

2024 Annual Report

We AIM for a World of Mentally Healthy Youth.



Our Mission

AIM is bridging the gap between research and access to care for youth struggling with their mental health by finding, funding, and implementing evidence-based treatments and empowering youth to discover their own mental health solutions.

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Introc

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Since 2014, AIM Youth Mental Health has been committed to bridging the gap between research and access to care for young people. With the guidance of our Scientific Advisory Board, we have identified and funded groundbreaking early-stage clinical research aimed at developing better treatments and coping strategies for youth struggling with their mental health.

Today, as the youth mental health crisis continues to grow, we recognize that research alone is not enough. It must lead to real-world solutions—interventions that are scalable, accessible, and truly make a difference in young lives. That's why AIM is taking an important next step: refining our strategy to ensure the research we support moves beyond discovery and into practice.

As we look ahead, we are prioritizing the translation of innovative research into actionable, communitybased solutions. This means:

- Investing in Research with a Clear Path to
 Impact We will fund both early-career scientists
 and innovative research ventures that are poised
 for real-world application. By prioritizing projects
 with strong potential for near-term scale and
 dissemination, we can help ensure that the most
 promising studies move beyond discovery and
 into the communities that need them.
- Accelerating Implementation of Evidence-Based Solutions – We are committed to accelerating the implementation of evidencebased solutions, beginning with initiatives like a scalable "waitlist protocol" to support youth awaiting care.

In collaboration with providers and community organizations, we aim to ensure that effective interventions move beyond clinical trials and into the hands of those who need them most.

 Empowering Youth to Shape the Future of Mental Health – Through the AIM Ideas Lab, we are embedding young people's real-world experiences into every stage of our work—from setting research priorities to guiding how solutions are implemented. By partnering with schools, providers, and community-based organizations, we're working to expand youth access to proven mental health supports. We connect youth directly with researchers and our Scientific Advisory Board to help build a future where mental health care truly reflects the needs of those it's meant to serve.

AIM was founded on the belief that change is possible when science and community come together. With your continued support, we can take the next step in ensuring that every young person has access to the mental health resources they need not just in research settings, but in schools, homes, and communities across the country.

Thank you for being part of this journey with us. Together, we can turn groundbreaking research into real-world impact.

With gratitude,

Sugar

Susan Stilwell





2024 ANNUAL REPORT

Mental health is one of the most pressing issues facing today's youth.

CONSIDER THESE STATISTICS:

1 in 5 children are struggling with their mental health.

Suicide is the **2nd leading cause** of death in teens.

> 50% of mental health challenges begin before the age of 14.

75% of all lifetime cases of mental disorders begin by the age of 24.

> Less than 20% of children and teens receive the treatment they need for their mental health challenges.

> > **19%** of high school students reported having seriously considered suicide in the past year.

The AIM Ideas Lab elevates the youth perspective in mental health solutions by training high school students in both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. Students learn to design and implement peer-to-peer surveys to better understand the mental health challenges their generation faces. With access to tools and mentorship, they analyze data, present their findings, and propose actionable solutions for improving youth mental health. Their findings and lived experiences bring a critical perspective to the research-to-practice pipeline—helping shape solutions that are inclusive, relevant, and driven by youth.



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The AIM Solution

/ INVESTING IN RESEARCH WITH A CLEAR PATH TO IMPACT

We invest in early-career scientists and emerging research with the strongest potential to improve care for young people. From diagnostic tools to early interventions and digital therapeutics, we prioritize projects that are poised for short-term scale and impact. Our Clinical Science Fellow program helps launch the next generation of leaders in youth mental health care.

/ EMPOWERING YOUTH TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF MENTAL HEALTH

/ ACCELERLATING IMPLEMENTATION OF **EVIDENCE-BASED SOLUTIONS**

We recognize that research alone is not enough. That's why AIM is focused on the implementation of evidence-based treatments: supporting work that goes beyond the lab to reach the youth and families who need it most. Our strategy ensures that what we fund leads to measurable, real-world change.

