

# A Declaration from the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, American Academy of Pediatrics, and Children's Hospital Association

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF  
CHILD & ADOLESCENT  
PSYCHIATRY

W W W . A A C A P . O R G

As health professionals dedicated to the care of children and adolescents, we have witnessed soaring rates of mental health challenges among children, adolescents, and their families over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbating the situation that existed prior to the pandemic. Children and families across our country have experienced enormous adversity and disruption. The inequities that result from structural racism have contributed to disproportionate impacts on children from communities of color.

This worsening crisis in child and adolescent mental health is inextricably tied to the stress brought on by COVID-19 and the ongoing struggle for racial justice and represents an acceleration of trends observed prior to 2020. Rates of childhood mental health concerns and suicide rose steadily between 2010 and 2020 and by 2018 suicide was the second leading cause of death for youth ages 10-24. The pandemic has intensified this crisis: across the country we have witnessed dramatic increases in Emergency Department visits for all mental health emergencies including suspected suicide attempts.

The pandemic has struck at the safety and stability of families. More than 140,000 children in the United States lost a primary and/or secondary caregiver, with youth of color disproportionately impacted. 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, and their communities. We must identify strategies to meet these challenges through innovation and action, using state, local and national approaches to improve the access to and quality of care across the continuum of mental health promotion, prevention, and treatment.

**That is why the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), and the Children's Hospital Association (CHA) are joining together to declare a National State of Emergency in Children's Mental Health. The challenges facing children and adolescents are so widespread that we call on policymakers at all levels of government and advocates for children and adolescents to join us in this declaration and advocate for the following:**

- Increase federal funding dedicated to ensuring all families and children, from infancy through adolescence, can access evidence-based mental health screening, diagnosis, and treatment to appropriately address their mental health needs, with particular emphasis on meeting the needs of under-resourced populations.
- Address regulatory challenges and improve access to technology to assure continued availability of telemedicine to provide mental health care to all populations.
- Increase implementation and sustainable funding of effective models of school-based mental health care, including clinical strategies and models for payment.
- Accelerate adoption of effective and financially sustainable models of integrated mental health care in primary care pediatrics, including clinical strategies and models for payment.
- Strengthen emerging efforts to reduce the risk of suicide in children and adolescents through prevention programs in schools, primary care, and community settings.
- Address the ongoing challenges of the acute care needs of children and adolescents, including shortage of beds and emergency room boarding by expanding access to step-down programs from inpatient units, short-stay stabilization units, and community-based response teams.

- Fully fund comprehensive, community-based systems of care that connect families in need of behavioral health services and supports for their child with evidence-based interventions in their home, community, or school.
- Promote and pay for trauma-informed care services that support relational health and family resilience.
- Accelerate strategies to address longstanding workforce challenges in child mental health, including innovative training programs, loan repayment, and intensified efforts to recruit underrepresented populations into mental health professions as well as attention to the impact that the public health crisis has had on the well-being of health professionals.
- Advance policies that ensure compliance with and enforcement of mental health parity laws.

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