

Talking Points: Adequate Funding for Mental Health

Alabama's pediatricians cannot overemphasize the critical need for services in Alabama for children with mental health issues, numbers of which have risen dramatically in the last several years. A rising number of Alabama children are faced with trauma and adverse childhood experiences. The American Academy of Pediatrics and other national and state organizations have declared a national children's mental health emergency, citing the serious toll of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The Chapter is partnering with the Alabama Department of Mental Health to mitigate these effects and looks to policymakers for their continued consideration of ways to address these statistics. ADMH and the AL-AAP are grateful for the support of the Alabama Legislature, which in the past several years, has appropriated much-needed funding for School-Based Mental Health Collaboration and other pathways to increase mental health services for children.

The Problem:

- During the pandemic, we have seen an increase in numbers of people with depression and anxiety.
 - Individuals with depression and anxiety die eight years earlier than others
 - 200 million lost workdays and \$200 billion in healthcare costs
- Decreased mental health among caregivers is associated with subsequent poor mental health among children.
- Individuals with fewer socioeconomic resources experience a greater burden of mental health disorders because of their lack of access to care.
- Even if the increase in symptoms does not meet diagnostic criteria, individuals are experiencing symptoms that can affect success in school, work and relationships.
- Up to one in five children has a reported mental, emotional, developmental or behavioral disorder.
 - Youth with mental health challenges also experience a higher risk for early substance use, regular substance use, and substance use disorder.
 - Even the first use of a drug can be deadly if laced with fentanyl.
 - Early investment in mental health care yields up to 10 times the savings in health care, juvenile and criminal justice, and lost productivity.

- In two of Alabama's fastest growing communities, youth must be transported out of the community for crisis stabilization services.
- In Huntsville, the local ambulance service transports approximately 800 youth per year out of the county for psychiatric stabilization.
- In 2021, East Alabama Medical Center was unable to provide access to mental healthcare to almost 500 individuals (255 children and adolescents/239 adults) because of lack of available services.

The Ask:

The Governor's recommended budget fully funds the ADMH budget request in the state's Education Trust Fund.

- Includes a \$1 million increase for School-Based Mental Health Collaboration, building on previous years' increases, which will expand access to this program to new and existing sites (existing = school system and local community mental health center that have been operating and funding their program on their own).
 - School-Based Mental Health Collaboration
 - **FY24 Request: \$1,000,000 Education Trust Fund**
- Includes a first-ever state appropriation for the expansion of PATHS – Pediatric Access to Telemental Health Services. The state is applying for a renewal of the federal HRSA grant which currently funds PATHS, and this state investment will not only ensure the program's sustained expansion, it also further strengthens our federal grant application. To date, more than 70 primary care and pediatric practices are enrolled in PATHS, with more than 300 healthcare professionals taking part in the program. This means even more of Alabama's children and families have access to high-quality behavioral healthcare in their local communities.
 - Expansion of Pediatric Access to Telemental Health Services (PATHS)
 - **FY24 Request: \$1,032,730 Education Trust Fund**