



**Association of
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April 27, 2022

The Honorable Anna Eshoo
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Brian Fitzpatrick
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lisa Blunt Rochester
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Eshoo, Fitzpatrick, and Blunt Rochester,

On behalf of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), I write in support of the “Strengthen Kids’ Mental Health Now Act” (H.R. 7236). This critical legislation is an important step in addressing the ongoing pediatric mental health crisis and improving access to behavioral health care for young people covered by Medicaid.

The AAMC (Association of American Medical Colleges) is a nonprofit association dedicated to transforming health through medical education, health care, medical research, and community collaborations. Its members are all 155 accredited U.S. and 16 accredited Canadian medical schools; approximately 400 teaching hospitals and health systems, including Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers; and more than 70 academic societies. Through these institutions and organizations, the AAMC leads and serves America's medical schools and teaching hospitals and the millions of individuals employed across academic medicine, including more than 191,000 full-time faculty members, 95,000 medical students, 149,000 resident physicians, and 60,000 graduate students and postdoctoral researchers in the biomedical sciences. In 2022, the Association of Academic Health Centers and the Association of Academic Health Centers International merged into the AAMC, broadening the AAMC’s U.S. membership and expanding its reach to international academic health centers.

The AAMC’s member organizations are directly involved in caring for the physical and behavioral health needs of young people. Our members have witnessed firsthand the profound and devastating impact of the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE) on the mental health and well-being of the nation’s children and youth, including a marked rise in mental health-related emergency department visits.

The AAMC has previously partnered with other organizations to advocate for policies that promote the mental and emotional health of children and their families. In July 2021, we co-signed a [letter to Congressional leadership](#) outlining key recommendations to improve the mental health of children and young people, including strengthening Medicaid, extending telehealth flexibilities, integrating physical and behavioral health care, and investing in the pediatric

behavioral health workforce. We further emphasized these and other recommendations in our November 2021 [letter to Senate Finance Committee leadership](#) on barriers to mental health care.

Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) are a key source of coverage for children and young people and are therefore critical to the financing and provision of behavioral health care. According to [data from Georgetown University Center for Children and Families](#), approximately one-half of the nation's children receive health insurance coverage through Medicaid and CHIP. However, coverage alone does not ensure access to care. The comparatively low reimbursement rates provided by Medicaid—on average, just [two-thirds](#) of the rates proffered by Medicare—disincentivize provider participation in the program, resulting in network inadequacy and subpar access to care. This issue is particularly acute among specialty providers, including pediatric behavioral health clinicians. A recent [MACPAC presentation](#) noted that just 35 percent of psychiatrists are willing to accept new patients covered by Medicaid. This research demonstrates that low reimbursement rates are a major hurdle to accessing mental and behavioral health services among young people with Medicaid coverage.

The “Strengthen Kids’ Mental Health Now Act” aims to address these challenges by increasing Medicaid reimbursement rates for pediatric behavioral health services and expanding the pediatric behavioral health workforce. Through a 100% federal matching rate, the proposed legislation would ensure that Medicaid reimbursement rates for pediatric mental health services match Medicare levels. If enacted, this legislation would strengthen behavioral health provider network adequacy for children and youth covered under Medicaid.

This legislation proposes to strengthen our nation's pediatric behavioral health workforce and invest in integrated and community-based models of care. This legislation would authorize HRSA to establish a new grant program dedicated to advancing access to integrated behavioral health models for children and youth. Integrated behavioral health (IBH) involves medical and behavioral health clinicians working as a multidisciplinary care team to address the medical and behavioral health factors that impact patients' well-being. IBH models not only improve the convenience and coordination of mental health care, but also reduce the stigma around mental health services, as patients can receive mental health services within the primary or specialty care setting. In addition, this legislation would establish a new HRSA program to promote the recruitment, training, and retention of our behavioral health workforce. The AAMC believes that these investments are a crucial first step towards improving our health care system's capacity to meet the growing behavioral health needs of children and young people.

The AAMC appreciates your leadership on the “Strengthen Kids’ Mental Health Now Act” and we look forward to working with you to pass this legislation and help ensure children and young people can access the behavioral health care they need to thrive. If you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me directly or Sinead Hunt, Legislative Analyst, Government Relations (sihunt@aamc.org).

Sincerely,

Representatives Eshoo, Fitzpatrick and Blunt Rochester
Apr. 27

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Karen Fisher". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Karen Fisher, JD
Chief Public Policy Officer
Association of American Medical Colleges

CC: David J. Skorton, MD
President and CEO
Association of American Medical Colleges