/ EXPANDING ACCESS THROUGH EDUCATION AND TRAINING

AIM is a certified training site for Youth and Teen Mental Health First Aid, offering specialized training for parents, teachers, counselors, first responders, and other caring adults. These courses empower participants to recognize and respond to signs of mental health challenges, substance use disorders, and crises in young people. The Youth course is a seven-hour training designed for adults working with youth, while the Teen course equips young people themselves to support their peers under the guidance of a trained adult. Together, these programs ensure that youth are surrounded by a community ready to provide support when it's needed most.

AIM's world-class Scientific Advisory Board guides our strategic investments in youth mental health research, finding studies with the greatest promise of making a difference now.

Stephen Hinshaw, PhD UCSF and UC Berkeley Development Psychopathy



Shashank Joshi, MD Stanford Suicide Prevention



Walter H. Kaye, MD UCSD Eating Disorders



Patrick McGory, MD. BS. PhD University of Melbourne Access to Treatment



Rinad Beidas, PhD Northwestern Implementation Science



David Miklowitz, PhD UCLA Bipolar Disorder

AIM Youth Mental Health



Mark Hyman Rapaport, MD Huntsman Institute Anxiety, Depression

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Marilu Gorno Tempini, MD, PhD UCSF Dyslexia, Neurodevelopment



John Weisz, PhD, ABPP Harvard Anxiety, Depression



PhD, ABPP Emory Depression, Bipolar Disorder

Edward Craighead,







MD



"AIM is uniquely addressing the critical need for clinical research to help children, teens, and young adults with mental disorders in order to generate more effective interventions to help reduce and ultimately prevent their suffering from the disorders and their risk of death by suicide."

-Dr. Hilary P. Blumberg, AIM Scientific Advisory Board Yale School of Medicine

Hilary P. Blumberg,

Yale School of Medicine Mood Disorders



David M. Clark, CBE

University of Oxford Panic Disorder, Social Phobia, PTSD



Barbara Cornblatt, PhD, MBA Hofstra New York Recognition, Prevention



Benjamin Goldstein, MD, PhD University of Toronto Mood Disorders

Damien Fair, University of Minnesota Developmental Neuroscience



Kate Fitzgerald, MD Columbia Depression, Bipolar Disorder



Adam Gazzaley, MD, PhD UCSF, Neuroscape Digital Medicine, ADHD



John Piacentini, PhD, ABPP UCLA Anxiety, OCD, Tics

Research Grants

AIM's Research Grants provide critical early-stage funding to accelerate innovative, near-term solutions for youth mental health. These grants support clinical research fellows and pioneering pilot studies, with a focus on early intervention and prevention.

Clinical Science Fellowships

AIM's Clinical Science Fellow Grants foster the next generation of youth mental health researchers by providing post-doctoral grants to advance clinical research in new therapies, diagnostic tools, early interventions, and emerging technologies. These grants help researchers establish independent careers while tackling pressing challenges such as:

- Predicting and preventing youth suicide
- Providing culturally sensitive interventions for underserved communities
- Developing technology-driven mental health solutions

By funding these fellowships, AIM is addressing the urgent shortage of mental health professionals and driving evidence-based care for youth up to age 26.

Venture Grants

AIM's Venture Grants provide seed funding for groundbreaking pilot projects, helping researchers generate the preliminary data needed to secure large-scale grants and bring effective interventions to the frontlines. These grants support researchers at any stage of their career, particularly those without existing federal funding, and help:

- Pilot innovative mental health solutions for rapid implementation
- Protect researchers' time to develop impactful studies
- Bridge the gap between early-stage ideas and major funding opportunities

Through AIM Impact Grants, we are accelerating the future of youth mental health care—one breakthrough at a time.

Implementation Grants

AIM prioritizes the translation of successful research into real-world applications, ensuring that innovative mental health treatments not only prove effective but are also scalable and implementable in community settings. This includes taking previously AIM-funded interventions and expanding their reach, first in local settings and eventually to a broader national or global audience.



AIM is committed to funding research that transforms youth mental health care by prioritizing early intervention and prevention. Research shows that half of all mental health conditions emerge before age 14, yet too often, youth face barriers to care. AIM's research funding accelerates innovative solutions, empowers youth and families, and expands access to quality care, ensuring that mental health challenges are identified and addressed early-before they escalate into lifelong struggles.



