

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
Of
Subcommittee on Health Chairwoman Anna G. Eshoo

Hearing on “Communities in Need: Legislation to Support Mental Health and Well-Being”

April 5, 2022

Our children are in crisis and Congress must act.

Last October, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the Children’s Hospital Association declared a national emergency in youth mental health.

Emergency department visits for children’s mental health more than doubled between 2016 and 2020. According to a new CDC report released just last week, 1 in 5 teens have contemplated suicide during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, 44% of students said they felt sad or hopeless.

Despite the frequency of mental illness, too many suffer in silence. Mental health is a neglected part of our health care system. Less than 40 percent of people with mental illness receive treatment. Children fare worse. Even prior to the pandemic, approximately half of children with mental disorders did not receive care.

This inadequate mental health system is due to insufficient insurance coverage, limited options due to poor provider reimbursement, and an aging system that too often relies on prisons, jails, and shelters.

The good news is there are many strong bills to address these issues. Today we’re considering **19** bills with two expert panels of witnesses, including Administrators of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Health Resources and Service Administration.

I’m proud to have sponsored, along with Representatives Blunt-Rochester and Fitzpatrick, H.R. 7236, the *Strengthen Kids’ Mental Health Now Act*. This comprehensive bill supports the entire continuum of mental health care for children by increasing reimbursement for pediatric mental health services through Medicaid and by creating new grant programs to expand our national capacity to deliver appropriate care for children.

Eleven other bills also address pediatric mental care by addressing the recent increase in youth suicides, racial disparities in mental health outcomes, telehealth, and access to mental health services in families’ communities.

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Several bills also address further gaps in mental health care, including creating high-quality housing for individuals with substance use disorder, improving virtual peer support, and establishing the Special Behavioral Health Program for Indians.

This slate of bills shows that there is clearly bipartisan demand to address the mental health crisis in both the pediatric and adult populations.

Our nation faces large and difficult challenges, but these challenges are not insurmountable. We can provide the mental health care and support our fellow Americans need to live and thrive.

Today's hearing is the first step in moving a comprehensive legislative package to address our nation's ongoing mental health crisis.