

THE COMMUNITY MENTAL WELLNESS AND RESILIENCE ACT OF 2023

BACKGROUND

The US is experiencing an epidemic of mental health problems, with almost 53 million American adults experiencing a diagnosed mental illness in 2021. Millions more adults and youth are experiencing significant distress and anxiety due to mounting toxic stresses and traumas resulting from social, economic, and other factors. These difficulties are impacting rural communities particularly hard.

Drought, flooding, and other extreme weather events have a significant impact on rural mental health. In addition to acute mental distress from loss of land and infrastructure, the long-term impact of these weather-related disasters continue to aggravate farmer debt, farm productivity, and economic bases on which rural communities are more likely to depend on. These impacts combined with limited social ties and stigma towards mental health lead rural communities to be especially vulnerable to mental health impacts from extreme weather events.

Although more funding and personnel is beneficial, individualized clinical treatment and direct human service programs can assist only a limited number of people and only after they experience symptoms of pathology. They cannot address the scale and scope of today's mental health problems, and have no chance of preventing or healing the mounting problems speeding our way.

To reduce the current epidemic of mental health and emotional struggles, and prevent future ones, the US must quickly expand the way it addresses these issues by supporting communities to use a public health approach to build population mental wellness and resilience.

A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH

A public health approach to mental wellness focuses on the entire population, not just those deemed at-risk or with symptoms of pathology. It prioritizes preventing mental health problems and integrates healing into prevention activities. And it does so by actively engaging community residents in identifying and enhancing existing protective factors—or assets—and forming additional ones that strengthen everyone's capacity for mental wellness and resilience for all types of adversities.

OVERVIEW OF PROVISIONS

The "Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act of 2023" (CMWRA) will direct CDC to fund and support community initiatives that use a public health approach to build population mental wellness and resilience. Specifically, it will appropriate funds for fiscal years 2023 through 2027 to fund small planning grants to help community resilience building initiatives get organized, and larger program grants for up to four years to strengthen and help expand existing community mental wellness and resilience initiatives.

These initiatives are designed by community members from the bottom up, not by outside experts from the top down. If whole-community mental wellness and resilience build initiatives are launched nationwide, today's mental health and problems can be significantly reduced, future troubles can be prevented, and residents will regain faith and hope for the future.

Contact Representatives Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) and Paul Tonko (D-NY) for more information.