

## The Quorum

November 2021: The Pediatric Mental Health Crisis

### The National Emergency

On October 19<sup>th</sup>, the AAP, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP), and Children's Hospital Association declared a national emergency in children's mental health. Below is an overview of the crisis, AAP policy recommendations, and ongoing legislation at the national and state levels to improve mental health service and delivery.

### Mental Health Crisis by the Numbers

By 2018, suicide was the second-leading cause of death for people between the ages of 10 and 24.

Teenage girls are particularly at risk: From February to March of 2021, emergency department visits for suspected suicide attempts were up 51% for girls ages 12 to 17, compared to the same period in 2019.

Overall, CDC data shows that in 2020, the percentage of emergency department visits for mental health emergencies rose by 24% for children between the ages of 5 and 11 and 31% for those 12 to 17, compared with 2019.

This ongoing mental health crisis disproportionately affects children of color. According to Pediatrics, 140,000 children have lost a parent or grandparent caregiver to COVID. Compared with white children, Native American children were 4.5 times more likely to have lost a primary caregiver. Black children were 2.4 times more likely, and Hispanic children nearly twice as likely.

Sources:

<https://www.aappublications.org/news/2021/10/19/children-mental-health-national-emergency-101921>  
[https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6945a3.htm?s\\_cid=mm6945a3\\_w](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6945a3.htm?s_cid=mm6945a3_w)

### AAP Recommendations

The AAP is recommending the following policy actions:

- Increase federal funding to ensure all families can access mental health services
- Improve access to telemedicine
- Support effective models of school-based mental health care
- Accelerate integration of mental health care in primary care pediatrics
- Fully fund community-based systems of care that connect families to evidence-based interventions
- Address workforce challenges and shortages so that children can access mental health services no matter where they live

Source:

<https://www.aappublications.org/news/2021/10/19/children-mental-health-national-emergency-101921>

## Advocacy: National Legislation

In August 2021 the Biden administration announced nearly \$85 million in funding for mental health awareness, training, and treatment. The funding includes \$10.7 million in American Rescue Plan funds from the Health Resources and Services Administration for the Pediatric Mental Health Care Access Program, which trains primary care providers to treat and refer kids for mental health issues. Another \$74.2 million in grants is being distributed from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to raise awareness about youth mental health issues and train school personnel and programs that coordinate treatment for young people with behavioral health diagnoses.

Our own California Senator, Alex Padilla, introduced the Comprehensive Mental Health in Schools Pilot Program Act, which would direct the secretary of education to establish a 4-year pilot grant program, authorized at \$20 million, prioritized to help schools predominantly serving low-income students address the mental and behavioral well-being of their students.

Sources:

<https://www.npr.org/sections/back-to-school-live-updates/2021/08/27/1031493941/childrens-mental-health-gets-millions-in-funding-from-the-biden-administration>

<https://www.padilla.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/FINAL-One-pager-Comprehensive-Mental-Health-in-Schools-Pilot-Program-Act-of-2021-1.pdf>

## Advocacy: CA State Legislation

[AB 552](#) (Quirk-Silva): Integrated School-Based Behavioral Health Partnership Program. This bill would establish the integrated school-based behavioral health partnership program to provide early intervention for, and access to, behavioral services for students. Specifically, partnerships will strive to provide more behavioral health professionals in school and ensure that schools have a space available to deliver behavioral health services.

Status: This is a two-year bill, currently in the assembly health committee.

[AB 563](#) (Berman): School-based health programs

This bill would require the California Department of Education to establish an Office of School-Based Health Programs for the purpose of improving the operation of, and participation in, school-based health programs.

Status: This is a two-year bill, referred to the senate education and health committees.

[AB 1117](#) (Wicks): Pupil support services: Healthy start: Toxic Stress and Trauma Resiliency for Children Program

This bill would establish the Healthy Start: Toxic Stress and Trauma Resiliency for Children Program, under which local superintendents would be required to award grants to qualifying schools and other local educational agencies to pay the costs of planning and operating programs that provide support services to pupils and their families. Grants would strive to create a sustainable funding stream to provide community support to vulnerable Californians.

Status: This is a two-year bill, currently referred to the assembly health and education committees.

*The Quorum is a monthly policy spotlight. For any inquiries, please email Chapter 2 legislative and policy analyst, Karinne Van Groningen, at [KVanGroningen@mednet.ucla.edu](mailto:KVanGroningen@mednet.ucla.edu).*