

ISSUE

The current pediatric mental health care system does not serve the needs of racial and ethnic minority communities.

BACKGROUND

- The COVID-19 pandemic amplified pre-existing mental health disparities in minority children and adolescents, including gaps in access to high quality mental health care.
- Emergency Department visits for pediatric mental health care have disproportionately increased among minority children.
- Minority youth are more likely to attempt suicide than their white peers and are less likely to receive adequate care for symptoms of anxiety, depression, and ADHD.
- Due to a long history of poor medical treatment, minority communities are less likely to trust the medical care system.
- Minority and rural communities are underrepresented in medicine, including in behavioral health care fields.

SOLUTIONS

Research, education, and outreach programs that narrow the mental health quality and access gaps for racial and ethnic minority groups require federal investment. Similarly, investments in the recruitment, training and broader distribution of a more diverse and representative clinician workforce promotes a stronger and more culturally sensitive workforce.

CONGRESSIONAL REQUESTS

Expand, reauthorize, and appropriately fund minority scholarship and fellowship programs and support medical school efforts to provide diversity core competency curriculum.

HOUSE: *Thank you for supporting and advancing H.R. 1475, the Pursuing Equity in Mental Health Act, introduced by Reps. Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ) and John Katko (R-NY).*

SENATE: *Support S.1795, the Pursuing Equity in Mental Health Act, introduced by Sen. Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Cory Booker (D-NJ), and Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV).*

The legislation would:

- *Expand programs to address racial and ethnic disparities in mental health through needed grants establishing interprofessional health care teams to provide behavioral health in largely minority communities;*
- *Support the development of health professional core competencies to address racial and ethnic minority mental health disparities; and*
- *Reauthorize and support the SAMHSA minority fellowship program, which seeks to place mental health providers, including child and adolescent psychiatrists, in communities where there are needs, giving child and adolescent psychiatrists, and others, the experience to support these communities going forward.*