

April 29, 2022

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education & Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

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

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

The Honorable Tom Cole
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 \$11 million in funding for the Pediatric Mental Health Care Access Program at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 omnibus bill and to request \$14 million for the program in the FY23 Labor, HHS, Education (LHHS) appropriations bill. Thanks to funding from Congress, 45 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.

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. 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.ⁱ 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 \$14 million for the program in the FY23 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 envisioned in S.3864/ H.R. 7076, the *Strengthening Children's Mental Health Care Access Act*. 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 extent to which the pandemic has exacerbated the existing need for increased child and adolescent behavioral health care, 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,

American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare
American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Muslim Health Professionals
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
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
Inseparable
International OCD Foundation
International Society for Psychiatric Mental Health Nurses
Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance
Mental Health America
MomsRising
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors

National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of Social Workers
National Federation of Families
National League for Nursing
National Register of Health Service Psychologists
Nemours Children's Health
REDC Consortium
School-Based Health Alliance
SMART Recovery

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