

April 4, 2022

Senator Chris Murphy
136 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Bill Cassidy, M.D.
520 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Murphy and Senator Cassidy:

As organizations that care deeply about the health and well-being of our nation's children, we write to thank you for introducing the *Supporting Children's Mental Health Care Access Act of 2022*. This important legislation reauthorizes the Pediatric Mental Health Care Access Program at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) for five years and makes exciting improvements to the program. Thanks to your leadership in creating and championing this program over the past five years, 45 states, D.C., tribal organizations, and territories have [received](#) a grant from HRSA to create or expand their programs. Providers throughout the country are relying on the programs funded by HRSA to enhance access to mental health care for their patients. And the need couldn't be more urgent.

The pandemic has exacerbated the already existing child and adolescent mental health crisis. Rates of childhood mental health concerns and suicide rose steadily between 2010 and 2020, and by 2018 suicide was the second leading cause of death for youth ages 10-24. The pandemic has intensified this crisis: across the country we have witnessed dramatic increases in Emergency Department visits for all mental health emergencies, including suspected suicide attempts and a recent [study](#) conducted by HHS, found that between 2016 and 2020, the number of children ages 3-17 years diagnosed with anxiety grew by 29% and those with depression by 27%. Children of color have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and the inequities that result from structural racism as well as the effects of racism itself impact the mental health care of children.

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.

Congress's investment in the HRSA Pediatric Mental Health Care Access Program is paying off. A recent 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.

Our organizations are pleased to support the *Supporting Children's Mental Health Care Access Act of 2022*, as it will reauthorize the HRSA Pediatric Mental Health Care Access Program for another five years at a level that allows HRSA to maintain all existing grantees and allow programs to expand the services they offer to additional settings, including to schools and emergency departments. 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.

Thank you again for your leadership in ensuring children and adolescents have access to the mental health services they need. We are eager to see this legislation move forward. If we can be of assistance, please don't hesitate to contact Tamar Magarik Haro at tharo@aap.org.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Muslim Health Professionals
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Children's Hospital Association
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
Family Voices
First Focus Campaign for Children
International OCD Foundation
Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Behavioral Healthcare
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Network of Child Psychiatry Access Programs
Nemours Children's Health
REDC Consortium
Sandy Hook Promise
School-Based Health Alliance
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
ZERO TO THREE

State Organizations

Alabama Chapter-American Academy of Pediatrics
American Academy of Pediatrics Alaska Chapter
American Academy of Pediatrics, CA Chapter 3
Arkansas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Children's Wisconsin
Connecticut Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Florida Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Illinois Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Maine Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Maryland Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Nevada Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
New Jersey Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
New Mexico Pediatric Society
Oregon Pediatric Society
South Carolina Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
United Way of Wisconsin
Wisconsin Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (WIAAP)

¹ <https://www.rand.org/news/press/2019/07/15.html>