBTQ+ and not LGBTQ+ young people say mental health is an important priority. But while LGBTQ+ youth discuss mental health more often, they are also more likely to find their access to mental health resources less reliable. A striking difference between these groups is who they turn to when they want to talk about mental health. LGBTQ+ youth report that they would be much less likely to discuss the subject with a parent/guardian than their not LGBTQ+ peers.

Prioritization of Mental Health

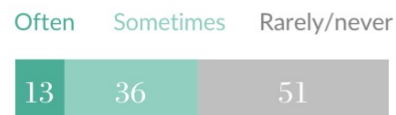


Felt Frequently in the Past Month

% Who felt this way a good bit of the time or more during the past month...



Frequency of Discussing Mental Health with Anyone



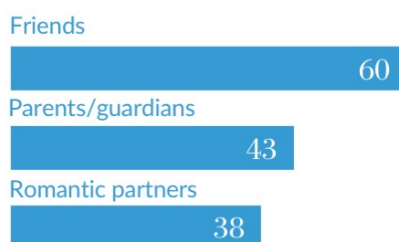
Resource Accessibility

"Do young people in your city have access to mental health resources...?"



Talk About Mental Health With

Of those who discuss mental health



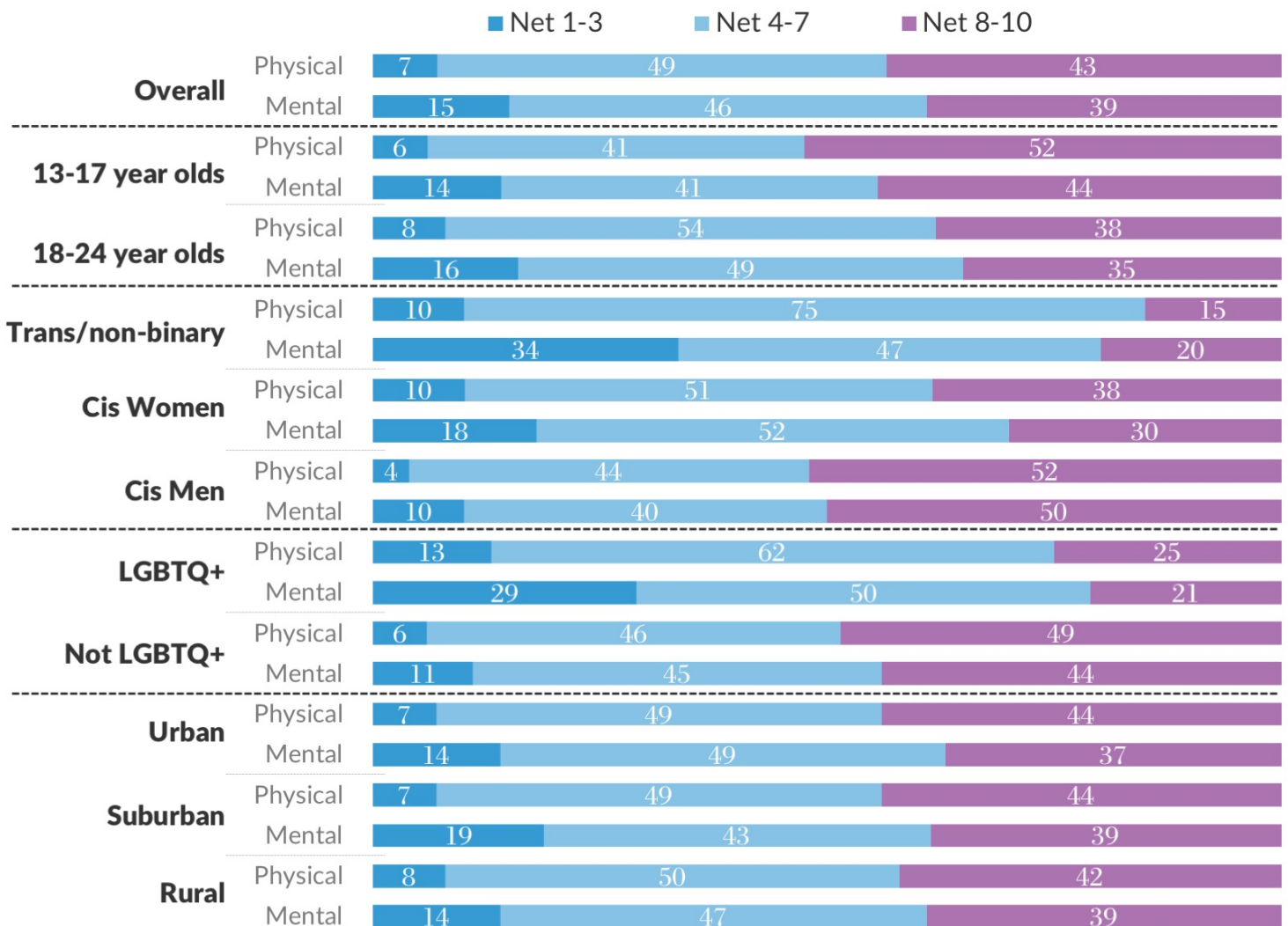


Youth Mental Health Behavior

Most young people do not feel great about their physical or mental wellness

Mental health is a priority for all young people, but not all young people feel good about the state of their mental health. There are stark differences in how strongly young people rate their mental and physical health across groups. For example, 13-17 year olds feel much better about their mental and physical health than 18-24 year olds. Young cis men rate their physical and mental health equally, while young cis women are more likely to rate their physical health stronger than their mental health. Suburban young people also rate their mental health weaker than their urban and rural peers. The widest gap, however, is between LGBTQ+ and not LGBTQ+ young people: nearly half of all young people who do not identify as LGBTQ+ rate their physical and mental health highly, while just a quarter of LGBTQ+ young people give their physical health the same marks, and only 1-in-5 say their mental health is an 8-10 out of 10.

% Rate Mental + Physical Health. Where 1 means “poor” and 10 means “excellent”



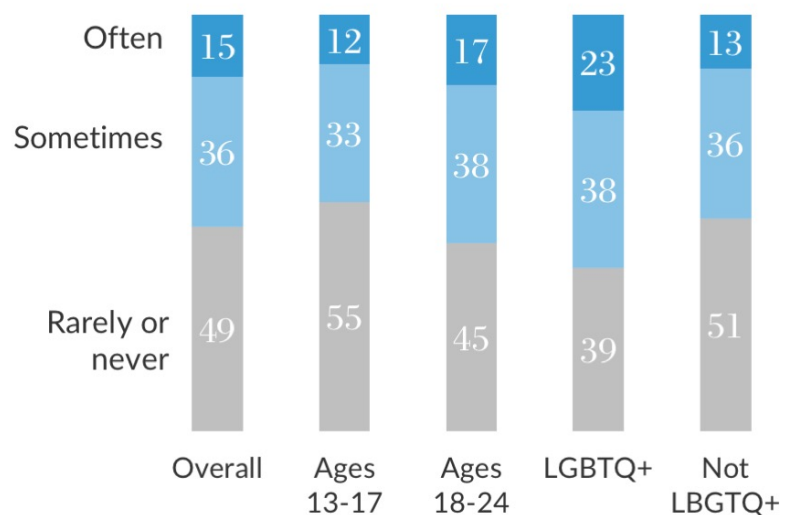
Just half of all young people believe they can work on their mental health on an ongoing basis

For a plurality of young people, mental health is something to be worked on continuously, but this plurality represents just half of all young people in the United States. Even fewer are actually talking about their mental health frequently. Given this, it is unsurprising that half of all young people say they “rarely” or “never” discuss their mental health. All of this points to the need for more to be done to educate young people on how to support their own mental health and to model discussions on the topic.

Which statement comes closest to your view about mental health?



How often do you discuss mental health?



Among those who do discuss mental health, they are most likely to have those conversations with their friends, parents, and guardians.

With whom do you discuss mental health?

