What They Are Saying: Child Health and Advocacy Community Sounds the Alarm to Address the Mental Health Crisis Among America’s Children and Teens

Child health and pediatric organizations, the health care community, and advocacy groups have joined together to raise awareness of the national mental health emergency among our children and teens, and call on Congress to expand access to care and resources to help them.

Here’s what they are saying:

⇒ “We are facing a significant national mental health crisis in our children and teens which requires urgent action. In the first six months of this year, children’s hospitals across the country reported a shocking 45 percent increase in the number of self-injury and suicide cases in 5- to 17-year-olds compared to the same period in 2019. Together with the AAP and the AACAP we are sounding the alarm on this mental health emergency.” – Amy Knight, President of the Children’s Hospital Association

⇒ “Children’s mental health is suffering. Young people have endured so much throughout this pandemic and while much of the attention is often placed on its physical health consequences, we cannot overlook the escalating mental health crisis facing our patients. We must treat this mental health crisis like the emergency it is, which is why AAP is joining CHA and AACAP in sounding the alarm.” – Lee Savio Beers, MD, FAAP, President of the American Academy of Pediatrics

⇒ “We were concerned about children’s emotional and behavioral health even before the pandemic. The ongoing public health emergency has made a bad situation worse. We are caring for young people with soaring rates of depression, anxiety, trauma, loneliness, and suicidality that will have lasting impacts on them, their families, their communities, and all our futures. That is why AACAP is joining AAP and CHA in this effort. The time for swift and deliberate action is now.” – Gabrielle A. Carlson, MD, President of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists
The AHA strongly supports the Sound the Alarm initiative, because no investment in the future is more important than the health and well-being of our nation’s young people. Behavioral health is inseparable from physical health, especially for children and adolescents. Congress must act with urgency to address inadequate reimbursement, provider shortages, fragmented care and other barriers to mental health resources for all.”

– Rick Pollack, President and CEO of the American Hospital Association

Mental health has never been as prominent in our national conversation, and our concern for young people is at the forefront of this change. We must take the needs of our young people seriously and show them the country is listening and taking action. This is what the National Mental Health Emergency for Kids initiative is all about—doing everything we can to support the mental wellbeing of our youth. And it will ensure that no matter where a child lives, goes to school or what their financial situation may be, they can access the care and support they need and deserve.”

– Bob Gebbia, CEO of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

We are seeing more and more children and adolescents facing difficulties in coping with the challenges and stressors in our current environment that are at a level we have not seen before. If these urgent needs for children are not addressed, families and communities break down due to the lack of resources available to support them. The time to act is now.”

– Dr. Rukhsana Chaudhry, Director of Mental Health Programming for American Muslim Health Professionals (AMHP)

In this pandemic, children and adolescents are faced with many factors detrimental to their mental health. For most, this has meant isolation of not being in school every day with their peers, and for some, this has meant the loss of family members. With the mental health system already stretched thin, we are joining this important effort to call attention to the national emergency around children’s mental health and urging policy makers to act.”

– Vivian Pender, M.D., President of the American Psychiatric Association

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the behavioral health and emotional well-being of children and adolescents, worsening many of the disturbing trends we have been seeing for several years. The impacts on youth from vulnerable populations, including communities of color, the LGBTQ+ community, and those with disabilities, have been particularly deleterious. The American Psychological Association is proud to join the
Sound the Alarm campaign to call attention to the national emergency of children’s mental health and urge lawmakers to enact policies that will address this critical issue in equitable and sustainable ways.” – Arthur Evans Jr., PhD, CEO of the American Psychological Association

⇒ “As an antipoverty organization that advocates for the well-being of youth and young adults, the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) believes it is crucial to invest far more extensively as a nation in preventing mental health conditions and promoting wellness among young people. “Congress must begin by passing the Build Back Better Act with its improvements in Medicaid—but that is the beginning not the end. We strongly urge Congress to prioritize investments that make a significant impact on improving youth mental health and well-being.” – Olivia Golden, Executive Director of the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

⇒ “We are in a crisis when it come to our children. When we focus on child welfare access to appropriate mental health services is vital. Primary prevention efforts, family preservation, reunification, adoption, and all forms of permanence requires addressing barriers created by behavioral health needs. We need to act now.” – John Sciamanna, Vice President of Public Policy, Child Welfare League of America

⇒ “Today we see increased rates of suicide, mental health emergency room visits, anxiety, and depression among all youth. These are issues strongly associated with the 5.4 million children diagnosed with ADHD, exacerbated during the pandemic by online learning, social isolation and, for many, the loss of primary and/or secondary caregivers. This is a national mental health emergency requiring immediate action, especially in marginalized and rural communities. We join this effort to sound the alarm and confront the spreading crisis that impacts so many American families.” – Patricia Hudak, President of Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)

⇒ “Over the last two years, America’s children, youth, and emerging adults have encountered endless unknowns, interpersonal loss, complicated pain, untenable expectations, and disenfranchised grief—in many ways unlike any generation before them. It is our duty to ensure young people are seen and their experiences honored. We have a tendency to relegate these folks to the sidelines with terms like ‘the future of America’, perhaps not stopping for long enough to see they are part of our society right now. Present tense. While our intentions may prove heartfelt, those words can sting, and rob from them the dignity they’re due as fellow citizens who have suffered
profound losses—meaningful people and meaningful experiences that are neither recoverable nor replaceable. If we create some intentional time to talk with them, ask them about their experiences, listen hard to their stories—while resisting the urge to infantilize their feelings by playing the ‘wizened fixer’ role with all the answers—if we can do that, we might just learn something incredible about them, about each other, about yourself, or about our common humanity. Growing up is hard, to be sure; hopefully we can do that, as our younger citizens need is to rise to just such an occasion.”

