



May 9, 2024

The Honorable August Pfluger
United States House of Representatives
1124 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kathy Castor
United States House of Representatives
2052 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Joyce
United States House of Representatives
152 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John P. Sarbanes
United States House of Representatives
2370 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Pfluger, Castor, Joyce, and Sarbanes:

On behalf of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMH) Coalition, a group of organizations representing a diverse array of perspectives, dedicated to promoting the mental health and well-being of infants, children, adolescents, and young adults, we write in support of your legislation, the *Early Action and Responsiveness Lifts Youth (EARLY) Minds Act* (H.R. 7808). The bipartisan *EARLY Minds Act* would allow states to better tailor the response to the youth mental health crisis in their states by allowing them to use funds from the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant (MHBG), which is administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), for prevention and early intervention services.

The MHBG is SAMHSA's most significant investment in the provision of mental health care services throughout the country. However, as currently authorized, states cannot spend MHBG dollars in ways they might want. Most significantly, the MHBG can be used only to provide services to adults with serious mental illness (SMI) or children with serious emotional disturbance (SED), which limits its use to individuals with very high needs and effectively prohibits funds from being used for early intervention and prevention. Prevention and early intervention services are particularly critical for children and teens regardless of whether or not they have a mental health diagnosis because services may delay or prevent crisis situations. Research shows that early intervention services can reduce the severity of mental health conditions in youth and delay or stop the onset of SED.ⁱ

Prevention and early intervention initiatives are wide-ranging, and many evidence-based programs have shown success in improving mental health outcomes and reducing anxiety, depression, and stress in participants over time. These programs include mental health literacy programs, parenting programs, outreach initiatives, and integration of mental health care into primary care and school settings, among many others. The *Early Minds Act* would allow states to expand the reach and impact of these programs.

The *Early Minds Act* also requires states to report on prevention and early intervention strategies funded through the MHBG. SAMHSA must then compile that information and report to Congress every two years detailing which states utilized the option to fund prevention and early intervention activities, how they allocated the funds, the populations reached, and outcomes of participants in the funded initiatives. Through

these reports, SAMHSA, Congress, and stakeholders will be able to review the impact of prevention and early intervention services on mental health outcomes.

On behalf of our organizations, we thank you for your leadership to address the mental health needs of children and adolescents. As you know, our nation's children cannot wait. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth ages 10-18 in the United States.ⁱⁱ In 2021, 29% of high school students reported experiencing poor mental health, and 42% reported feeling persistently sad or hopeless.ⁱⁱⁱ To address this crisis, youth deserve investments across the full continuum of pediatric mental health care, including prevention and early intervention. We look forward to working with you to advance this legislation. If we can be of further assistance, please contact Madeline Curtis (mcurtis@aap.org) at the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
Association of Children's Residential & Community Services (ACRC)
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Children's Hospital Association
Committee for Children
Family Voices
First Focus Campaign for Children
Mental Health America
MomsRising
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Children's Alliance
National Federation of Families
National League for Nursing
Nemours Children's Health
Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine
The Jed Foundation
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
Trust for America's Health

ⁱ Cuijpers P, Pineda BS, Quero S, Karyotaki E, Struijs SY, Figueroa CA, Llamas JA, Furukawa TA, Muñoz RF. Psychological interventions to prevent the onset of depressive disorders: A meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *Clinical psychology review*. 2021 Feb 1;83:101955.

ⁱⁱ National Vital Statistics System. Leading Causes of Death, United States. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2020 <https://wisqars.cdc.gov/data/lcd/home>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report, 2011-2021. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2023. https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/yrbs_data_summary_and_trends.htm