



Improving Equity in Access to Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

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 physician workforce promotes a stronger and more culturally sensitive workforce.

CONGRESSIONAL REQUEST

Support research and training programs that address behavioral health disparities among racial and ethnic minority groups.

HOUSE: Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ) will be reintroducing the “Pursuing Equity in Mental Health Act” in May 2023. Please co-sponsor this bill. The legislation would:

- Improve the pipeline of culturally competent behavioral health providers by updating the Minority Fellowship Program to support the development of core competencies for addressing mental health disparities among racial and ethnic minority mental groups in training programs;
- Update the SAMHSA Promoting the Integration of Primary and Behavioral Health Care program to ensure special consideration is given to eligible entities serving a high proportion of racial and ethnic minority groups;
- Develop an outreach and education strategy to promote behavioral health and reduce stigma associated with behavioral health conditions among minority groups; and
- Authorize nearly \$900 million to support research to address and reduce mental health disparities among underserved and underrepresented youth.



SENATE: AACAP urges the Senate to introduce a companion bill to the updated House “Pursuing Equity in Mental Health Act.”

APPROPRIATIONS REQUEST

AACAP requests **\$25 million to support the SAMHSA Minority Fellowship Program (MFP).**

- The MFP increases behavioral health practitioners’ knowledge of issues related to prevention, treatment, and recovery support for mental illness and substance use addiction among racial and ethnic minority populations.
- The program provides stipends to increase the number of culturally competent behavioral health professionals who teach, administer, conduct research, and provide direct mental illness or substance use disorder treatment services for minority populations that are underserved.