Asked among those who discuss mental health

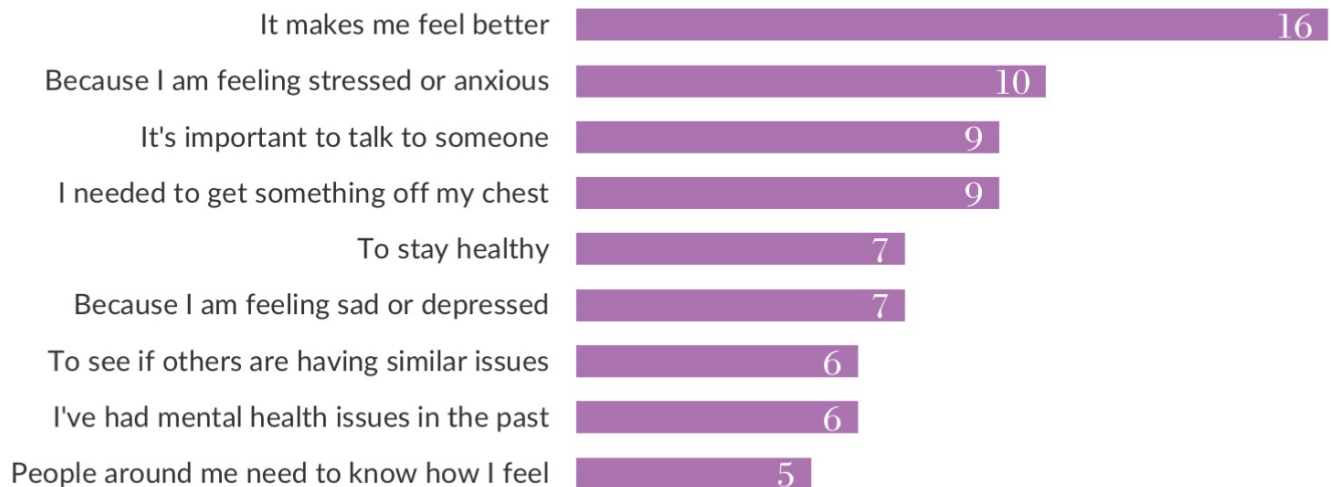


Young people who discuss their mental health know ongoing discussions are important to feeling good

Communication is key to mental health. When asked to describe in their own words why they discuss their mental health, young people most commonly say these conversations are a way to make them feel better — especially when they feel stressed or anxious — or when they want to get something off their chest.

What is the main reason you discuss your mental health?

Asked among those who discuss mental health (open-ended question)



"My **mental health isn't perfect** and I know how important it is to **communicate with others in order to receive the support** I need."

- Trans/Non-binary, 13-17

"**Feels better to let it out.**"

- Cis Woman, 21-24

"[I need to] get whatever is bothering me **out in the open, so I don't carry it alone.**"

- Cis Man, 13-17

"It's **important to discuss** your mental health. Discussing it **helps you process what you are feeling.**"

- Cis Woman, 21-24

"**Talking about my weaknesses** and issues **is key to healing.**"

- Cis Woman, 13-17

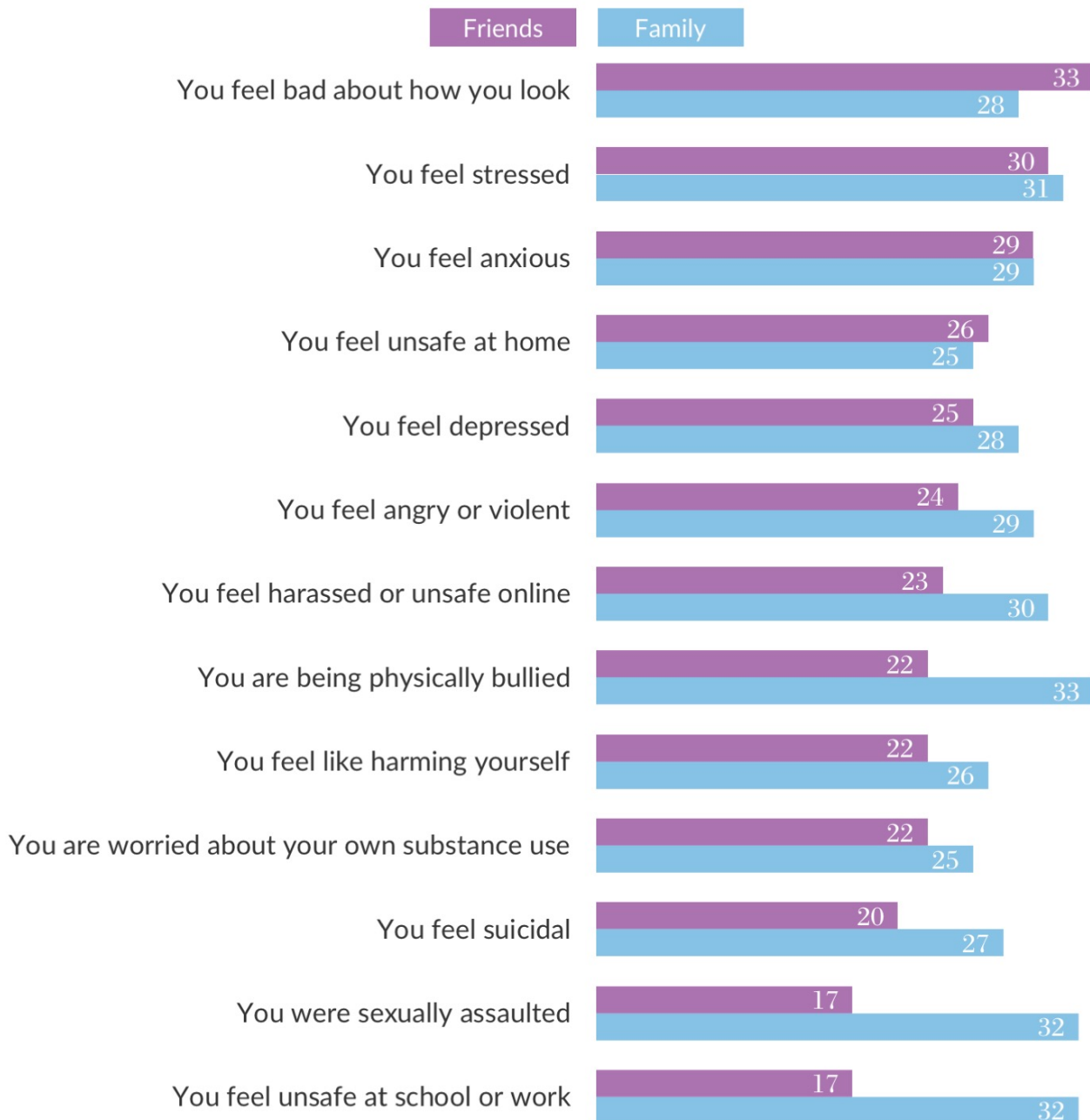
"To get [problems] **off my chest and just be listened to** helps with stress."

- Cis Man, 13-17

Young people rely most on family and friends when facing common mental health challenges

Young people most heavily rely on family and friends when facing a difficult situation or mental health challenge. In instances of emotional distress, such as anxiety and depression, young people are just as likely to turn to their peers for help as they are to seek the support of their family. But when their physical safety becomes at-risk, family networks become the place they turn to for support.

