

USE OF AI IN MENTAL HEALTH CARE

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DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

I have no personal/professional disclosures

The products used as examples do not imply an endorsement by APA



APA is the leading scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the U.S. with a membership of over 190,000 clinicians, researchers, educators, & students

Mental Health in the U.S.



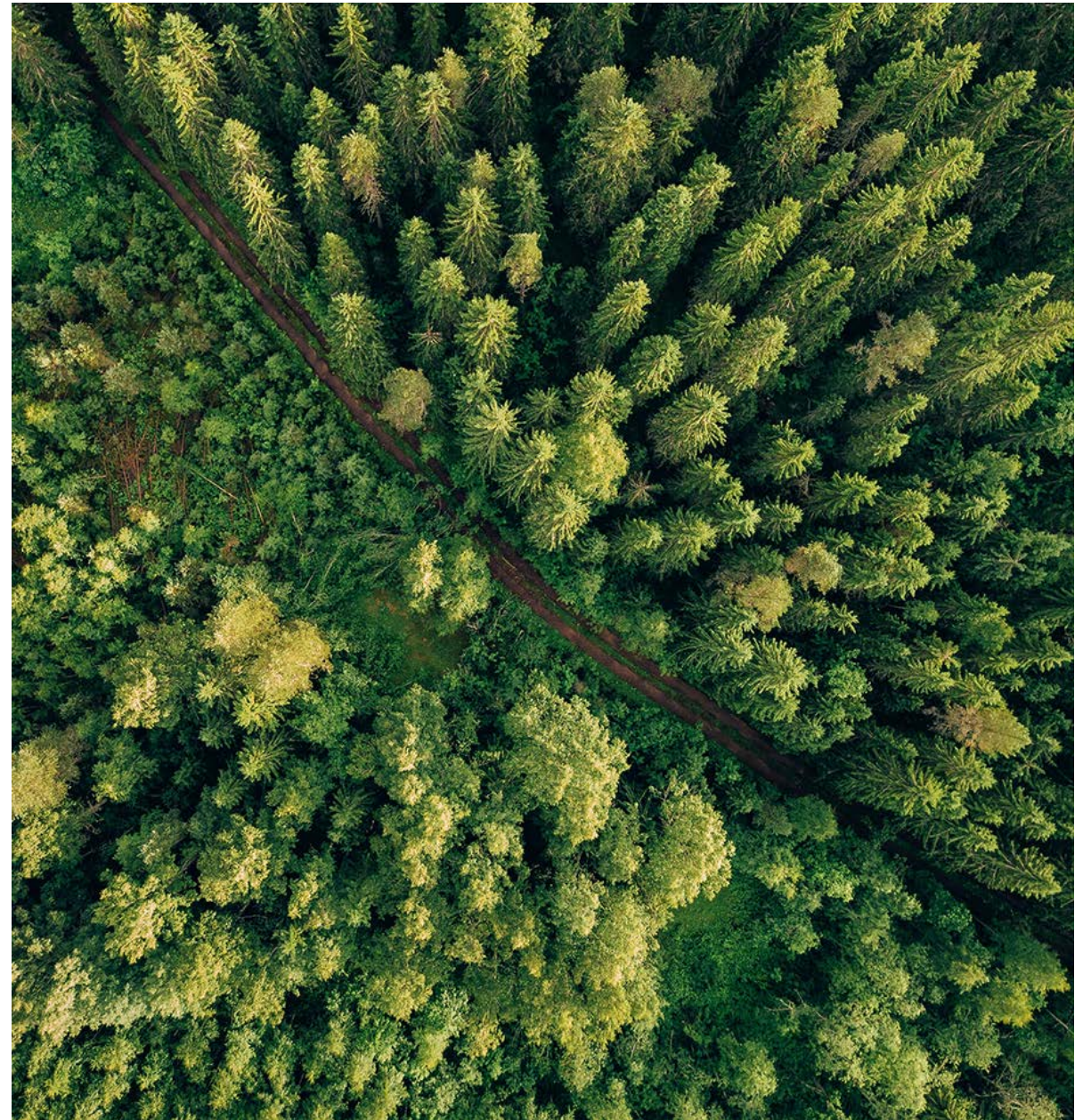
25% of adults experience a mental illness each year (MHA, 2024)

