ISSUE:
Depression is a leading cause of disability and morbidity, with more than 300 million people estimated to be suffering from the disorder worldwide. Depressive disorders are now known to arise in early childhood, with marked increases in prevalence seen in puberty. Children and adolescents with depression suffer from social and emotional impairments. Childhood and adolescent depression are also associated with an increased risk of suicide, as well as risk for developing other psychiatric and substance use disorders. Urgent action is needed to expand mental health screenings, access to treatment, and follow-up for depression in youth.

BACKGROUND:
- Mental illness impacts 1 in 5 American youth, with 22 percent of those aged 13 to 18 years experiencing a severe mental health disorder at some point in their life.
- Untreated depression can lead to a wide array of adverse effects, not limited to major health concerns, including heart disease, contact with the criminal justice system, substance use, and suicidality.
- Depression is a major contributor and a leading cause of lower academic achievement, school absenteeism, and truancy.
- The United States Preventative Services Task Force has called for physicians to screen for depression in adolescents, because early intervention is critical for successful treatment.
- Among depressed high school students, 17 percent seriously consider suicide, 27.3 percent report having suicidal thoughts, and 2.4 percent of adolescents require medical treatment for suicide. Furthermore, 50 percent of teenagers with depression are likely to have a recurrence of depression.
- Treatment for depression can include medication, psychotherapy, and multidisciplinary team approaches often requiring regular clinical visits to provide, monitor, and effectively deliver care.

Treatment of mental health conditions, including childhood depression, requires access to highly trained professionals and close clinical supervision. Child and adolescent psychiatrists have specialized medical training and experience specifically suited to treat youth with depression. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) estimates that more than 20,000 additional child and adolescent psychiatrists are needed to meet the demand for treatment of depression and other childhood mental illnesses.

Improved screening and access to care are critical components of treating youth with depression. Children and adolescents need regular visits with well-trained physicians, including child and adolescent psychiatrists when indicated, in order to optimize treatment, decrease impairment, limit disability, and promote healthier lives.

Information for Parents, Youth, and Clinicians is available at AACAP’s Depression Resource Center, https://www.aacap.org/depressionrc