% Turn to Each to Talk about Specific Situations

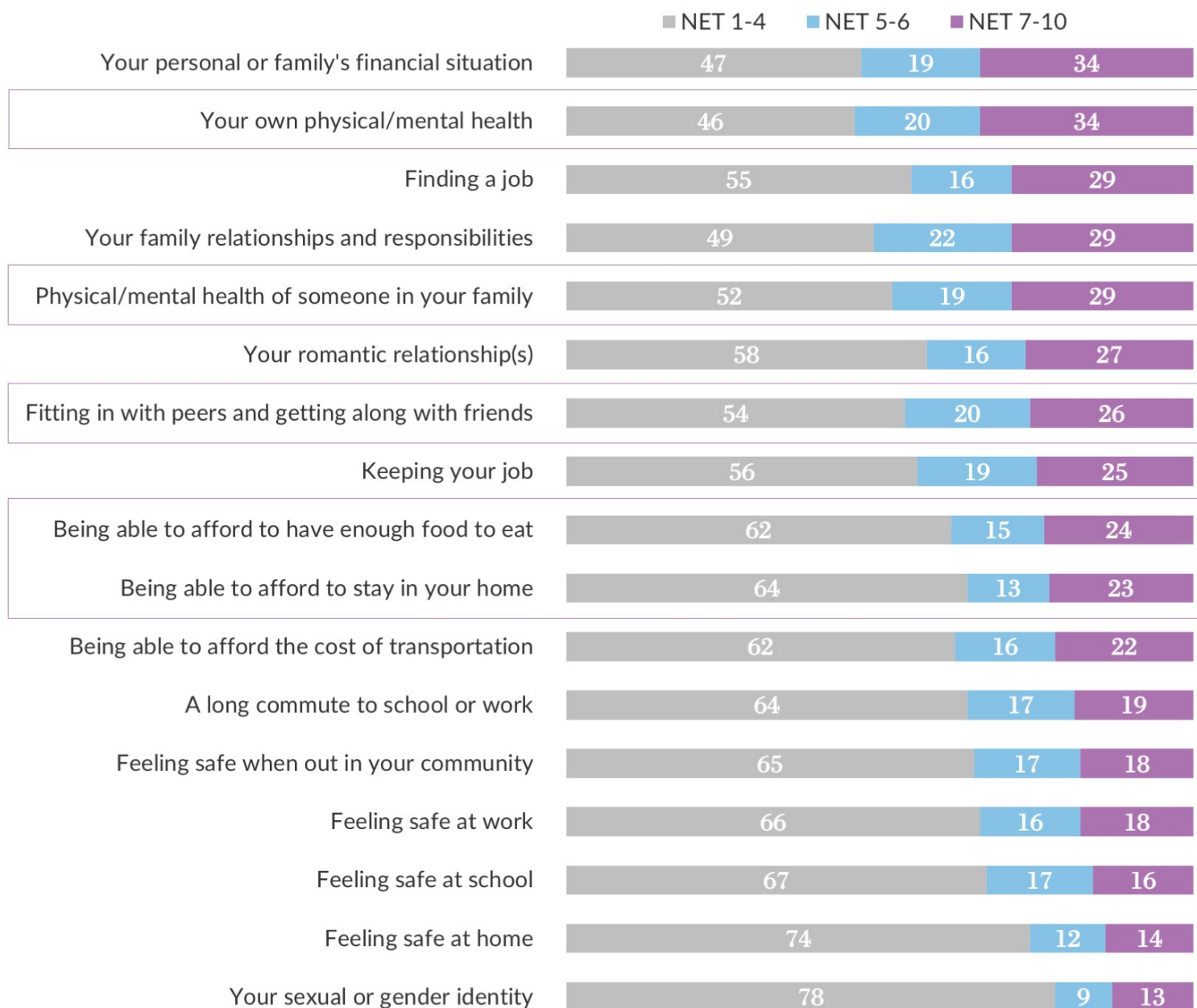


Young people's stress is driven by serious concerns

Characterizing young people as quick to “stress out” trivializes the very real pressures youth today grapple with. Many face serious challenges that are innately stressful. For example, a third have felt stress from concerns over the physical and/or mental health of themselves or someone in their family in the past month. Further, a quarter of young people say they felt stressed about being able to afford food or a home to live in. This demonstrates the need to understand and respond to the very real obstacles young people experience.

Frequent Sources of Stress

% Felt stressed about...in the past month, where 1 means “not at all stressed” and 10 means “extremely stressed”

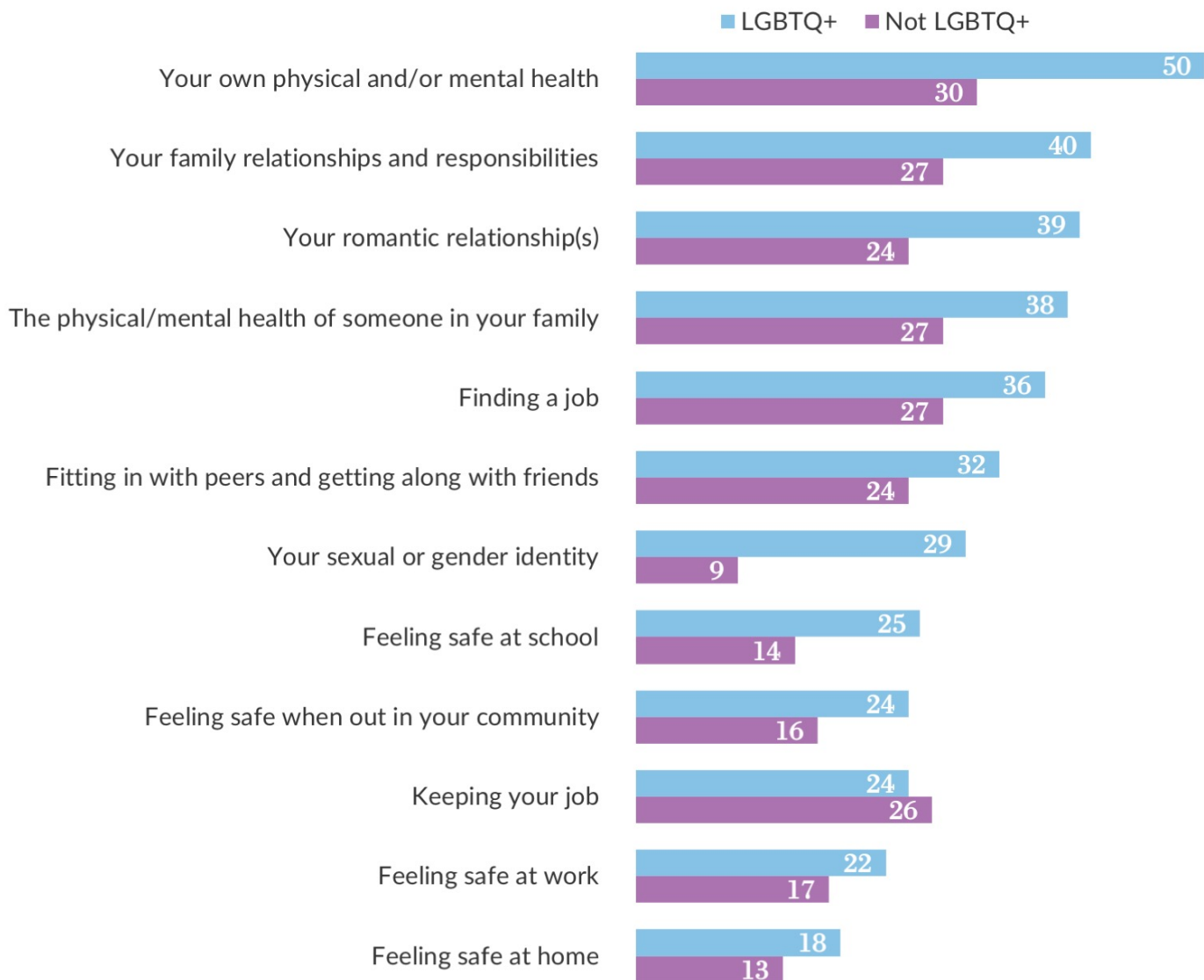


LGBTQ+ young people are more likely to report experiencing stress on a wide range of issues

Young people within the LGBTQ+ community experience much higher levels of stress than young people at-large. Understandably, both the greatest sources of stress and the sources which distinguish them most from their not LGBTQ+ peers relate to their mental and physical health, their identity, as well as their romantic and familial relationships. The extent to which LGBTQ+ young people are more likely to be stressed about their safety and fitting into society at-large should inspire us to do more to build kinder communities and invest more in resources that support LGBTQ+ youth.

Frequent Sources of Stress

% Rated how stressed they felt about...in the past month a "7-10," on a scale where 1 means "not at all stressed" and 10 means "extremely stressed"



Young people want to learn coping skills to help support their mental health

There is high demand for mental health resources that teach coping mechanisms to help navigate the ins-and-outs of every day life. A strong majority (63%) are also enthusiastic about taking a class or workshop that teaches them how to support themselves or someone else in their life who is experiencing a mental health challenge or crisis.

% Agree with Following Statements

I want to learn coping skills and tools to help me deal with the stresses of...

