The Quorum

October 2023: Updates on Mental Health Policy

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Tuesday October 10th, 2023 was recognized around the globe as “World Mental Health Day”. This year, the theme was “Mental Health is a Universal Human Right”. As you may recall, mental health is one of the 3 key focuses for our chapter for this current 2023-2024 legislative session, and this theme of universal access could not have been better selected, as we make a big push to increase access across the state.

Two key efforts in California policy as related to child mental health access are AB 665 and a March 2024 Ballot Measure known as Proposition 1.

AB 665 was just signed into law by Governor Newsom on October 7th, 2023 and represents a big policy win for all advocates of mental health and equity. In 2010 youth in California over the age of 12 years gained the right to consent for their own mental healthcare (with some exceptions including access to psychotropic medications). But due to a set of conflicting rules, youth on Medi-Cal had to meet a much higher standard in order to provide their own consent, such as being a victim of abuse, or a danger to self or others. What this has essentially meant is a two-tiered system, in which youth who come from poorer household have had less autonomy over their mental healthcare than their more affluent peers. AB 665 corrects this issue and allows all youth, regardless of the type of insurance they have, to consent for their own mental healthcare. AAP-CA2 has closely followed and supported this important bill and we are excited to see it now become law.

Looking ahead to 2024, Proposition 1 represents a potentially very big update for California’s Mental Health system. Proposition 1 will ask the voters to approve a $6.4 billion bond to add 11,000 treatment beds and supportive housing units, provide outpatient mental health treatment to 27,000 individuals, and move $1 billion in existing funds for a range of mental health services. This law will also modify the existing Mental Health Services Act, to become the Behavioral Health Services Act, and will allow for resources to be directed to those with the greatest need, such as people with severe mental health disorders, people navigating substance abuse, and people living in encampments. This funding would help open up access for tens of thousands of people across the state, including for youth.

In March of 2024, voters will have the opportunity to approve this funding at the ballot box. Over the next several months, AAP-CA2 will work with AAP-CA and other advocates throughout the state to fully assess this initiative and push to make sure that decisions that help advance the needs of children continue to be front and center.
References:


The Quorum is a monthly policy spotlight published by the California Chapter 2 of the American Academy of Pediatrics (San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura, Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino). For any inquiries, please email Chapter 2 legislative and policy analyst, Kamaal Jones, at KamaalJones.AAP@gmail.com

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