Only 20% received any mental health treatment in the last year

(SAMHSA, 2023)



A word cloud centered around the word 'Stigma'. The word 'Stigma' is the largest and most prominent. Other large words include 'shame', 'embarrassment', 'dishonor', 'humiliation', and 'disgrace'. Smaller words include 'surgery', 'skin', 'guilt', 'humiliated', 'health', 'condition', 'pattern', 'isolated', 'warning', 'condition', 'dermatitis', 'depression', 'secret', 'scared', 'feeling', 'concept', 'healthcare', 'guilty', 'fear', 'social', 'itchy', 'bloody', 'shoulder', 'melanocyte', 'surgical'.





HOW IS GENAI BEING USED BY US ADULTS?

- 48.7% of participants report using LLMs for psychological support within the past year
- Users primarily sought help for anxiety (73.3%), personal advice (63.0%), and depression (59.7%)
- 63.4% of users reported improved mental health from LLM interactions, with high satisfaction ratings for practical advice (86.8%) and overall helpfulness (82.3%)
- 9.0% of users encountered harmful responses



THE PUBLIC'S USE OF CHATGPT (OPENAI, 2025)

~800 million weekly users globally

.15% of users express indicators of suicidal planning or intent =

1.2M people

.15% of users show signs of emotional dependency =

1.2M people

.07% of users show possible signs of psychosis or mania =

560,000 people

US TEENS' AI USE (COMMON SENSE MEDIA, 2024)

70% have
used at
least one
type of
GenAI tool

- Four main categories
 - Chatbots or text generators
 - Image generators
 - Video generators
 - Search engines with AI generated results

Parents'
awareness
of teen's
use:

- 37% said yes
- 23% said no
- 39% said "not sure"

U.S. TEENS' USE OF AI COMPANIONS

Entertainment (30%)

Curiosity about the technology (28%)

Advice (18%)

Always available when I need to talk (17%)

No judgement (14%)

Can share things that I wouldn't tell friends or family (12%)

Easier than talking to real people (9%)

Helps to practice social skills (7%)

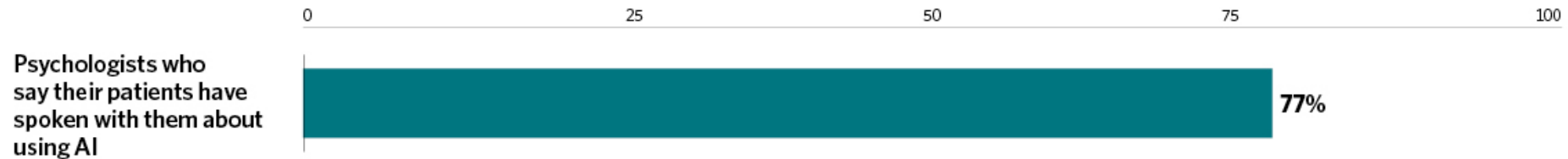
To feel less lonely (6%)

Other (5%)