...**every day life** to support my mental health. 80

...**school life** to support my mental health.^{2 3} 80

...**work life** to support my mental health.⁴ 77

...**family life** to support my mental health. 74

...**romantic relationships** to support my mental health.⁵ 73

% Interested in taking a mental health first-aid class or workshop 63

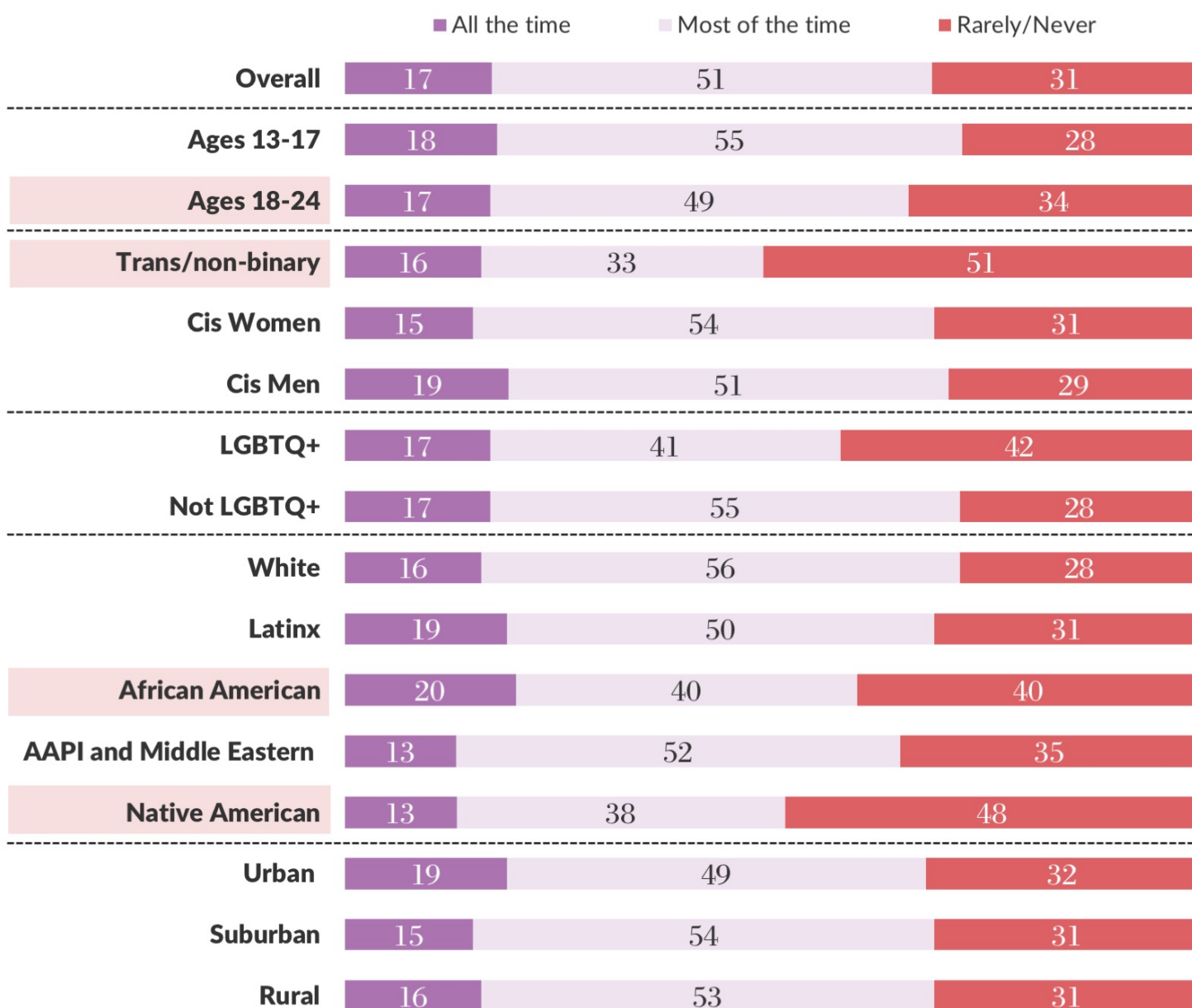


Mental Health Resource Access

1-in-3 young people do not have reliable access to mental health resources

And the story is worse still for a number of communities. Around half of all trans/non-binary, Native American, LGBTQ+, and African American young people say their hometowns lack adequate access to mental health resources. Additionally, 18-24 years olds are more likely than their younger peers to report a lack of access to resources.

Do young people in your city have access to the resources they need to support their mental wellness or to address a mental health issue?



Top barriers to access for mental health resources are knowing where to look and cost

Almost half of all young people do not know where to turn to get mental health support and more than 4-in-10 say even if they did know where to look, the cost of these services puts them out of reach. And while not the primary barriers to resource access, mental health stigmatization and a lack of trust in existing resources stand in the way of young people getting the mental health help they need.

What in your view is preventing young people in your city from using resources to support mental health?

Among those who say they do not have access to resources all of the time

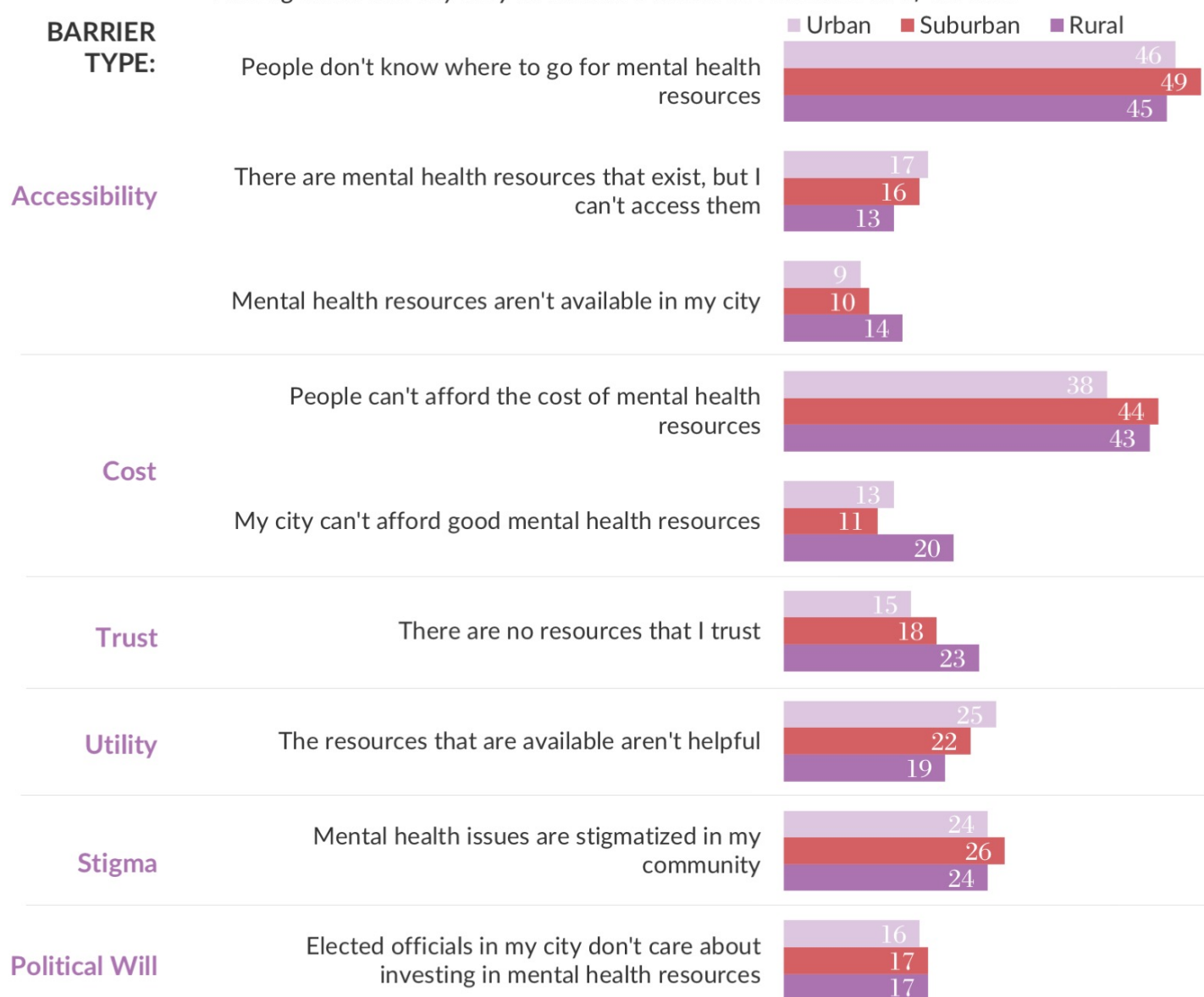


There are differences in the barriers to access for urban, suburban, and rural communities

A closer look at urban, suburban, and rural areas shows that the barriers to mental health resources across these communities differ. Young people in rural areas are more likely to say their communities are falling short in providing these services, and many believe their communities are simply less able to shoulder the cost of these resources. Young people in rural areas also see the trustworthiness of these services as a key barrier. Meanwhile, for urban young people, the barrier is less whether or not these resources exist and more whether they are useful.

What in your view is preventing young people in your city from using resources to support mental health?

