



Background and Rationale Brief

Origins

Island Mind emerged from the delivery of the first **National Adolescent Mental Health Survey** in Bermuda and the subsequent development of the **Youth Mental Health Plan**, adopted by the Ministry of Health. Together, these initiatives demonstrated the critical role of rigorous, population-level mental health data in shaping public policy, guiding investment decisions, and enabling coordinated, whole-of-system reform.

The survey provided, for the first time, a comprehensive picture of adolescent mental health at a population level. Its findings directly informed the Youth Mental Health Plan, translating evidence into concrete policy priorities and implementation pathways. Island Mind was established to sustain and extend this evidence-to-impact approach, ensuring that high-quality research continues to inform mental health promotion, prevention, and system reform over time.

Key Findings from the National Adolescent Mental Health Survey

The National Adolescent Mental Health Survey identified significant and unmet mental health needs among young people.

- **High prevalence of mental health symptoms** was observed, particularly for depression and anxiety, at levels exceeding international benchmarks.
 - **31% of adolescents reported symptoms consistent with diagnosable depression, and**
 - **25% reported symptoms consistent with diagnosable anxiety,**
 - **approximately 5–6% higher than global averages.**
- Despite this level of need, **only 30% of adolescents reporting these symptoms indicated an intention to seek help.**

The survey highlighted a substantial gap between need and service utilisation, driven by persistent and interconnected barriers to help-seeking. Young people reported the following barriers to accessing mental health support:



- **62%** felt too embarrassed or shy to seek help;
- **51%** believed that nothing would help;
- **50%** were concerned that the person they spoke to would think negatively of them;
- **44%** worried about what others might think;
- **46%** cited the cost of seeing a mental health professional.

These findings underscore the central role of stigma, perceived ineffectiveness, affordability, and access barriers in suppressing help-seeking, reinforcing the need for system-level reform, stigma reduction, and early intervention.

Business Case for Island Mind

Structural Disadvantage in Small Island Communities

Small island communities face persistent structural barriers to prioritising and sustaining mental health promotion and prevention. Limited population size restricts economies of scale, making it difficult to justify the fixed costs of national mental health research, evaluation infrastructure, and policy development.

These challenges are compounded by a limited specialist mental health workforce, gaps in population-level mental health data, and reliance on externally developed models that are not locally validated. As a result, policy decisions are often made without robust evidence, and prevention efforts remain fragmented or underdeveloped.

Missed Prevention Dividend

Delayed or insufficient investment in youth mental health promotion and prevention leads to increased long-term costs across health, education, justice, and social service systems. These downstream costs disproportionately impact small jurisdictions with limited fiscal buffers.



Evidence indicates that for every **\$1 invested in adolescent mental health, there is a potential return of up to \$24¹**, reflecting reduced service utilisation, improved educational outcomes, increased workforce participation, and lower justice system involvement.

Opportunity for Shared Infrastructure

Comparative analysis across island jurisdictions shows consistent mental health system pressures, regardless of income level. This creates an opportunity to shift away from bespoke, high-cost national solutions toward shared infrastructure tailored to island contexts.

A specialist entity focused on island communities can amortise development costs, enable high-quality national research, and support consistent monitoring, evaluation, and policy learning across jurisdictions.

The Case for Island Mind

Island Mind addresses a clear market failure by providing scalable, island-relevant mental health intelligence, integrated lived-experience leadership, and practical support for translating evidence into policy and system reform. Through this model, Island Mind enables informed decision-making, stronger systems, and long-term public benefit.

¹ Stelmach R, Kocher EL, Kataria I, Jackson-Morris AM, Saxena S, Nugent R. The global return on investment from preventing and treating adolescent mental disorders and suicide: a modelling study. *BMJ Glob Health*. 2022 Jun;7(6):e007759