AIM's research funding strategy

Key Research Areas:

Innovative Approaches to Youth Mental Health

AIM's flexible funding model allows researchers to explore novel interventions, leverage the latest technology, and adapt evidence-based practices to support the diverse needs of youth facing mental health challenges. AIM-funded research has advanced innovative approaches to youth mental health care, such as leveraging AI, machine learning, smartphone interventions, and telehealth platforms -technologies that are revolutionizing how mental health services are delivered, improving accessibility, and enhancing outcomes for youth.

Empowering through Tools and Education

AIM-funded research is empowering youth and families to take an active role in mental health through evidence-based, data-driven interventions. Through the AIM Ideas Lab, AIM provides youth with education, tools, and resources designed to enhance knowledge and mental health resilience.

Advancing Access and Equity to Quality Youth Mental Health Care

One in five children struggles with a mental health disorder, but only about 20% of them receive the care they need.

Barriers to care include a shortage of mental health professionals, long wait times, and financial barriers. AIMfunded research is focused on expanding access to quality mental health care, particularly for underserved communities.

This strategy ensures that AIM's research investments drive meaningful impact by preventing crises before they start, expanding access to care, and empowering youth with the tools to manage their mental health early and effectively.

Accelerating Science Through AIM Clinical Science Fellows Research Updates and Impact

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Accelerating Science Through AIM Clinical Science Fellows

When Help Can't Wait: A Tool for Parents on Therapy Waitlists



Madelaine Abel, PhD Massachusetts General Hospital at Harvard

Long waitlists for therapy can leave families feeling helpless -especially when a child is struggling with anxiety or OCD. To address this urgent gap, Dr. Madelaine Abel tested a digital, single-session intervention called Project EMPOWER designed specifically for parents of children ages 5–13 who are waiting to begin therapy. In this AIMfunded study, 46 parents completed the self-guided program, which focused on reducing "parental accommodation"-well-intentioned behaviors that can unintentionally reinforce a child's anxiety. Compared to parents who only received symptom monitoring, those who completed the intervention reported significantly greater reductions in both their own accommodation behaviors and their children's anxiety. These positive changes were sustained during the average four-month wait to begin therapy, and nearly all parents completed the program and rated it as helpful and easy to use.

/ IMPACT

This research offers a promising, scalable solution to support families during critical gaps in careempowering parents to take action while they wait, and giving children a better chance at long-term mental health success.

A Suicide Intervention App for College Students



Benjamin Johnson, PhD Penn State and Fairleigh Dickinson University

With support from AIM, Dr. Ben Johnson and his team are using smartphone-based surveys to better understand and eventually prevent—suicide and self-harm in young adults. In this first phase of the study, 120 participants (ages \sim 20) responded to brief daily questions about their mood, sleep, stress, and relationships. Early findings show that these real-time responses can predict moments of increased risk, such as when participants feel like a burden, experience anger, or have poor sleep. While not a treatment study, participants reported increased selfawareness and even emotional benefit from reflecting on their daily experiences—offering hope that this research could lead to future interventions that save lives.

/ IMPACT

This groundbreaking study is a first step toward developing real-time, personalized tools to prevent self-harm and suicide in young people. By identifying key moments of vulnerability, the research paves the way for timely, mobile-based interventions that can offer support when it's needed most. AIM is looking to support the second phase of this study.

Training the Next Generation: Using AI to Improve Teen Mental Health Helplines



With demand for teen mental health helplines on the rise particularly via chat and text-there's an urgent need to better support the peer helpers who power these services. In this AIM-funded pilot, Dr. Sylvanna Vargas is working to improve the quality and reach of helpline support by developing evidence-based training for teen peer helpers grounded in Motivational Interviewing (MI), a proven technique for encouraging youth to seek help in real life. To make the training scalable, her project explores the use of AI to deliver performance-based feedback—a method shown to improve counseling quality in digital environments.

This year, Dr. Vargas and her team completed a series of focus groups and interviews with teen helpline staff and volunteers. They are now analyzing the results, which will inform how helplines can better support youth with unmet mental health needs. With additional funding from San Diego State University, the team also expanded their research to include another large-scale teen helpline, allowing for a broader understanding of training needs across programs.

