

April 4, 2023

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education & Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education & Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education & Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education & Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

As organizations that care deeply about the health and well-being of our nation’s children, we write to thank you for providing \$13 million in funding for the Pediatric Mental Health Care Access Program at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 omnibus bill and to request \$13 million for the program in the FY24 Labor, HHS, Education (LHHS) appropriations bill. Thanks to funding from Congress, 48 states, D.C., tribal organizations, and territories have received a grant from HRSA to enhance access to mental health care for their patients. And the need couldn’t be more urgent.

Emotional and behavioral health challenges were at a crisis point before the COVID-19 pandemic, and the public health emergency has acutely exacerbated these challenges, prompting the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and Children’s Hospital Association to declare a national emergency in child mental health—a call echoed by over 40 other organizations.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth ages 10-18 in the United States. In 2021, 42% of high school students reported feeling persistently sad or hopeless, and 29% reported experiencing poor mental health. Additionally, 20.1% of youth ages 12 - 17 had a major depressive episode in the past year, compared to only 15.7% of youth in 2019. The CDC also found a more than 50% increase in suspected suicide attempt ED visits among girls ages 12-17 in early 2021 as compared to the same period in 2019. Behavioral health clinicians have reported over the last several years that children and adolescents are increasingly “boarding” in emergency departments for days because they do not have sufficient supports and services.

The Pediatric Mental Health Care Access Program supports pediatric primary care practices with telehealth consultation by child mental health teams, thereby increasing access to mental health services for children and enhancing the capacity of pediatric primary care to screen, treat, and refer children with mental health concerns. Integrating mental health and primary care has been shown to substantially expand access to mental health care, improve health and functional

outcomes, increase satisfaction with care, and achieve cost savings. Expanding the capacity of pediatric primary care providers to deliver behavioral health through mental and behavioral health consultation programs is one way to maximize a limited subspecialty workforce and to help ensure more children with emerging or diagnosed mental health disorders receive early and continuous treatment.

The HRSA Pediatric Mental Health Care Access Program is an effective investment in enhancing mental health care for children. A RAND study found that 12.3% of children in states with programs such as the ones funded under this HRSA program had received behavioral health services while only 9.5% of children in states without such programs received these services.¹ The study's authors concluded that federal investments to substantially expand child psychiatric telephone consultation programs could significantly increase the number of children receiving mental health services. Programs funded by HRSA have increased pediatric provider capacity to screen, refer, or treat children's mental health, increased screening, incorporated health equity, and supported quality improvement. According to data from HRSA funded programs, 61% of participating providers report screening more patients in their practices and 60% of providers agreed that more of their patients received needed treatment for a behavioral health condition as a result of participating in the program.

We urge you to include \$13 million for the program in the FY24 LHHS appropriations bill to allow HRSA to maintain all existing grantees and allow programs to expand the services they offer to additional settings, including schools and emergency departments as specified in the *Bipartisan Safer Communities Act*, which reauthorized the program for five years. These are critically important sites for enhancing the availability of pediatric mental health team consultations because they are sites where children are often in need of care.

Given the mental and behavioral health crisis our youth are facing, we urge you to continue supporting this program with robust funding so that all states, D.C., and the territories can benefit. Thank you for your consideration. Our organizations are grateful to you for your commitment to the mental health and well-being of our nation's families.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

- American Academy of Family Physicians
- American Academy of Pediatrics
- American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
- American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
- American Psychiatric Association
- American Psychological Association
- Anxiety and Depression Association of America
- Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness

Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Children's Hospital Association
Clinical Social Work Association
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
Family Voices
First Focus Campaign for Children
International Society for Psychiatric Mental Health Nurses
Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance
Mental Health America
MomsRising
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Children's Alliance
National League for Nursing
National Network of Child Psychiatry Access Programs
REDC Consortium
RI International
Save the Children
School-Based Health Alliance
The Kennedy Forum
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
Youth Villages

State Organizations

Alabama

Alabama Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

Arizona

Arizona Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

Arkansas

Arkansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

California

American Academy of Pediatrics, CA Chapter 3
AAP- Orange County Chapter
American Academy of Pediatrics- California Chapter 2
California Chapter 1, American Academy of Pediatrics

Colorado

American Academy of Pediatrics, Colorado Chapter

Connecticut

CT Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
District of Columbia
American Academy of Pediatrics, DC Chapter

Florida
Florida Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics, Inc.
IMPOWER

Hawaii
American Academy of Pediatrics, Hawaii Chapter, Inc.

Illinois
Illinois Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Iowa
American Academy of Pediatrics - Iowa Chapter

Kentucky
Kentucky Chapter of the AAP

Louisiana
Louisiana Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

Maine
Maine Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Maryland
Maryland Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Massachusetts
The Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

Montana
Montana Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

Nebraska
Nebraska Chapter of AAP

Nevada
Nevada Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

New Hampshire
NHAAP
NHAFP
NH Psychiatric Society

New York
NYS American Academy of Pediatrics, A Coalition of Chapters 1, 2 & 3

North Carolina

NC Pediatric Society

North Dakota

North Dakota Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

Oklahoma

Oklahoma Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

Pennsylvania

PA Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

South Carolina

SC Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

Tennessee

Tennessee Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

Vermont

American Academy of Pediatrics Vermont Chapter

Wyoming

Wyoming Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

ⁱ <https://www.rand.org/news/press/2019/07/15.html>