

## THE OPPORTUNITY PROJECT

2022 PROBLEM STATEMENT

## Enhancing Children's Resilience to Adversity in Puerto Rico

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and  
Instituto del Desarrollo de la Juventud (IDJ)

**THE CHALLENGE** – Supporting children's resilience – their ability to bounce back in the face of adversity – is critical to their wellbeing, including by helping avoid long-term negative mental health outcomes. Create tools and resources designed specifically for Puerto Rican children and youth that promote resilience, such as by addressing mental health stigma.

**EXECUTIVE CHAMPION** – Jennifer Cannistra, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy, Administration for Children and Families, HHS

**THE PROBLEM** – COVID-19 and other disasters have exacerbated and shined a light on critical gaps in behavioral health care for children and youth in the United States. All levels of government, as well as many communities, youth, and families across the country, are focused on addressing this challenge. In December 2021, the U.S. Surgeon General released an [Advisory on Protecting Youth Mental Health](#), which highlighted that rates of psychological distress among young people, including symptoms of anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders, increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mental health emergencies among young people have also increased. In 2020, there was a 24 percent increase in [emergency room visits for mental health reasons](#) for children ages 5 through 11, and more than a 30 percent increase in such visits for those ages 12 to 17. Tools and resources to address stigma and promote resilience in children and youth must be created in consultation and partnership with the end user (children and youth) and must be culturally relevant and user friendly. Advancing equity in mental health for children and youth in Puerto Rico is particularly pressing because of the significant exposure to natural disasters, the impact of COVID-19 in the community, and the limited access to resources to support and strengthen the mental health of children and youth.

**THE OPPORTUNITY** – Promoting resilience is particularly important for children and families who have experienced and are at risk of experiencing disproportionate stress and trauma during the pandemic. We believe there is an opportunity to create child- and youth-friendly tools that highlight culturally-relevant and available resources, practices, and tools for children and youth in Puerto Rico to build resilience and fill a critical gap.

**VISION FOR SPRINT OUTCOMES** – Through the creation and distribution of child- and youth-friendly tools and resources specifically designed for the unique culture, language, and resources in Puerto Rico, more children and youth in Puerto Rico could have access to new skills and resources to strengthen their responses to adversity.

**TARGET END USERS** – Children and youth, parents, educators, community-based organizations, and other service providers in Puerto Rico.

## RELATED DATA SETS

- ↳ [Protecting Youth Mental Health](#), The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory
- ↳ [CDC Press Release](#)
- ↳ [Related Emergency Department Visits Among Children Aged <18 Years During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#), U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- ↳ [Mental Health Surveillance Among Children](#), CDC
- ↳ [2021 Kids Count Puerto Rico](#)
- ↳ [Communities Advancing Resilience Toolkit](#)
- ↳ [CDC Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences: Data to Action cooperative agreement](#)
- ↳ [Hidden Pain](#), COVID Collaborative
- ↳ [Child and Adolescent Mental Health During COVID-19: Considerations for Schools and Early Childhood Providers](#), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- ↳ [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)
- ↳ [AAP-AACAP-CHA Declaration of a National Emergency in Child and Adolescent Mental Health](#)
- ↳ [Administración de Servicios de Salud Mental y Contra la Adicción](#)
- ↳ [A Review of Psychiatric Epidemiology Studies in Puerto Rico Longitudinal](#), Puerto Rico Health Sciences Journal
- ↳ [Child and Family Psychiatric and Psychological Factors Associated With Child Physical Health Problems: Results From the Boricua Youth Study](#)
- ↳ [Impact of Hurricane Maria on Puerto Rico's Children](#), Instituto del Desarrollo de la Juventud

## SPRINT LEADERS

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