



Provide Federal Support to Address the Shortage of Pediatric Mental Health Providers

Our nation's young people are facing a rising tide of mental and behavioral health concerns and challenges. The National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners (NAPNAP) has joined other national organizations representing pediatric providers in calling attention to a national emergency in child and adolescent mental health. To respond to this urgent call to action, **NAPNAP urges members of Congress to cosponsor the "Helping Kids Cope Act" (H.R. 2412), support introduction of a Senate companion bill, and pass this important legislation this year.**

While significant initiatives have been undertaken to address this crisis, they are simply not enough to meet the growing need for pediatric mental health services and providers. Suicide remains the second leading cause of death for youth ages 10-18 in the United States. In 2021, 42 percent of high school students reported feeling persistently sad or hopeless, and 29 percent described experiencing poor mental health. An alarming 20.1 percent of young people ages 12-17 have had a major depressive episode in the past year, compared to 15.7 percent in 2019.

Congress has recognized the need to respond to this crisis. The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (P.L. 117-159) included a number of important provisions expanding the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic Medicaid demonstration program and providing guidance, technical assistance, and other resources related to telehealth, school-based Medicaid services, and Medicaid's Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit. With Medicaid and CHIP covering more than half of all children and serving as the single largest payer of behavioral health services in the U.S., these provisions are important first steps to address the children's mental health crisis – but they alone aren't sufficient. In far too many areas there are insufficient options for children in need of mental health care, whether they would benefit from early intervention services, outpatient therapies, or more intensive treatment options.

The "Helping Kids Cope Act"

The bipartisan "Helping Kids Cope Act" (H.R. 2412) includes critical investments that will bolster the pediatric mental health workforce and improve the availability of a full continuum of care for kids, establishing three new grant programs at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) specifically focused on urgent needs of pediatric mental and behavioral health care. Together these grants:

Improve access to community-based services and support

- Strengthen community-based pediatric mental health services by enabling communities to implement or develop new programs and policies tailored to meet the mental and behavioral health needs of children.

Support training to enhance the pediatric mental health workforce

- Bolster the capacity of the current pediatric health workforce through expanded mental and behavioral health training and support for pediatric mental health professionals.

Invest in critical pediatric mental health infrastructure

- Expand and enhance critical pediatric mental health infrastructure to improve our national capacity to deliver appropriate care for children with more intensive treatment needs, including inpatient psychiatric care and step-down care, such as day programs or intensive outpatient services.

NAPNAP believes Congress must take action this year to address the national emergency in children and teens mental health care. **Please cosponsor H.R. 2412 or support the introduction of a Senate companion and urge leadership to include its provisions in any comprehensive health legislation.**

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