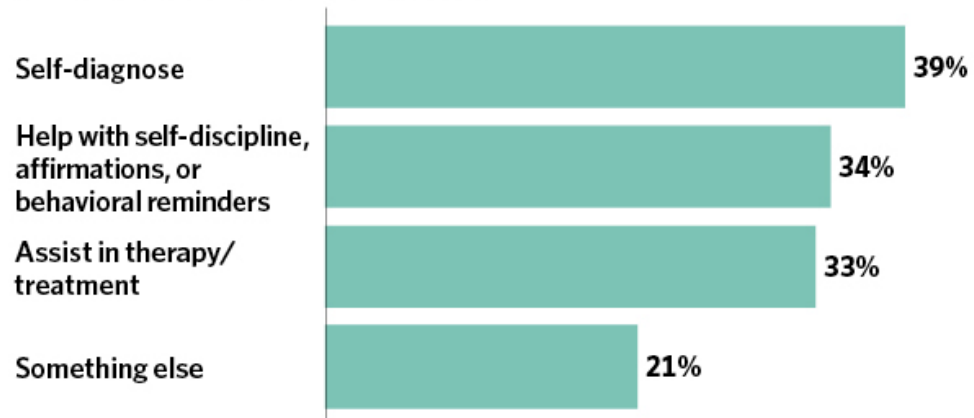


77% of psychologists report their patients use AI. Here's how.

% OF PSYCHOLOGISTS WHO REPORTED THAT THEIR PATIENTS HAVE SPOKEN ABOUT USING AI



REASONS PATIENTS HAVE REPORTED USING AI



Not all Conversational Chatbots are the same

Medical devices (SaMD)

Chatbots that make medical claims that they can “diagnose, treat or cure” a mental health disorder and have to demonstrate efficacy and safety to be cleared

Not aware of any AI or generative AI chatbot currently cleared by a regulatory body but can anticipate some soon

Consumer Wellness

These are unregulated AI or generative AI chatbots that do not make medical claims but are developed to address MH concerns (i.e., stress) or emotional wellbeing

Some are grounded in evidence-based theories and developed by SME, while others are less transparent

General Purpose & Companion

These are also unregulated generative AI chatbots that do not claim to be developed to address MH concerns but are being used by people for “therapy,” “companionship” or as a “friend”

As far as we know, few of the products on the market (e.g., **Character AI, ChatGPT**) have little to any evidence-base, SME input, or post-market surveillance

POSITIVE USE CASES

Purpose-Built LLMs

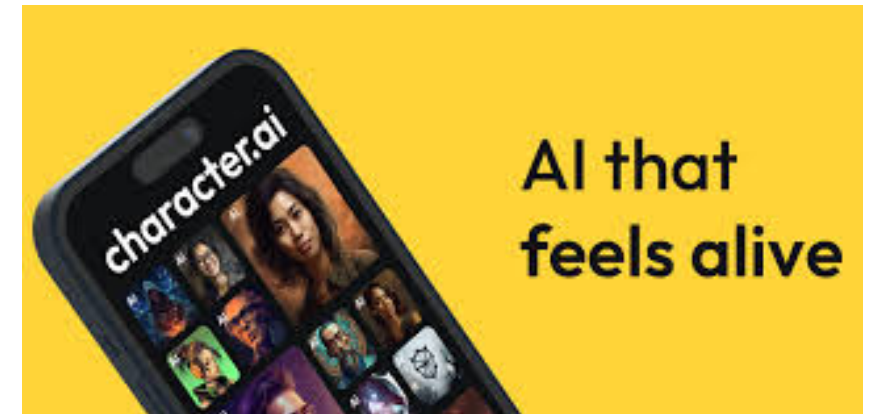
- 2025 Randomized Control Trial (NEJM):
 - Therabot users showed significantly greater reductions in symptoms of major depressive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and eating disordered symptoms
- 2025 10-week Observational Study:
 - 76% of Ash by Slingshot users reported a decrease in depression symptoms
 - 77% reported lower anxiety levels
 - 95% of users made measurable progress toward personal goals
 - 72% reported decrease in loneliness
 - 75% increase in social support