– Chase Bannister MDIV, MSW, LCSW, CEDS, Board Member of Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy, and Action

⇒ “Military families enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) face many challenges. Access to mental health services is difficult now, which is why we are part of #SoundtheAlarm4Kids. We are deeply concerned the military medical billet cuts/outsourcing of care combined with the new Tricare contract structure will compound the difficulties our families face.”

– Rebecca Emerson, Executive Director of Exceptional Families of the Military

⇒ “The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed us all to the brink, but our youngest have been some of the hardest hit—especially in their formative years. While most children have thankfully been spared from severe illness, the mental toll continues to mount. We proudly join with other health organizations in their effort to Sound the Alarm for Kids. We must take action to invest in the mental health of our youth and assure them that a brighter future lies ahead.”

– Chip Kahn, CEO of the Federation of American Hospitals

⇒ “It’s long past time to sound the alarm for children’s mental health. Kids have suffered immeasurably during the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed what we already knew: Children are in the midst of a mental health crisis. We must take a fresh look at how to provide the best mental health services to our children and adolescents and Congress must deliver these resources. We can do better — and our children can't wait.”

– Bruce Lesley, President of Focus on Children

⇒ “The latest data from SAMHSA show that almost 3 million adolescents had serious thoughts of suicide last year, with more than 1 million who said they made suicide plans. These statistics are even more troubling as we face significant shortages across behavioral healthcare professions and treatment settings. We are eager to work with policymakers, workforce agencies, and partner organizations to identify where the gaps in access to care are—and
how we can fill those gaps.” – **Shawn Coughlin, President and CEO of the National Association for Behavioral Healthcare**

⇒ “The COVID pandemic amid times of social unrest and anti-immigrant rhetoric have magnified standing stressors for many families and children. Addressing the mental health of at-risk children is of utmost priority to help them achieve their full potential. We need to act today so that our children can have an opportunity tomorrow.” – **Luz Garcini, PhD., MPH, National Latinx Psychological Association**

⇒ “When mental health depends on connection, military kids and teens are not set up for success. They move about every two to three years away from their schools, neighborhoods and communities and just when they settle in, it’s time to move again. They do this through deployment, activation, and trainings, meaning they’re often without at least one parent. Military kids serve alongside their families and our nation's leaders must act to ensure that military kids have access to the mental and behavioral health care that they need.” – **Besa Pinchotti, Executive Director and CEO of the National Military Family Association**

⇒ “As a result of the last 20 months the mental wellness of our kids and teens (as well as adults) has been strained. Increasing awareness and providing support and resources is more vital than ever to assist our communities with resilience and recovery.” – **Dawn Doherty, Executive Director of the Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide**

⇒ “COVID-19 has had many dire consequences, including the catastrophic emotional turmoil thrust upon our youth, who were in no way equipped to navigate the uncertainties of a global pandemic. It’s time to listen to our experts and address this crisis head on by improving access to care; building a larger, more diverse workforce of providers; and prioritizing prevention and early intervention efforts. As a former educator, I’ve seen first-hand the long-term ramifications of untreated mental health challenges. We cannot stand idly by when the futures of so many are at risk.” – **Amy Kennedy, Education Director of The Kennedy Forum**

⇒ “When it comes to mental health and suicide among young people, we are in the midst of a public health crisis that requires our immediate attention and comprehensive action. We know these issues disproportionately impact LGBTQ youth, and LGBTQ youth of color in particular, yet prevention programs too often take a one-size-fits-all approach and intersectional
research and policies are lacking. We must sound the alarm for this crisis and specifically confront the disparities among marginalized communities.”
– Amit Paley, CEO and Executive Director of The Trevor Project

⇒ “Children in military and veteran families face all the typical stressors impacting their civilian counterparts, as well as unique factors such as a parent regularly in harm’s way, or a parent's service-related injuries. Yet recent studies have concluded that families continue to face barriers to care for their children’s mental, emotional and behavioral needs. From prevention to early intervention, community supports, crisis care and better understanding and navigation of higher acuity care, we must make coverage and access easy and incentivized.” – Kara Oakley, Founder of Tricare for Kids Coalition

⇒ “Addressing the mental/emotional health of children is critical to their development. United Way is committed to supporting the needs of children to ensure their well being and success in life.” – Dave Wallace, Health Policy Director of United Way Worldwide