This research has the potential to shape national training standards for teen helplines, ensuring peer helpers are equipped with the tools they need to deliver effective, evidence-based support. By leveraging AI, the project could unlock a scalable solution for preparing the next generation of youth mental health responders.





Sylvanna Vargas, PhD, MPH UCSD (previously UCLA)

/ IMPACT

Empowering Clinicians to Deliver Evidence-Based Practices



Briana Last. PhD University of Pennsylvania

Too often, youth-serving therapists are stretched thin expected to deliver high-quality care without the time or tools to thoughtfully plan their sessions. Dr. Briana Last set out to change that. In a two-part, AIM-funded study, Dr. Last worked with 79 community clinicians to better understand the barriers they face in implementing evidence-based practices, starting with one overlooked but essential step: session planning. Using innovative, user-centered design strategies, her team developed and tested prototype tools to make planning more practical and impactful. Clinicians consistently expressed how meaningful the research was, with one participant saying: "We're providing a service. The patient is doing their part to show up, and so we should do our part to prep... I think we owe that to our clients."

/ IMPACT

This research has the potential to improve therapy for thousands of young people by equipping clinicians with the support they need to deliver more intentional, effective care. Future virtual trainings based on these findings could scale nationallyhelping more youth get the care they deserve.

Research Spotlight

/ SPOTLIGHT

How Virtual Multi-Family Support is Enhancing Treatment for Youth with Anorexia

Healing in community feels seemingly ubiquitous amongst mental health experts and advocates alike nowadays.

Family-based treatments (FBT) are an effective research-backed method of care for mental health challenges, particularly eating disorders. It involves the whole family working together to support a child's recovery, rather than focusing on the child alone.

Including family in the treatment of an individual struggling with their mental health, especially a child, pulls in community for a robust and supportive healing approach. Which begs the question... what would happen if we pulled a double whammy with that community support?

What would it look like to participate in a familybased treatment amongst other families experiencing the same challenges you are? And, what if you could attend these programs virtually so that access to this care could open up even further?

Our AIM-funded researchers at Stanford set out to discover just that in this new study: Feasibility and acceptability of a pilot studying investigating multi-family parent-only guided self-help family-based treatment for adolescent anorexia nervosa by Matheson, B., Van Wye, E., Whyte, A., and Lock, J.

AND THE RESULTS WERE STAGGERING:

100%	of parents reported that this specific style of treatment helped their child
90%	of parents reported that their child had improved by the end of treatment
84%	of parents felt supported by their cohort
79%	of parents agree/strongly agree that treatment sessions were helpful

Parental self-efficacy also increased by end of treatment.

Challenges the researchers experienced were primarily in recruitment and adolescent data collection.

FULL DETAILS ON THIS LATEST AIM RESEARCH AND WHAT THAT MEANS FOR THE FUTURE OF YOUTH EATING DISORDER CARE ARE LIVE ON OUR BLOG!





Anxiety is the most common emotional problem in children

AlMymh.org

MIDDLE SCHOOL AIM DESIGN CHALLENGE WINNER, EVA YOO

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Empowering Youth

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2024 KEY RESEARCHER FINDINGS

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A Mental Health



The **AIM Ideas Lab** is an innovative youth participatory action research program, designed to give young people a direct voice in addressing the youth mental health crisis. Over the course of 8 weeks, teens learn to design and conduct peer-to-peer mental health surveys, gathering insights from their fellow students. By the end of the program, they analyze the data, developing actionable solutions, which are presented to educators, parents, and community leaders. It's a program that empowers youth to take control of the conversation around mental health in their own communities.

AIM believes that young people are the experts when it comes to their own mental health. The AIM Ideas Lab places teens at the center of the research process based on their needs and interests, they are given the tools to identify the issues they face and to offer evidence-based solutions that resonate with their peers.

The peer-to-peer nature of the program is key. It leads to better data that directly benefits the community since it's rooted in and follows their needs. It elevates the voices of individuals that may not otherwise be able to advocate for their communities.

In 2024, the AIM Ideas Lab reached 37 schools. engaging 90 youth researchers and gathering over **1,100 survey responses**. The AIM Ideas Lab made an impact on the lives of teens across Monterey, Alameda, Santa Clara, Marin, San Mateo, San Luis Obispo, and San Diego counties.