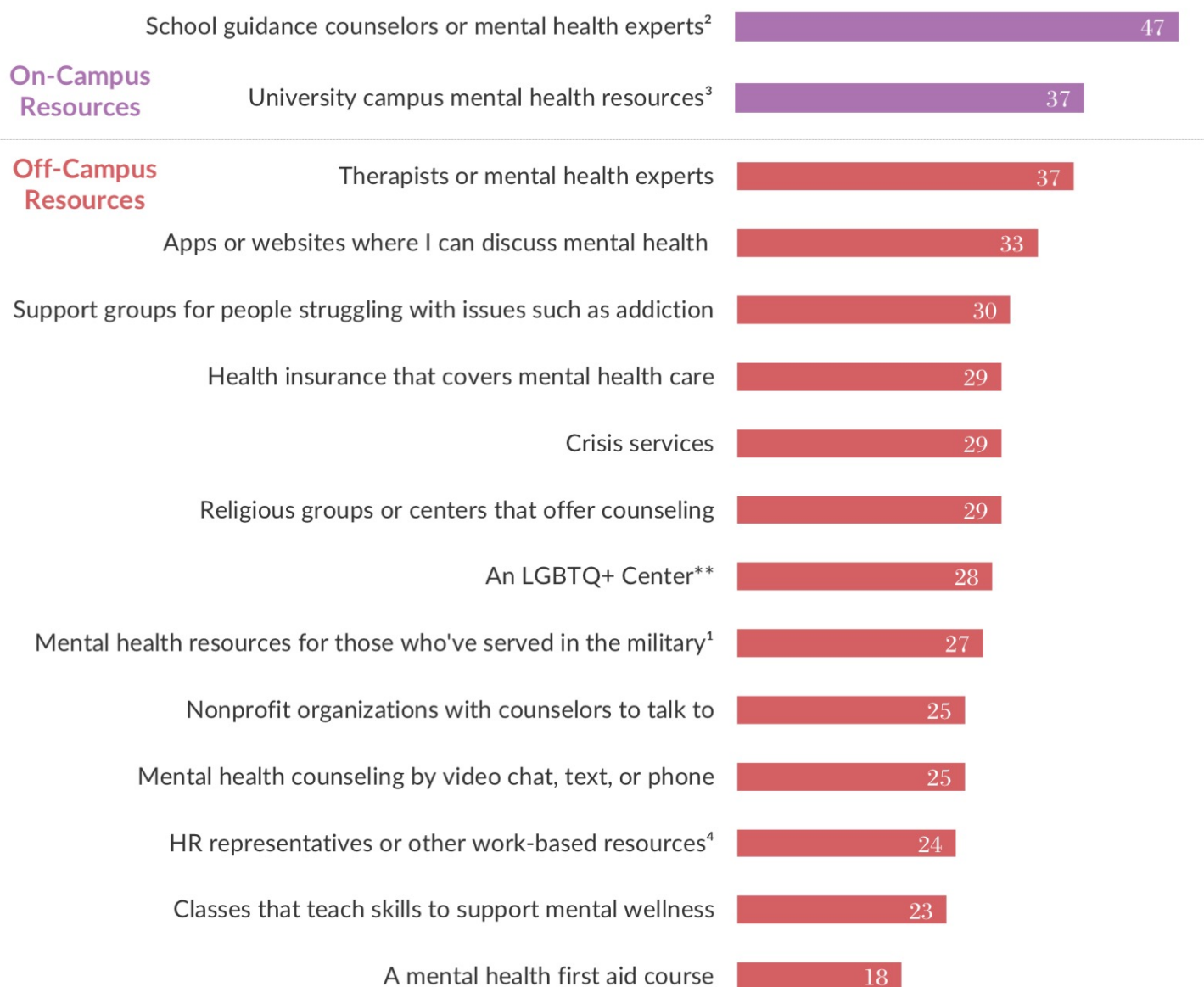
Among those who say they do not have access to resources all of the time



Young people are not sure if they have access to key mental health resources

When asked about specifics, most youth are unsure if they have access to essential mental health resources. Among students, there is a fairly good sense that their schools and universities provide them with on-campus access to mental health resources. But they are less sure about off-campus tools, where except for therapy, only about a third of young people believe their communities provide access to other important mental health resources.

% Believe Following Resources Are Definitely Available in Their Community



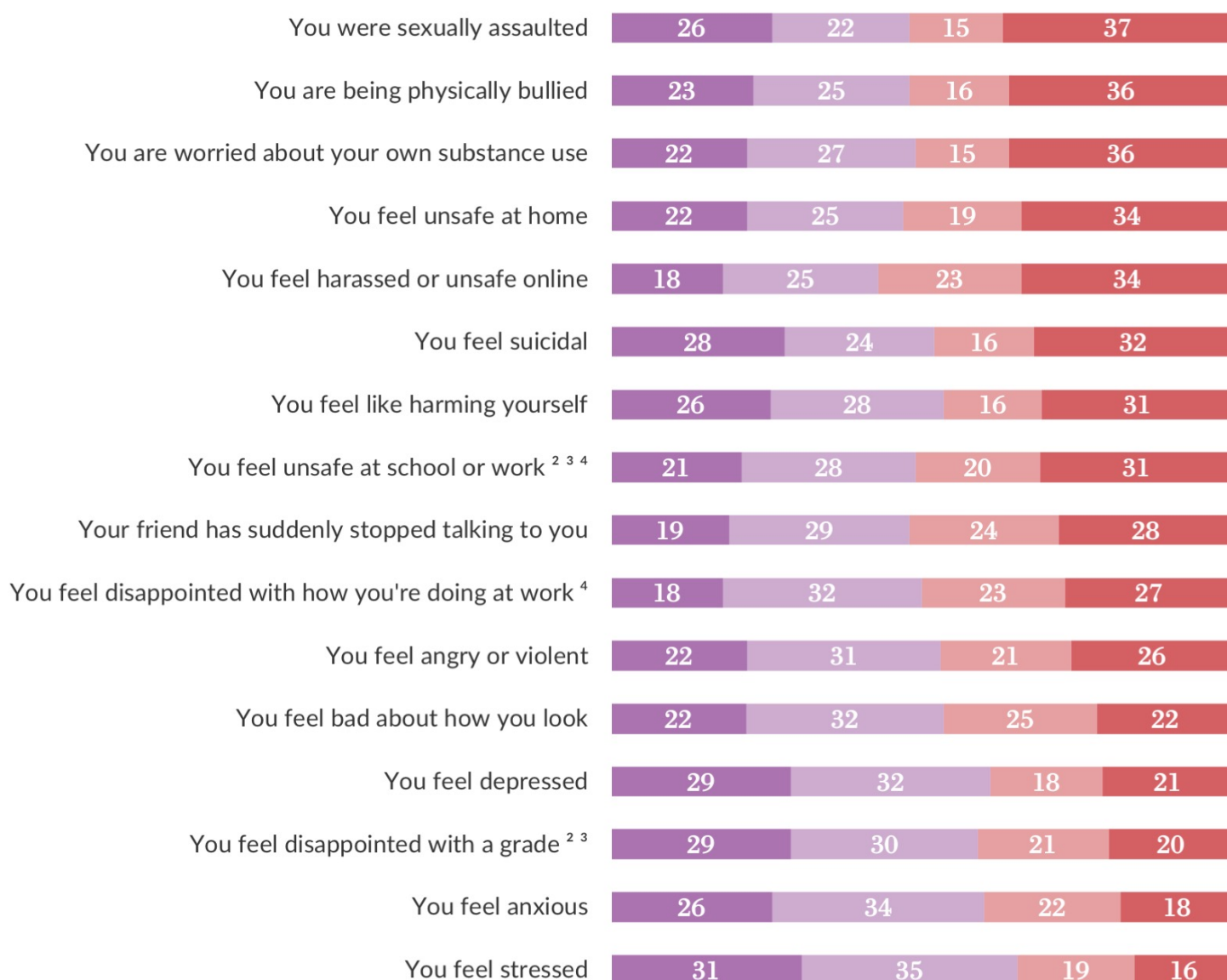
**Among LGBTQ+

Most young people lack access to the resources they need to deal with life's most trying moments

By and large, young people do not feel they have reliable access to the mental health resources they need to handle challenging moments in their lives. Whether it is feeling bad or disappointed in themselves, feeling concerned about others, or — alarmingly — when being bullied, being assaulted, feeling suicidal, or feeling like harming themselves, most say they do not have the resources needed to address these potentially dangerous circumstances.

If you faced each situation, would you have the resources to deal with it?