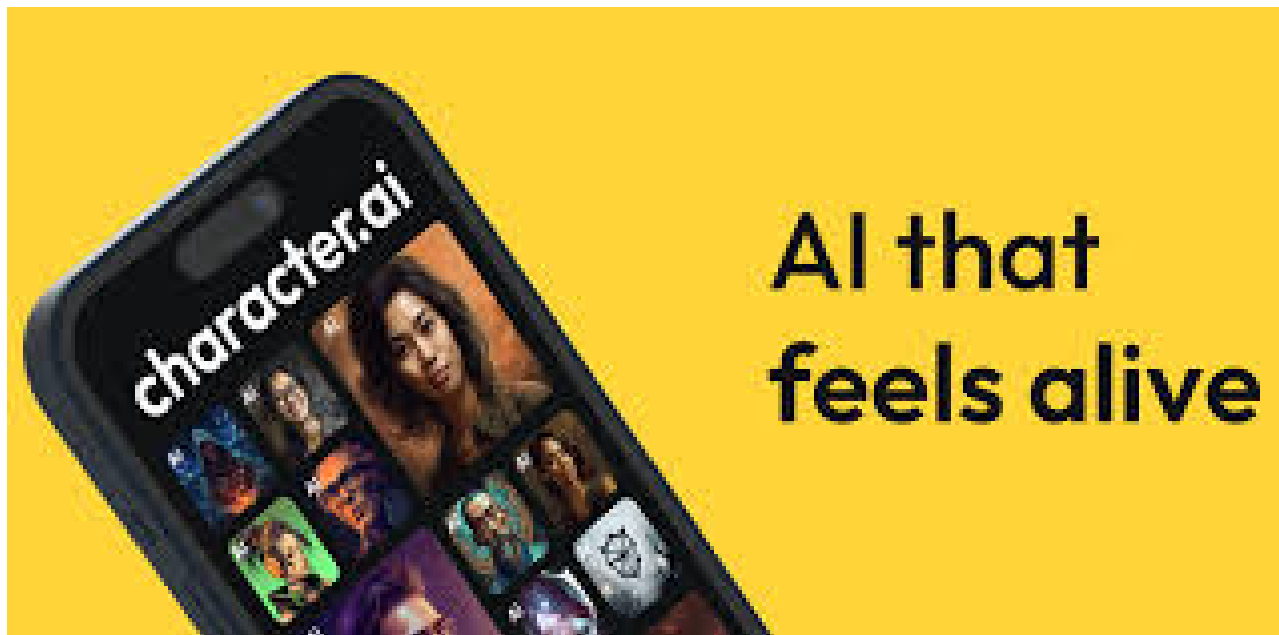
General-Purpose LLMs

- A rural resident asks: “What’s the difference between stress, burnout, anxiety and depression?” and receives an accessible explanation before deciding whether to seek professional care.
- A parent asks, “My teenager seems withdrawn and anxious. Should I talk to a pediatrician, school counselor, psychologist or psychiatrist?”
- An individual experiencing work-related stress engages in a guided conversation about coping strategies and self-care.
- A user develops a stepwise sleep improvement plan and receives reminders of evidence-based sleep hygiene practices.
- A caregiver learns strategies for supporting a family member with depression while maintaining healthy boundaries.
- An older adult receives guidance regarding grief, loneliness, or community resources.

YET GENERAL PURPOSE & COMPANION LLM'S ARE ALSO...

- Engineered for maximum engagement with users
- Trained to be agreeable and validate user input (i.e., sycophancy bias)
- Foster emotional dependency
- Dangerous feedback loop
- Reinforce confirmation bias, cognitive distortions, or avoiding necessary challenges
- Misrepresent services
- Create a false sense of therapeutic alliance
- Anthropomorphism
- Unreliable crisis management
- Accuracy and safety features erode over time with long conversations





Mental Hospital
🧡 Caring psychologist who will help you recover
💬 60.8k chats • By @Jake_14



ACT Psychologist

I am ACT Psychologist and can lead you into a better inner world and accept yourself
💬 284.1k chats • By @anpolol



Psychologist
Kind, Empathetic, Qualified
💬 83.4k chats • By @iamjakebryant



Dr James Barnes
📄 • Your psychologist... (you're the patient)
💬 126.3k chats • By @anyonenoone00



Psychologist
your empathetic, patient and kind psychologist
💬 4.9m chats • By @Pancakee

'Classic pattern of grooming'

Families around the world have been impacted. Earlier this week the BBC reported on a young Ukrainian woman with poor mental health who received suicide advice from ChatGPT, as well as another American teenager who killed herself after an AI chatbot role-played sexual acts with her.

