

U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory “Parents Under Pressure”: An Overview

The recent [U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory](#) discusses the critical topic of parental stress and mental health. The last decade has seen an increasing number of parents reporting experiences of high levels of stress and with over 63 million parents in the U.S. – not including the millions of non-parent caregivers – this topic is relevant and necessary to understand how to better support parents and caregivers and their task of raising future generations (Office of the Surgeon General [OSG], 2024).

Background

Parents and caregivers deal with many stressors while raising children in their care. Parenting often produces immense mental loads, which can have adverse effects on parents and caregivers by limiting their memory capacity and resources. Parents and caregivers face stressors like financial strain, poverty, children’s health, safety, and future, parental isolation and loneliness, and cultural pressure, which impact their daily lives and mental health (OSG, 2024).

Over 20 million parents have any mental illness, and almost 5 million have serious mental illnesses (OSG, 2024). Mental illness can appear differently in a parent or caregiver based on their gender, place in the family structure, and other factors. For example, maternal mental health encompasses research on topics like postpartum depression and other common pregnancy-related illnesses, while paternal mental health remains understudied. Family structure also has a significant influence on parent and caregiver mental health, and disruptions within it are another cause of stress, whether that disruption is caused by child welfare involvement, divorce, or other influences.

"41% OF PARENTS SAY THAT MOST DAYS THEY ARE SO STRESSED THEY CANNOT FUNCTION AND 48% SAY THAT MOST DAYS THEIR STRESS IS COMPLETELY OVERWHELMING COMPARED TO OTHER ADULTS."

-Parents Under Pressure, Office of the Surgeon General, 2024

Why does this Matter?

Parents are raising future leaders, community members, and professionals. While parenting is rewarding, it comes with many challenges throughout the parents and their child’s life. These stressors can negatively affect parents’ mental health and well-being, directly impacting the well-being of children, families, and society (OSG, 2024).

Additionally, parental mental health and well-being directly impact **child outcomes** just as much as child outcomes affect parents (OSG, 2024). Investing in parents and their well-being impacts the individual and the child’s and family’s well-being. Supporting parents in raising children can positively affect individuals, families, and society at large.

Action Steps: What Can You Do?

Engaging with parents and caregivers to listen to their needs is a critical first step to acknowledging and addressing the challenges of parenting. In 2023, The [Social Policy Institute](#) worked with

United Parents and Parents & Caregivers for Wellness to create a [Parent and Caregiver Engagement Toolkit](#) to amplify their voice and choice. This toolkit details engagement stages across the **continuum of social services**, bringing parents and caregivers to the table as **equal partners** and as a part of critical decision-making processes. To access this free toolkit, view our previous blog post [here](#).

The Surgeon General’s Advisory (2024) covers steps for different groups and sectors to cultivate “a culture for parents and caregivers to thrive.” This “whole society” approach is needed to create this culture shift. View some of the recommendations below.

National, Territorial, State, Local, and Tribal Governments can...	
Promote and expand funding for programs that support parents and caregivers and their families	Ensure parents and caregivers have access to comprehensive and affordable high- quality mental healthcare
Employers can...	
Expand policies and programs that support the well-being of parents and caregivers in the workplace	Implement training for managers on stress management and work-life harmony
Communities, Community Organizations, and Schools can...	
Strengthen and establish school-based support programs	Elevate the voices of parents and caregivers to shape community programs and investments
Health and Social Service Systems and Professionals can...	
Prioritize preventive care	Recognize parents and caregivers who are at a higher risk for mental health conditions
Researchers can...	
Conduct studies to better understand, prevent, and improve mental health conditions in parents and caregivers	Improve mental health data collection integration
Family and Friends can...	
Offer practical support	Learn about mental health challenges parents and caregivers may face
Parents and Caregivers can...	
Remember, caring for yourself is a key part of how you care for your family	Recognize how mental health challenges manifest and seek help when needed

View the full *Parents Under Pressure* report [here](#) for additional recommendations and information.

Reference

Office of the Surgeon General. (2024). *Parents under pressure: The U.S. Surgeon General’s advisory on the mental health & well-being of parents.*
<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/parents-under-pressure.pdf>