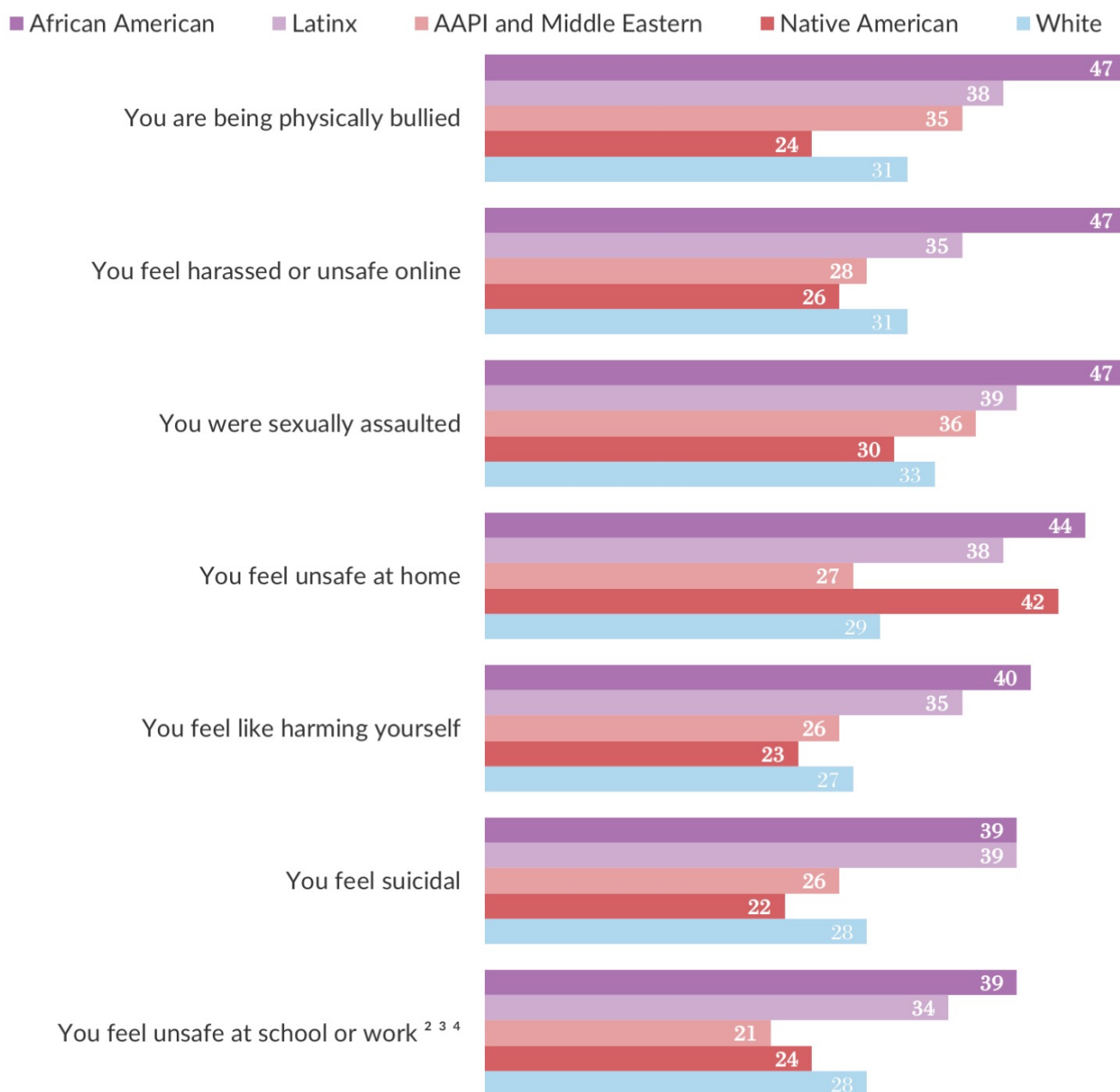
■ Definitely Yes ■ Probably Yes ■ Probably No ■ Definitely No



Young people in communities of color lack access to mental health resources to address feeling unsafe

Those in communities of color feel their mental health resource access is more insecure in moments of physical danger. This is particularly true among African American and Latinx young people. People of color are up to 16% less likely to say that they are confident they have access to resources that would help them overcome being bullied, harassed online, or feeling suicidal.

% Definitely Would Not Have the Resources to Deal with Situation

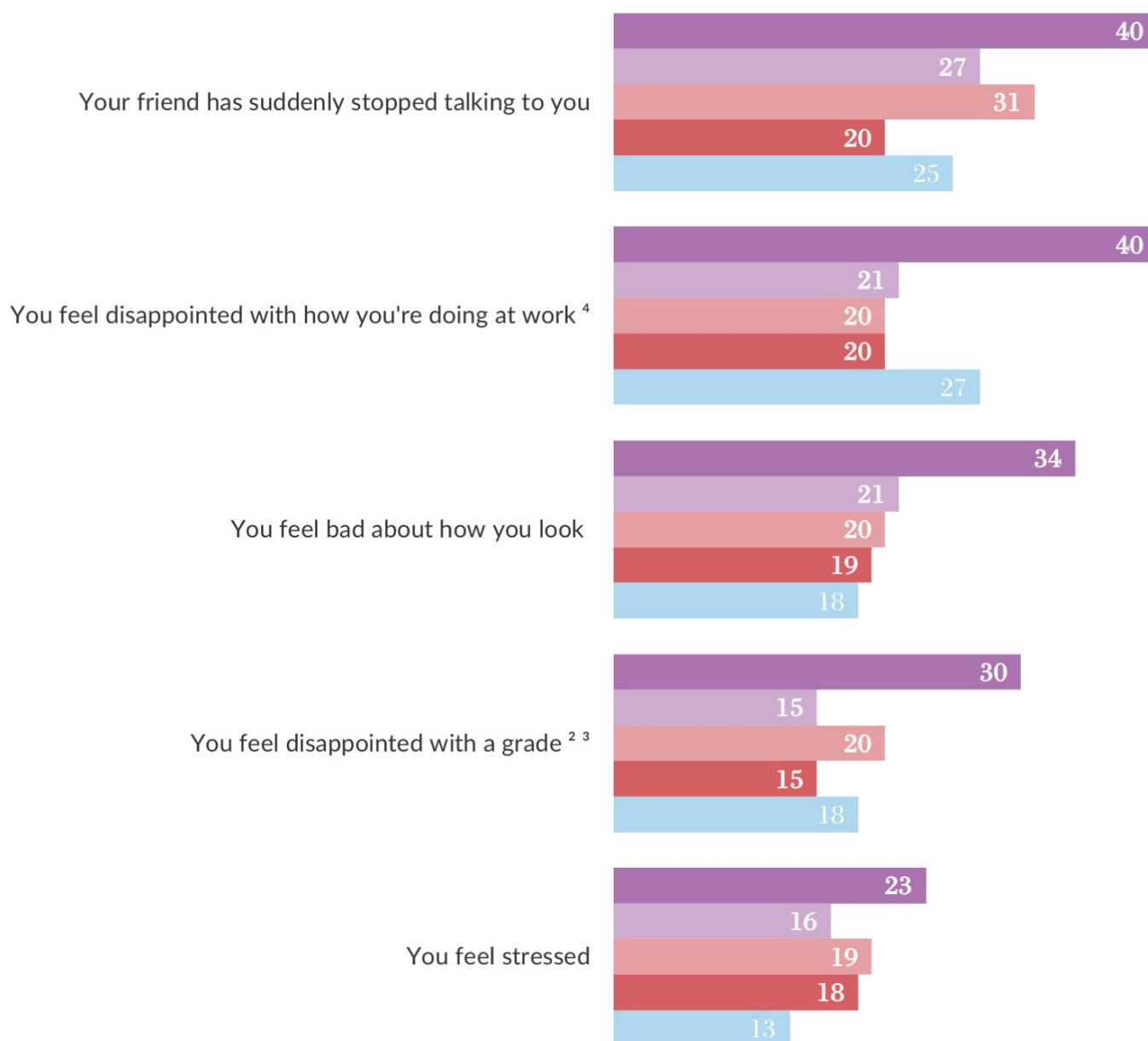


When facing emotional distress, youth of color are also less likely to have needed resources

The difference in resource access between white communities and communities of color continues in moments of emotional difficulty. Here again, young people in communities of color feel much less confident that they have access to tools to help them handle stress or disappointment compared to their white peers.

% Definitely Would Not Have the Resources to Deal with Situation

■ African American ■ Latinx ■ AAPI and Middle Eastern ■ Native American ■ White



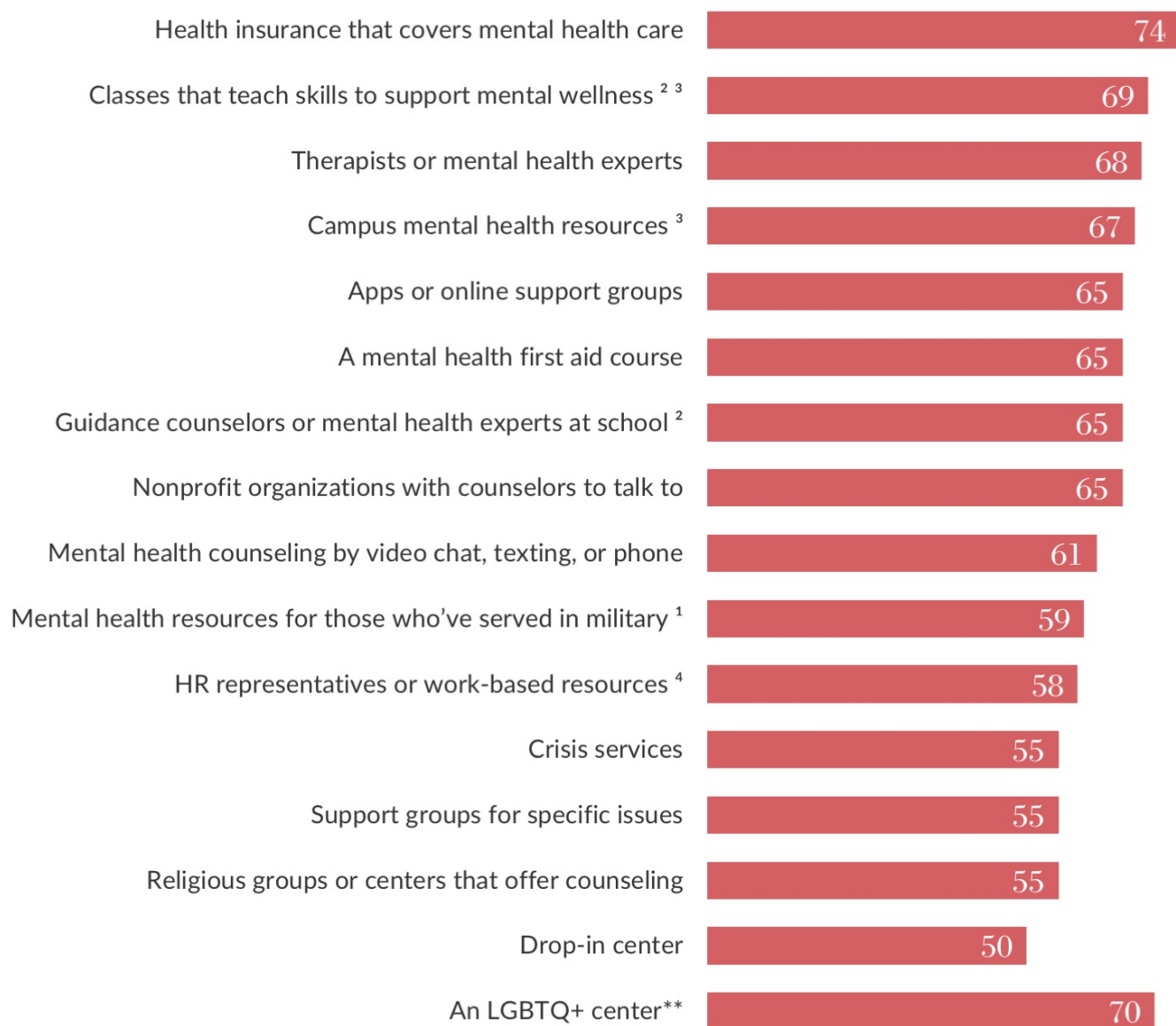


Youth Mental Health Resource Preferences

Despite uncertainty about access, young people would be comfortable using a variety of resources to support their mental health

Young people are willing to use many different resources to support their mental health, both online and in-person. Promisingly, there is a real appetite for resources such as mental health first-aid courses and general wellness classes, showing they are interested in taking proactive steps on the path to supporting positive mental health both within themselves and their communities.

% Comfortable Using the Following Mental Health Resources



**Among LGBTQ+

Young people want mental health resources that are trustworthy and judgement-free

When youth are asked to describe in their own words the qualities they look for in their mental health resources, they ask for judgement-free, trustworthy, and supportive spaces. Following this, their ask is for mental health resources to strike a balance between being professional, reputable, and affordable. Their openness to digital resources suggests this type of tool is one approach to help expand affordable access more widely.

Top Mental Health Resource Qualities that Increase Likelihood of Use

(Open-ended question)



What are the qualities a mental health resource could have that would make you more likely to use it? (Open-ended question)

"A mental health resource would **ideally be very accessible, no matter where you are or what time it might be...**"

- Cis Man, 18-20

"**Open welcoming environment.**"

- Cis Man, 22-24

"Other **people my age who are in a similar situation.**"

- Trans/Non-binary, 13-17

"**Text or message feature**, so I don't have to talk on the phone."

- Cis Woman, 13-17

"**Supportive, knowledgeable** person to talk to."

- Cis Man, 13-17

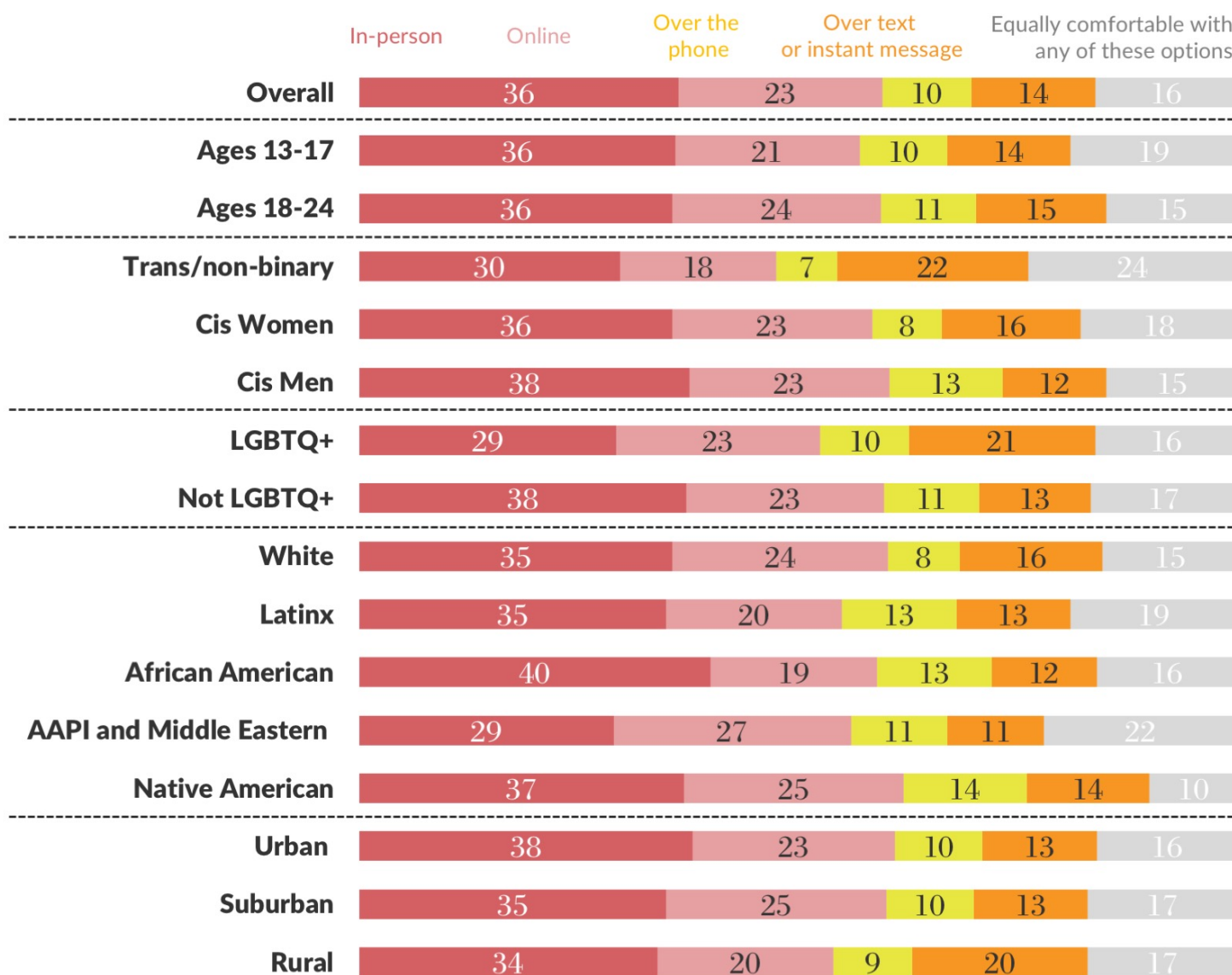
"**People who are kind** to me and I get to know well."

- Cis Man 22-24

In-person resources are the most desired but significant numbers of young people are also open to or prefer remote options

Face-to-face mental health resources are appealing to a majority of young people. At the same time, different communities communicate different levels of enthusiasm for various remote or virtual options. African Americans are even more inclined to look to in-person resources than young people overall. Meanwhile, AAPI and Middle Eastern young people would sooner turn online and trans/non-binary, LGBTQ+, and rural young people would go to text or instant message resources more than young people overall.