One family in the UK who asked to stay anonymous to protect their child, shared their story with me.

Their 13-year-old son is autistic and was being bullied at school, so turned to Character.ai for friendship. His mother says he was "groomed" by a chatbot from October 2023 to June 2024.

Teenage boys using 'personalised' AI for therapy and romance, survey finds

Male Allies UK worries rise in chatbot 'girlfriends' will leave boys unable to socialise and respect boundaries

Their teen sons died by suicide. Now, they want safeguards on AI

Sep 19, 2025 — Their teenage sons died by suicide. Now, they are sounding an alarm about...

 NPR 



AI company bans minors from using chatbots after teen's suicide

Oct 30, 2025 — this morning new...

 YouTube · ABC News 



Teens say they are turning to AI for friendship - AP News

Jul 23, 2025 — No question is too small when Kayla Chege, a high school student in Kansas,...

 AP News 

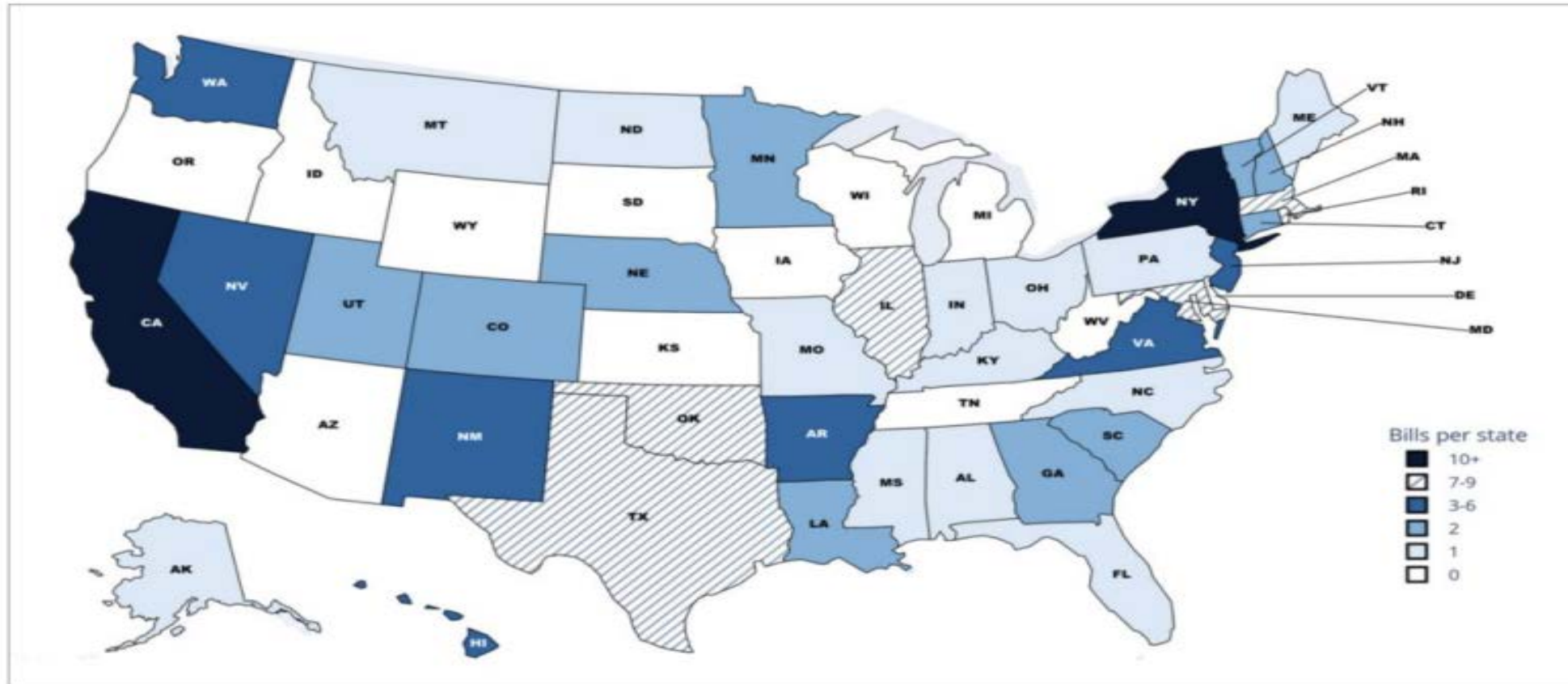


Show all

AI LEGAL AND REGULATORY LANDSCAPE



NUMBER OF MENTAL HEALTH AI RELATED BILLS INTRODUCED BY STATE (2022-2025)



Shumate, J. N., Rozenblit, E., Flathers, M., Larrauri, C. A., Hau, C., Xia, W., Torous, E. N., & Torous, J. (2025). Governing AI in mental health: 50-state legislative review. *JMIR Mental Health*, 12, e80739. <https://doi.org/10.2196/80739>



GEN AI RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

Modernize regulations

Create nuanced evidence-based standards

Require following transparency guidelines

Enact clear legislation

Mandate “Safe-by-Default” settings

Mandate age-appropriate design and pre-deployment testing

Strengthen requirements around premarket evidence and postmarket monitoring

Develop guidelines for GenAI and digital literacy education

Fund rigorous and independent research

APA SAMPLE LEGISLATION - *PROTECTION AGAINST UNLICENSED CHATBOTS ACT*

A BILL

To prohibit the promotion, advertising, or provision of mental and behavioral health services without the appropriate professional license, and for other purposes.

SEC. II. AI Chatbot Transparency.

(1) IN GENERAL. — A covered entity may not provide the generation of output from an AI chatbot, or disseminate marketing or advertising materials, that, from the perspective of a reasonable user—

