



Addressing loneliness through belonging in boys

From the Humana Foundation's report,
"Strengthening Belonging for Underserved Boys"



Purpose

To raise awareness, share best practices and inspire meaningful action to combat loneliness and foster a sense of belonging among underserved boys.



What we examined

- **Review of national public health data, research and government reports**, including the former Surgeon General's 2023 advisory report on the U.S. epidemic of loneliness and social isolation.
- **Interviews with nonprofits** who work with underserved boys, as well as clinical and subject matter experts and young men who have experienced social isolation and loneliness.



Why it matters

Boys of color, boys located in rural areas, LGBTQ+ boys, and those with disabilities face unique barriers to emotional well-being. By addressing loneliness through belonging, we can improve boys' mental health and build stronger, more connected communities. Improving social connectedness also enhances boys' academic engagement and performance, contributing to long-term success.



What research shows

- 1 Boys are less likely to be diagnosed with depression than girls, yet more likely to die by suicide.^{1,2}
- 2 Changes to systems of mental health care for boys could improve help-seeking behavior, diagnostic tools and interventions.³
- 3 Mainstream male culture contributes to emotional suppression and stigma.⁴



Call to action for funders to support:

- 1 **Strategic communications and educational campaigns** that normalize boys talking about their mental health and seeking help.
- 2 **Community-rooted outreach models** such as programs that build long-lasting relationships with family, trusted messengers and community institutions.
- 3 **Sustaining and scaling mentorship initiatives**, including peer buddy programs and programs that incentivize men to serve as mentors for boys.
- 4 **Peer mental health programs** where boys feel safe to talk about mental health challenges, such as group therapy and mental health first aid training.
- 5 **More research** to better understand diagnosis gaps, develop culturally relevant and inclusive screening tools, evaluate best practice interventions, and further explore loneliness among underserved boys.

1. Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative. (2022-2023). National Survey of Children's Health. Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health supported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB). Retrieved August 8, 2024 from <https://nschdata.org/browse/survey?s=2&y=51&r=1#home>
2. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Health Statistics Mortality Data on CDC WONDER. Accessed August 20th, 2025. <https://wonder.cdc.gov/mcd.html>.
3. Rice SM, Purcell R, McGorry PD. Adolescent and Young Adult Male Mental Health: Transforming System Failures Into Proactive Models of Engagement. *J Adolesc Health*. Mar 2018;62(3s):S9-s17. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2017.07.024
4. DeGue S, Singleton R, Kearns M. A Qualitative Analysis of Beliefs about Masculinity and Gender Socialization among US Mothers and Fathers of School-Age Boys. *Psychol Men Masc*. Oct 5 2023;25(2):152-164. doi:10.1037/men0000450

Read the full report here: https://assets.humana.com/is/content/humana/HF_Underserved%20Boys_Full%20Report%201.pdf

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