Children’s Hospitals Ask Congress to Prioritize Mental Health Needs for Youth
Child Patients participate in the 2021 Speak Now for Kids Family Advocacy Week

WASHINGTON, DC – Today marks the start of the 2021 Speak Now for Kids Family Advocacy Week with the participation of 50 patient families from children’s hospitals across the nation. Having a child, teen or young adult with significant health challenges is made worse when there are barriers to receiving care they need to survive and thrive. