

Subcommittee on Children & Families

Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions

Chairman Bob Casey ~ Ranking Member Bill Cassidy

Health Care Capacity for Pediatric Mental Health Act of 2022

U.S. Senators Bob Casey (D-PA) and Bill Cassidy (R-LA)

Mental health services for youth have long been inadequate—and the pandemic worsened the crisis:

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted gaps in mental health care for kids as communities and health care providers are struggling to meet the demand for support. Mental health disorders have long been among the leading causes of death and disability among young people, affecting [about one in five children](#). In 2019, [over a third](#) of high school students reported persistent sadness or hopelessness, [up 40% from 2009](#). Research has shown that mental health in childhood and adolescence is associated with [immediate and long-term physical health, health risk behaviors, social relationships, education, and employment](#). Further, for over a decade, there has been an alarming rise in youth suicide, making suicide the [second leading cause of death for youth ages 10-14](#). Unfortunately, many families are unable to access mental health care that is timely, affordable and appropriate for a child or teen's specific needs. Because of inadequate capacity to deliver essential mental health support across the country, [children's health care organizations have declared a national emergency](#) in child and adolescent mental health.

Investments in behavioral health care and workforce development can save lives:

Access to the right mental health and substance use disorder care at the right time can change the trajectory of a child or teen's life—and for some it can be life-saving. Behavioral health integration—the practice of coordinating physical and behavioral health services as well as community-based resources—can save lives by ensuring a strong network of holistic supports for youth. Investments in behavioral health integration and workforce development are critical for sustainable, long-term and life-saving youth behavioral health care.

The Health Care Capacity for Pediatric Mental Health Act:

The Health Care Capacity for Pediatric Mental Health Act would create new grant programs to help health care providers:

- Integrate mental health care into their services, including building out more telehealth and in-person mental, emotional, behavioral, and substance use disorder health care options;
- Facilitate access to behavioral health services in partial hospital, day treatment, intensive outpatient programs or walk-in crisis assessment programs to prevent hospitalizations and support children as they transition back to their homes and communities;
- Collect data on pediatric mental, emotional, behavioral and substance use disorder health care needs and service utilization and availability to identify unmet needs and barriers in access to care;
- Establish community-based pediatric mental health and substance use disorder partnerships, such as partnerships with schools, early childhood education programs, community-based organizations and mental health and substance use disorder care providers, to address gaps in access to care;
- Train primary care providers, pediatricians, psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, social workers, counselors, community health workers, care coordinators and other health care professionals in trauma-informed, culturally-sensitive care for pediatric mental health and substance use disorders; and
- Enhance health system infrastructure to respond to the demand for mental health and substance use disorder care, including through the expansion of telehealth capabilities and intermediate care programs.