(A) indicate or imply possession of an appropriate professional license to provide a mental or behavioral health service without, at that time, the possession of such license; and

(B) falsely indicate or imply that the output is provided or verified by a human in possession of an appropriate license to provide a mental or behavioral health service.

SECTION III. Enforcement.

(1) IN GENERAL.—A person injured by an act or practice in violation of Section II(a)(1) of this Act, or a regulation promulgated under such subsection, may bring a civil action in an appropriate court of [State]—

(A) to enjoin the violation;

(B) to recover damages for actual monetary loss from the violation, or to receive up to [Amount] in damages for each such violation, whichever is greater; or

SECTION IV. Definitions.

(1) AI CHATBOT.—The term “AI chatbot” means a system that uses artificial intelligence to engage in interactive conversations with a user similar to the communications that an individual would have with a human.

(2) ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE; AI.—The term “artificial intelligence” or “AI” has the meaning given that term in section 9401 of the National Artificial Intelligence Initiative Act of 2020 ([15 U.S.C. 9401](#)).

(3) COVERED ENTITY.—The term “covered entity” means an individual or company that develops or deploys an AI chatbot for intended use by a resident of [State].

(4) MENTAL OR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICE.—The term “Mental or behavioral health service” means any health care service that requires a license under [insert relevant state licensing laws] to provide, or the provision of which otherwise falls within the jurisdiction and oversight of [relevant state laws].

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS FOR AI LEGISLATION THAT ESTABLISHES CERTAIN PROTECTIONS FOR USERS OF AI CHATBOTS

Mandatory disclosure when AI is attempting behavioral influence or behavior change

Protection of confidential personal information

Restrictions on advertising

Minimize addictive coding tactics/emotional dependency design/deceptive anthropomorphic practices

