



Mental Health Care Services

ACTION

- Increase funding for the Community Mental Health Performance Partnership Block Grant, the principal federal discretionary program for residential and community-based mental health services for adults and children.
- Increase funding for the Children’s Mental Health Services Program, which provides six-year grants to states and local communities to help them develop intensive, comprehensive community-based mental health services for children with serious emotional disturbances.
- Provide first-time funding for the Mental Health and Child Welfare Services Integration program, which would address the serious needs of children and adolescents in the child welfare system and the needs of youth at risk for placement in the system.
- Pass the Keeping Families Together Act (S. 1704/H.R. 3243), legislation to address the problem of parents forced to relinquish custody rights to the state to obtain mental health care for their seriously ill children.
- Support the recommendations of the President’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, including early co-occurring mental health and substance abuse screening, assessment, and referral to services to promote the mental health of young and adolescent children.
- Pass the Lifespan Respite Care Act (S. 538/H.R. 1083), legislation that would provide a break from caring for children with severe disabilities for parents and other caregivers who have trouble finding trained respite care providers or paying for respite services.
- Pass the Senator Paul Wellstone Mental Health Equitable Treatment Act (S. 486/H.R. 953), which would require group health plans that provide mental health benefits to do so without arbitrary limits that differ from limits applied to medical and surgical care. This is the same health coverage currently available to members of Congress, federal employees, and their families.

HISTORY

The President’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health found that our nation’s failure to prioritize mental health is a national tragedy. Nowhere is this more evident than among children in foster care who have extensive mental health needs, as most have experienced some form of abuse or neglect and suffer from being separated from their families. CWLA believes that more resources must be dedicated to research and services for children in out-of-home care so they can receive the mental health services they need and deserve to live healthy, productive lives.

Mental Health Services Block Grant

An increasingly critical source of funding for state and local mental health departments and programs is the federal Community Mental Health Services Performance Partnership Block Grant. It provides services such as case management, emergency interventions, residential care, and 24-hour hotlines to stabilize people in crisis, as well as coordination of care for individuals with schizophrenia or manic depression who require extensive supports.

The Mental Health Programs of Regional and National Significance provide local communities the opportunity to improve mental health services by implementing proven, evidence-based practices for adults and children with serious emotional disorders. These programs allow state and local mental health authorities to access information about the most promising methods for improving programs. Current areas of

importance include the state child welfare system, the criminal justice system, children who are victims or witnesses of violence, services for persons with co-occurring mental illnesses and additional disorders, and prevention of school violence and suicide, particularly for children and adolescents. In FY 2004, this program was funded at \$415 million.

Children's Mental Health Services Program

The Children's Mental Health Services Program develops organized systems of care for children with serious emotional disturbances in child welfare, juvenile justice, and special education who often fail to receive the mental health services they require. Extensive evaluation of this program suggests that it has had a significant impact on the communities it serves. Outcomes for children and their families have improved, including symptom reduction, improvement in school performance, fewer out-of-home placements, and fewer hospitalizations. This program was funded at \$103 million in FY 2004.

Keeping Families Together Act

The Keeping Families Together Act (S. 1704/H.R. 3243) is designed to address the barriers that prevent families with children who have mental or emotional disorders from accessing critical mental health services. This bipartisan legislation, introduced by Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) and Representatives Jim Ramstad (R-MN), Patrick Kennedy (D-RI), and Pete Stark (D-CA), would allow states to build new infrastructures to more efficiently serve children needing mental health services, while keeping them with their families in their own homes. Providing these new resources (\$55 million in grants to states over six years) would help ensure that children and youth who are in state custody or at risk of entering state custody receive critical mental health services.

Lifespan Respite Care Act

The Senate approved the Lifespan Respite Care Act (S. 538/H.R. 1083) on April 10, 2003. This bill, introduced by Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY) and Representative Jim Langevin (D-RI), is awaiting action in the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health. The bill would provide a coordinated system of accessible, community-based respite options for primary caregivers who provide round-the-clock care for family members with special needs. The need is great—as many as one- to two-thirds of caregivers report physical and mental health problems due to ongoing caregiving. Children with disabilities are almost four times more likely than their nondisabled peers to be physically and emotionally abused; without respite care, the risk of out-of-home placement for children increases 35%.

KEY FACTS

- Between 5% and 9% of all children in America have a serious emotional disturbance.¹
- One in 10 children and adolescents has a mental illness severe enough to cause some level of impairment. Yet, only one in five receives mental health services in any given year—meaning nearly 80% of children who need mental health services do not receive treatment.²
- Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among youth ages 10–14; third among young people 15–24.³
- Moderate to severe mental health and behavioral problems affect 50%–80% of children; about 60% of preschool age children in foster care have developmental delays. Fewer than 5% of children are without psychological symptoms.⁴
- Only about 25% of children in foster care receive mental health services at any given time.⁵
- Eighty percent of children entering the child welfare or juvenile justice systems have mental disorders.⁶
- Based on interviews with child welfare directors in 19 states and juvenile justice officials in 30 counties, in FY 2001, parents placed more than 12,700 children in the child welfare or juvenile justice system so their children could receive mental health treatment.⁷

SOURCES

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