AIM has already engaged hundreds of students statewide in 2025.

"It feels like I am helping. It felt amazing knowing I was contributing to this cause and creating tangible results to help my peers...Particularly because, you're helping yourself as a result. You're helping provide a safer space for people just like you-a space where expression is more welcome and conversation is made."

-Taylan Dincer, AIM Ideas Lab Student Researcher





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Empowering Youth

Monterey

We asked Monterey teens... What factors worsen the mental health of teens?

Alameda/Santa Clara

We asked Alameda and Santa Clara teens... What would encourage you to ask for mental health support?

3.4%	 Knowing they won't be judged
3.3%	 Learning how to ask for help
2.4%	 Confidentiality and knowing their parents/guardians won't find out
2.2%	 Knowing they won't be rejected or turned away

Marin 77.5% 76.8%

of Marin teens shared that their friends struggle with anxiety of Marin teens shared that their

friends would turn to no one for help

San Diego

77.5% 76.8%

of San Diego teens say school interferes with their mental health

of San Diego teens believe their school should do more to support the mental health of their students

/ SPOTLIGHT

From the AIM Ideas Lab to the Ivy League: **Daniel Beccera's Story**

Daniel Beccera joined the AIM Ideas Lab in 2022 as a sophomore at Everett Alvarez and participated in the program every year through his senior year. His commitment and passion for mental health advocacy grew and he decided to become an AIM Youth Ambassador, dedicating himself to supporting his community in Salinas.

As an Ambassador, Daniel joined a summer series of researcher speaker sessions, where he had the opportunity to hear from Dr. Madeline Abel—a researcher at Massachusetts General Hospital at Harvard, specializing in children's mental health. Inspired by her work, Daniel, now in his first year at Harvard studying health policy, reached out to Dr. Abel to pursue mental health research on campus. His story reflects the lasting impact and connections that AIM Ideas Lab and the AIM Youth Ambassador program creates for young mental health advocates.

Empowering Youth

AIM Youth Ambassador Program

The AIM Youth Mental Health Ambassador (AYA) program recognizes high school students across the U.S. who are committed to transforming youth mental health through advocacy, storytelling, and research. Whether they are starting a school club, writing about mental health, or leading change rooted in the findings of the AIM Ideas Lab, Ambassadors are part of a growing network of youth leaders shaping solutions that center the experiences of youth.

The program empowers students to transform youth mental health research and advocacy into tangible action. By implementing AIM Ideas Lab recommendations, advocating for mental health resources, and collaborating with AIMfunded researchers and the Scientific Advisory Board, Ambassadors ensure that youth voices drive meaningful improvements in mental health solutions. The program strengthens leadership and peer mentorship and provides students with the tools to deepen their understanding of mental health, explore career opportunities, and take proactive steps to address mental health challenges in their communities.





It is a skills-based training that teaches adults how to identify, understand and respond to an adolescent (ages 12-18) who may be experiencing a mental health or substance use challenge.

AIM's Teen Mental Health First Aid Program equips teens with the skills to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental health and substance use challenges among their peers. The research states that young people are more likely to seek support from their friends and peers before approaching an adult.



Youth and Teen Mental Health **First Aid**

AIM's Youth Mental Health First Aid Program provides education about youth mental health struggles and the importance of early intervention. We seek to educate adults to intervene early to prevent more serious symptoms and disorders from developing.

Adults can get trained in Youth Mental Health First Aid to recognize and respond to mental health challenges in young people, creating a community where youth can grow into mentally healthy adults.

The training is an evidence-based, peer to peer curriculum that fosters knowledge and connection among the participants. We seek to educate young people how to recognize and help their friends with mental health and substance use challenges and crises and how to get the help of a trusted adult quickly.

Since the program's inception, AIM has trained over 1,500 teens and adults in Mental Health First Aid.





AIM for Awareness Design Challenge

Art has the power to heal, connect, and spark change. With this in mind, AIM's annual **AIM for** Awareness Design Challenge invites middle and high school students to combine creativity with advocacy by designing art that raises awareness about youth mental health challenges, stigma, and solutions.

