

Appropriate use of psychotropic drugs in children and adolescents

A Magellan monograph

In January and October 2022, Magellan completed extensive reviews and updates of its award-winning clinical monograph, *Appropriate Use of Psychotropic Drugs in Children and Adolescents*, which highlights evidence-based research on the use of psychotherapeutic agents in children and principles for optimal children’s psychopharmacotherapy practice.

Addressing a critical issue in the children’s mental health crisis

Culminating mental health challenges for young people, made worse by the pandemic, have initiated the Surgeon General and leading children’s health organizations in issuing declarations of a youth mental health crisis.¹ Our updated monograph provides an in-depth analysis of an integral issue—the increasing rate of psychotropic drug prescribing in the treatment of young people. It outlines the need for:

- Improved collaborative care for children’s behavioral health
- Increased use of non-pharmacologic interventions for youth in general and foster care youth in particular
- Consistent approaches to assessment, diagnosis, treatment, oversight and monitoring
- Active family participation and understanding of the child’s illness and challenges they face

A guide for providers, families and child advocates

We developed this monograph to serve as a reference for primary care physicians, including pediatricians, and behavioral health practitioners in making decisions—as well as families to learn more and be informed—about behavioral health treatment options for children and adolescents. This research and information is also available for advocacy organizations and policymakers in advancing a public policy agenda and best practices to meet the challenges of children, youth and families involved in all child- serving systems.

Magellan’s approach to caring for children and youth

Evidence-based research, including in this monograph, underpins our model of care for serving children, youth and their families. Our approach to caring for children and youth is built around compassion, individualization and our hands-on, dedicated clinical and peer support team members who are part of the communities we serve. We help families live happier, healthier, more independent lives.

What is covered in the monograph?

Along with an evidence-based review of psychotropic medications—including dosage ranges, warnings, common side effects, teratogenic risks and recommended monitoring—used to treat specific behavioral health disorders in children and adolescents, the monograph covers the following topics:

- Nature and scope of the problem
- Drug treatment effects on nervous system development
- Principles for optimal psychopharmacotherapy practice, including onboarding and offboarding of medication
- Treatment efficacy of psychotherapeutic agents alone and in combination with psychological therapies
- Controversies in clinical management
- Cautionary guidelines for broadened usage of drugs
- Integrated/collaborative care
- Children in foster care



The monograph as guide

Among the shortcomings in the field of pediatric psychopharmacology, Magellan’s updated monograph highlights the unknown effects of medications on child development, including the long-term neurological effects on a child’s central nervous system. It underscores that many of the commonly prescribed drugs have not been specifically studied and approved for use with children and youth. While Magellan is not opposed to the use of psychotropic medications in treating children and adolescents, we advocate for and implement an evidence-informed and judicious approach.

The Magellan clinical monograph was designed to assist providers in making appropriate treatment decisions based on the latest industry research but is not meant to replace their sound clinical judgment.

For more information

To access the complete document, along with another award-winning Magellan monograph, *Understanding and Meeting the Needs of Children and Adolescents at High Risk: Foundations of a Model*, which highlights evidence-based prevention and treatment approaches for problematic behaviors and various types of behavioral health challenges in children and adolescents, go to: MagellanHealthcare.com/Monographs.

Learn more about how our customized solutions for children are making a difference at MagellanHealthcare.com/Youth.

1. December 7, 2021, HHS press release on the Surgeon General’s Advisory addressing the youth mental health crisis, and October 19, 2021, AAP-AACAP-CHA declaration of a national emergency in child and adolescent mental health