



APA Public Interest Government Relations Office

Child Health Care Crisis Relief Act (S. 1572/H.R. 2073)

According to the Surgeon General's report on mental health, one in ten children and adolescents in the United States, totaling almost 14 million young people, has a mental health problem severe enough to cause some level of impairment. However, it is estimated that only one in five of such children receives specialty mental health services. The Child Health Care Crisis Relief Act is urgently needed to remove one of the major barriers to treatment – the lack of available child mental health professionals.

- **Child and adolescent mental health problems are at a point of crisis in our nation.** One out of every ten children or adolescents has a serious mental health problem, and another 10% has mild to moderate problems. Mental health problems in young people can lead to tragic consequences, including suicide, substance abuse, inability to live independently, involvement with the correctional system, failure to complete high school, lack of vocational success, and health problems.
- **There is a lack of mental health services for children and adolescents.** Less than half of children with mental health problems receives treatment, services, or support. Families that are poor, are people of color, or have children with other disabilities have an especially difficult time accessing services that would identify, prevent or treat mental health problems.
- **Research has shown a dearth of appropriately trained clinical child psychologists, child psychiatrists, and social workers.** Only one out of five children and adolescents receives treatment from a mental health professional with special training to work with children. There are particularly acute shortages in the number of mental health service professionals serving children and adolescents with serious emotional disorders.
- **Without action, the outlook for improvement looks grim.** The U.S. Bureau of Health Professions projects that the demand for mental health services for children and adolescents will double between 1995 and 2020.
- **Untreated mental health problems have major adverse repercussions for children and their families.** Scarcity of mental health professionals will limit access to treatment, exacerbating child and adolescent mental health problems and increasing the probability of engagement in risky behaviors.
- **Provisions in the Child Health Care Crisis Relief Act (S. 1572/H.R. 2073) target both education and practice to address the critical shortage of psychologists and other mental health professionals working with children and adolescents.** Education incentives, training enhancement, and support to community-based providers are essential to improve the quantity and quality of child and adolescent mental health services. For example:
 - With increased funding, graduate training programs will have the resources to enhance their training curricula and prepare qualified professionals to work with children and adolescents.
 - Funding for community-based providers increases the likelihood that children and adolescents, particularly those who are underserved, low-income, members of racially and ethnically diverse groups, or residents of rural communities will receive quality mental health services.
 - Increased funding is critical to remove major barriers to treatment and would enable millions of children and adolescents to receive the help they desperately need and deserve.

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The American Psychological Association Recommends Increased Funding for:

- **Education and training to support increased numbers of mental health professionals** in psychology and other disciplines to more effectively address the mental health needs of children, adolescents, and their families.
- **Curriculum development and continuing education** to disseminate state-of-the-art knowledge about advanced tools and methods that have been found to be safe and most effective for the diagnosis and treatment of mental health problems in children and adolescents. Training should emphasize sensitivity to family needs, cultural and language differences, and what is appropriate for children at different ages.
- **Training frontline providers**, including those in schools, child care, primary health care, juvenile justice, and child protective services to detect and recognize mental health problems in youth and to take appropriate action.
- **Research, research training, and interdisciplinary efforts** that will find new behavioral, pharmacological, and multiple component approaches to effectively treat child and adolescent mental health problems.