In 2024, the Design Challenge received over 250 inspiring submissions from students worldwide, with the winning design coming from as far as Australia.

The challenge culminated on May 1, 2024, at AIM's 7th Annual Design Challenge Exhibition & Reception in partnership with Carmel Sunset Rotary, where students, families, and community members gathered to celebrate the artists and their impactful work. Through their designs, students encouraged others to seek help, be more empathetic, and break the stigma surrounding mental health and substance use disorders.





"I have several friends who are currently experiencing different levels of mental illness. I have had conversations with them: they told me that sometimes they often felt that they have been trapped and that no one was able to help them. So I decided to include a girl with her reflection in my poster. The broken glass can be understood as a mirror and her broken self that has been hurt from the suffering of mental problems. Even though she (white) acts as a normal teenager, the real self (gray) is crying and trying to express all those feelings. I included the words and phrases from my conversation with my friends, they are all the real panic that teenagers with mental health problems are facing."

-Selina Wen









OVERALL WINNER: SELINA WEN 11TH GRADE. METHODIST LADIES' COLLEGE, AUSTRALIA



JOAOUIN MUNCY-SILVA



EVA YOO





AIM's 10th Annual Gala

On October 4, 2024, AIM celebrated its 10th Annual Gala at The Inn at Spanish Bay in Pebble Beach, marking a decade of impact in youth mental health.

The evening featured a powerful keynote from mental health advocate and bestselling author, Kevin Hines, who shared his story of survival and resilience. Award-winning hosts, Chris Harrison and Lauren Zima, emceed the night, while the Salinas High Marching Band delivered a dramatic opening.

Guests enjoyed exclusive wine, The Macallan whiskey, and caviar tastings from The Caviar Co., followed by a gourmet dinner and a worldclass performance by Broadway star Ashley Loren, the longest-running Satine in Moulin Rouge! The Musical.

The evening also marked the launch of AIM's Youth Suicide Prevention Fund, aimed at advancing research and community education to address the alarming rise in youth suicide rates.

Thanks to the generosity of attendees, the Gala raised over \$625,000 to continue **AIM's mission of** bridging the gap between research and access to care.











We are deeply grateful to our sponsors, guests, and volunteers for making this milestone event a resounding success.

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2024 TCS New York City Marathon

AIM was proud to be an official charity partner of New York Road Runners for the 2024 TCS New York City Marathon! Spanning all five boroughs —Staten Island, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Manhattan—the iconic 26.2-mile course is a celebration of resilience, determination, and community. Through this partnership, AIM provided six dedicated runners the opportunity to make their miles meaningful by raising awareness and funds for youth mental health.

Together, they raised over \$18,000, helping to advance AIM's mission of bridging the gap between mental health research and access to care for youth struggling with their mental health.





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Sometimes, it's difficult staying afloat

1ST PLACE ENTRY, PHOEBE CAINE, SALINAS HIGH SCHOOL

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Our Supporters 况

Our mission to bridge the gap between research and access to care, empower youth to discover their own mental health solutions, and foster safer communities through education and training is made possible by the generosity of our incredible community of donors. We are deeply grateful to our supporters for their unwavering dedication to advancing youth mental health and helping us in our vision for a world of mentally healthy youth.



AIM Youth Mental Health

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2024 Financials

AIM Youth Mental Health

Revenue

AIM Youth Mental Health experienced a strong financial year in 2024, marked by steady growth in program funding and donor engagement. We strategically invested in core operations and expanded our capacity to reach more youth through our research and programs.

We remain deeply grateful to our supporters, partners, and community members who make our work possible. Their continued generosity fuels our commitment to creating meaningful, measurable change in the lives of youth.



Join Us

AIM Youth Mental Health's impact is made possible by individuals who share our commitment to supporting youth struggling with mental health challenges. By funding evidence-based treatments and empowering young people to find their own solutions, AIM is changing lives. You can support our mission by donating, participating in an AIM event or program, or connecting with us online.



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AIM Youth Mental Health bridges the gap between research and access to care for youth struggling with their mental health by finding, funding, and implementing evidencebased treatments and empowering young people to drive solutions through innovative research, advocacy, and lived experience.

Learn more at AIMymh.org.