



December 21, 2017

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-230 U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-221 U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232 U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204 U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Speaker Ryan, and Minority Leaders Schumer and Pelosi:

On behalf of the American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) and American Psychiatric Association (APA), we are writing to urge swift passage of renewed funding for five-years for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). CHIP provides affordable health care to 8.9 million children and adolescents whose family's income is too high to qualify for Medicaid, but too low to purchase private health insurance on their own. **It is essential that CHIP is reauthorized for five years to ensure ongoing access to quality evidence-based mental health care services while avoiding gaps in enrollee coverage.**

AACAP represents over 9,300 child and adolescent psychiatrists nationwide and serves as the leading authority on children's mental health, and APA is the national medical specialty association representing more than 37,000 psychiatric physicians nationwide.

Since CHIP's bipartisan creation in 1997, it has provided important health insurance coverage to children from many low-income families. However, much work remains to be done, and the non-partisan Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission (MACPAC) recommended funding CHIP for an additional five years.¹ The expiration of CHIP funding exacerbated budget shortfalls amongst the states, with 16 states anticipating that they will exhaust all reserve CHIP funding by the end of January 2018.²

Due to the success of the CHIP program, the uninsured rate of children ages 0-17 fell from 13.9% to 4.5% in 2015. This bipartisan accomplishment has led to the lowest recorded levels of children who are uninsured. This program is vital for low-income children and adolescents in need of mental health services, who are more likely to have a reliable source of health and dental care and to have regular preventative care visits via enrollment in CHIP.

To ensure that children continue to be insured and have access to care, it is imperative that the federal government extend funding for CHIP. We should not undo the gains which have been made over the

¹ <https://www.macpac.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/The-Future-of-CHIP-and-Childrens-Coverage.pdf>

² <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/fact-sheet/state-plans-for-chip-as-federal-chip-funds-run-out/>

past several years for children and adolescents with mental illness. Without guaranteed federal funding, these 8.9 million children will face severe disruptions in care, as states begin winding down their CHIP programs due to budget constraints. For children suffering from mental health or substance use disorders, disruption of care of any length of time can be life-threatening.

Currently in America, 1 in 5 young people will be diagnosed with a mental illness, with 50% of all lifetime cases of mental illness beginning by age 14, and 75% by age 24. Access to mental health care remains a critical component of CHIP programs, as approximately 850,000 CHIP beneficiaries experience serious behavioral or emotional disorders.³ Without CHIP, these children and adolescents will be unable to receive insurance coverage for the evidence-based care that they need, forcing many to go without due to the inability to pay high out-of-pocket expenses. It is imperative that Congress provide long-term funding to CHIP to ensure that every child can access affordable and quality health care.

If you have any questions, please contact Ronald Szabat, Esq., AACAP Director of Government Affairs & Clinical Practice, at 202-587-9666, or Ashley Mild, APA Interim Chief of Government Relations, at 703-907-8645.

Respectfully,



Karen Dineen Wagner, MD, PhD
AACAP President



Saul Levin, MD, MPA, FRCP-E
CEO and Medical Director

³ <http://healthaffairs.org/blog/2015/04/08/implementing-health-reform-medicare-chip-mental-health-and-substance-abuse-parity/>