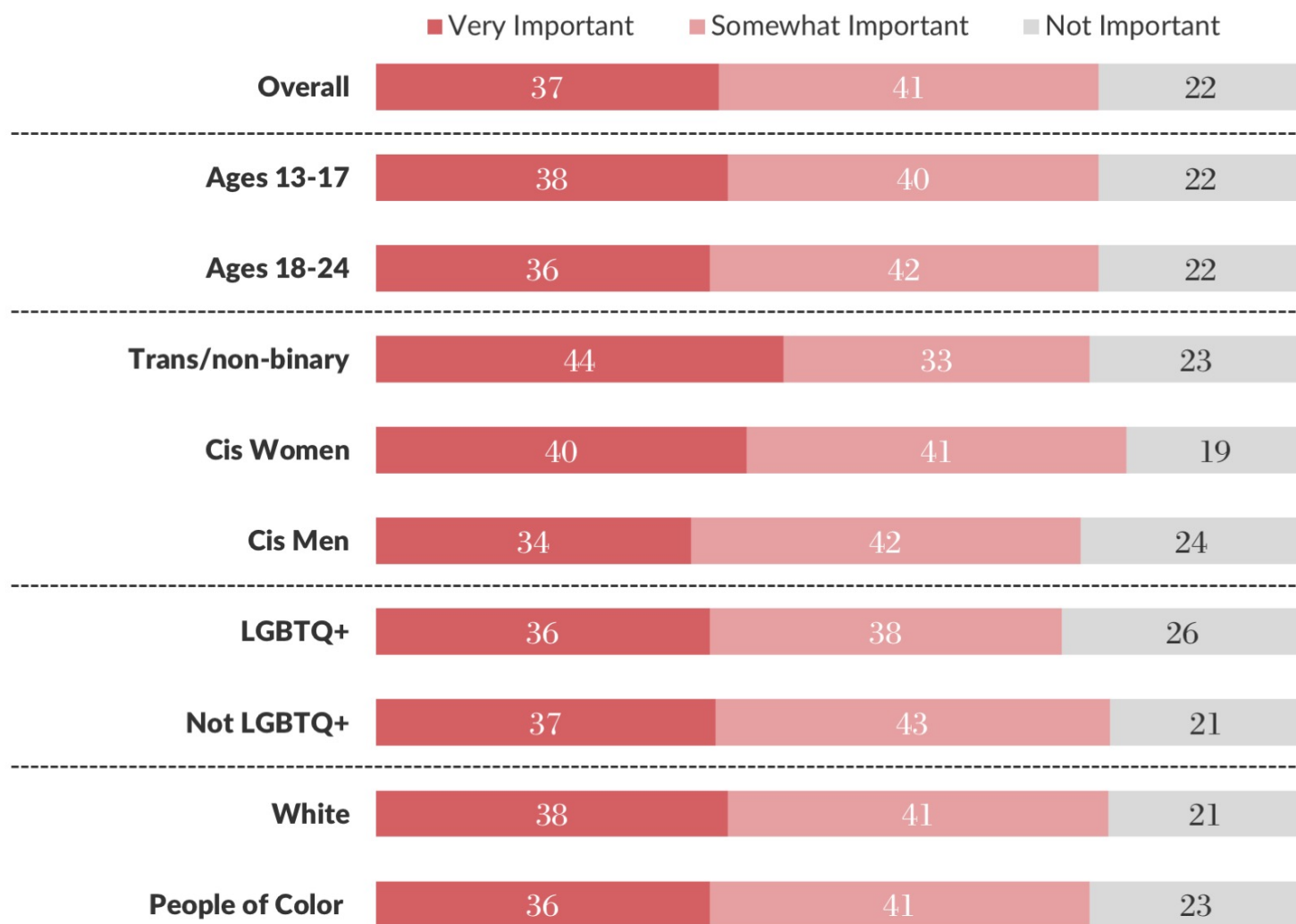
When looking for resources to improve your mental health, you would be more comfortable turning to resources that are...?



Anonymity is an important quality of mental health resources, but it is not essential for everyone

Anonymity is important, but not in absolute terms. Across ages, races, genders, and sexual orientations, large majorities say remaining anonymous on some level is important, but they are divided on just *how* important anonymity is to them. Indeed, young people are evenly split between whether anonymity is “very” or only “somewhat” important to them when using mental health resources.

Importance of Anonymity in Finding and Using Mental Health Resources



Innovations in the health care sector should first and foremost strive to expand access to those currently without coverage

Cost, choice, and quality are important, but young people believe innovation in mental health should set its sights on expanding access to those who are currently without mental health resources at their disposal.

Which kind of innovations should be the biggest priority for the mental health care system in your state?

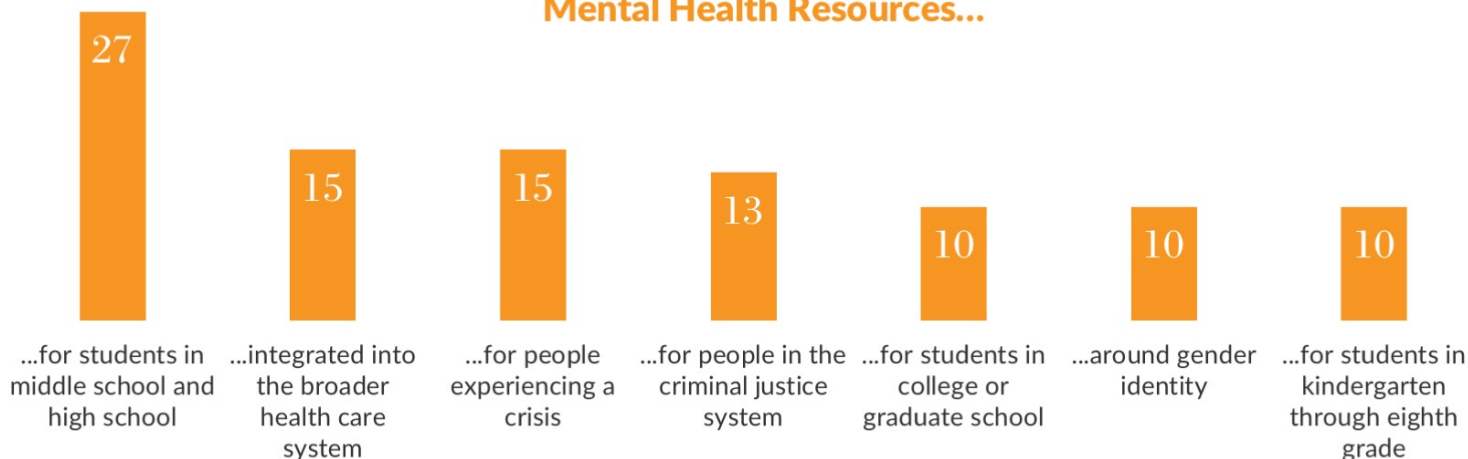
(Open-ended question)

Innovations that...



For each of the following kinds of mental health services in your state, which is most in need of innovation and improvement?

Mental Health Resources...

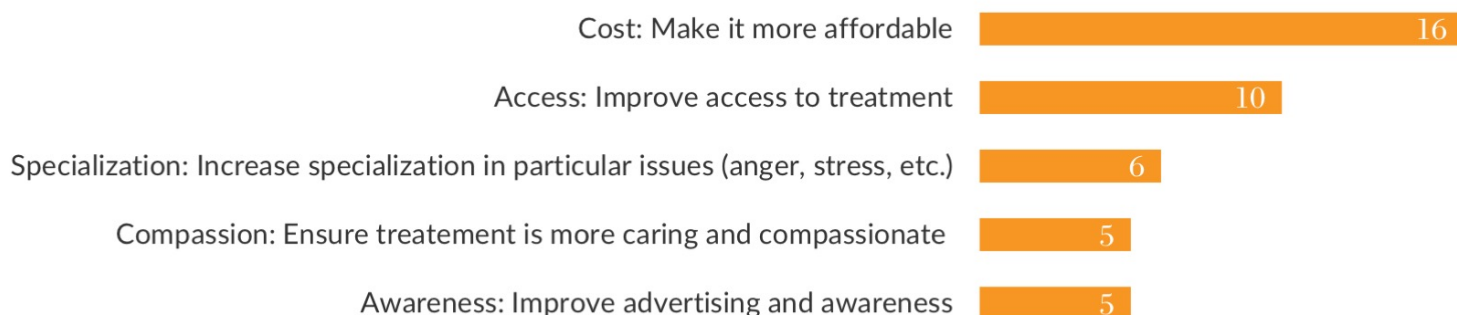


When young people are asked how to improve mental health care, lowering costs and expanding access are top-of-mind

When asked to describe in their own words what mental health resource innovations they most want to see, youth cite improvements to help lower costs and expand access. Many also voiced an interest in having mental health innovations focus on promoting specialization, compassion, and awareness.

If you had the opportunity to improve one aspect of how the mental health care system works in your state, what would it be?

(Open-ended question)



Young people believe cost should not stand in the way of accessing good mental health resources. They believe that insurance, in particular, should not block access to mental health care, but as seen through their own eyes or the experiences of others, many say that insurance continues to be a barrier to mental health resource access.

"...[Mental health care] **should be covered by all insurance companies.**"

- Cis Woman, 21-24

"**Innovations need to help the people who can't afford transportation to their Mental Health appointments or insurance.**"

- Cis Man, 13-17

"People shouldn't be denied the best mental health care **because they lack insurance.**"

- Cis Woman, 21-24

"...**We need to make it more accessible to lower-income families...**"

- Cis Man, 21-24

"I personally receive excellent care from [an insurance company], but that's **only because insurance pays for it.** Others that I know don't get the same care..."

- Trans/Non-binary, 13-17

"Making it **available on low cost insurance plans so that low/middle class can access it** without the worry of the outrageous costs to see a mental health specialist."

- Cis Man, 13-17