

Youth Demand for Mental Health Support Rises as U-Matter Expands

KINGSTON June 22, 2026: As more young Jamaicans turn to digital spaces for emotional support, demand for the U-Matter Chatline continues to grow, reinforcing its role as a critical mental health lifeline for youth.

Managed by the National Council on Drug Abuse (NCDA), a department of the Ministry of Health and Wellness (MOHW), in collaboration with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), U-Matter provides free, confidential, text-based counselling. The service offers adolescents and young adults a safe, non-judgmental space to seek emotional and psychosocial support.

Since its launch in 2022, the chatline has facilitated over 9,500 contact sessions, highlighting a growing demand for accessible mental health services. Between January 2025 and May 2026, U-Matter recorded 3,662 cases opened and 2,448 cases closed, reflecting both sustained need and consistent follow-through by trained counsellors.

Demand has continued to accelerate in 2026. A total of 1,276 new cases were opened between January and May, with monthly cases rising from 227 in January to 254 in May, representing an 11.9 per cent increase in demand over the period.

Novia Condell, UNICEF Health Specialist noted “This trend reflects growing awareness of U-Matter among young people. As pressures related to school, relationships and life transitions increase, the service is meeting youth where they are, on platforms they trust.”

Usage data continue to show that U-Matter is reaching its intended audience of young people, with the 15–24 age group representing the largest share of users while the average age of users is between 24 and 25 years.

Across the reporting period, female users account for the majority of texters, with approximately three-quarters of cases, while male participation remains significantly lower.

This trend mirrors broader national and global patterns in help-seeking behaviour and underscores the need for targeted outreach strategies aimed at encouraging

boys and young men to seek mental-health support and to normalise help-seeking among this group.

High Satisfaction Confirms Quality and Impact

User feedback continues to demonstrate strong confidence in the quality of the service. In 2025, the chatline recorded an 85.26 per cent satisfaction rate with 82.37% willing to recommend the service. Early 2026 data have shown improvements following service adjustments and expanded volunteer coverage.

Between January and May 2026, an average of 85.6% of users said they would reach out again, reflecting improved user experience and confirming that users feel heard, supported, and safe during their interactions with U-Matter counsellors.

Capacity Expansion Strengthens National Response

To meet the rising demand, U-Matter expanded its operational capacity between June 2025 and March 2026 following its transition to the NCDA. Two new cohorts of volunteers were trained, bringing the team to 30 certified counsellors, supported by trained facilitators.

Dr. Kristen Robinson, Director of Treatment Services at NCDA stated, “This expansion has strengthened service delivery and positions U-Matter for long term sustainability. We remain committed to providing a safe, responsive, youth-focused space for young people to seek support without fear and judgment.”

Against the backdrop of Child Month 2026 and its focus on children’s health and wellbeing, U-Matter is strengthening Jamaica’s mental health support landscape for youth. Through sustained investment, partnerships, and innovation, it is helping to build safer minds and a safer future for the nation’s young people.

The chatline, a joint effort of the MOHW and UNICEF with support from the Caribbean Child Development Centre (CCDC) at The University of the West Indies Global Campus, is delivered through UNICEF’s U-Report messaging platform. Young people can connect by sending “SUPPORT” to @ureportjamaica on Instagram or Facebook Messenger, or via WhatsApp or SMS at 876-838-4897.

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