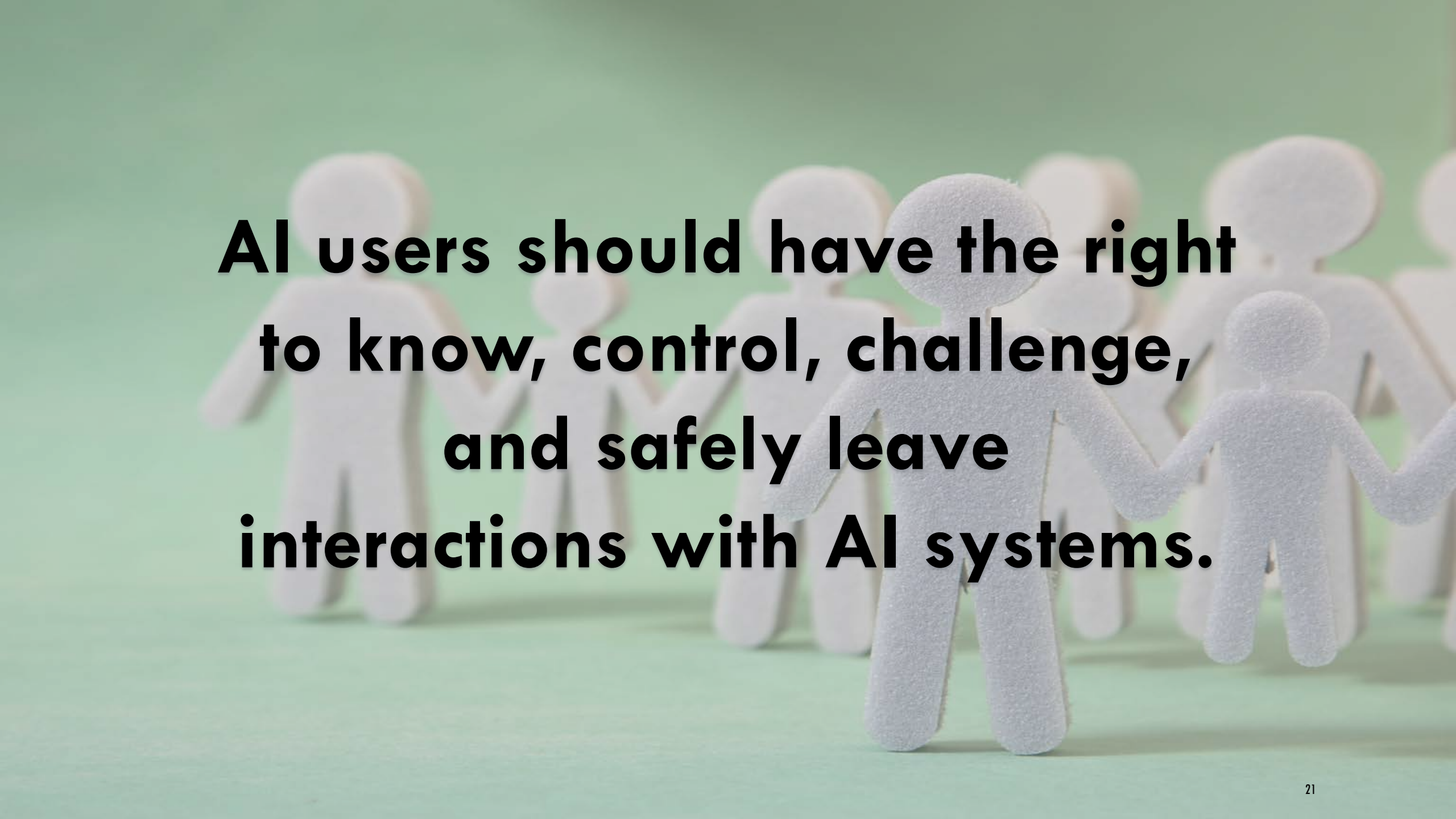
Enforcement provisions

Whistle blower/Safe Harbor protections

Requirements for suicide/self-harm safety protocols and evaluation

Specific audit and disclosure requirements

- For example: Reporting number of times suicidal ideation was detected, the number of attempts, and the number of completions



**AI users should have the right
to know, control, challenge,
and safely leave
interactions with AI systems.**



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PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

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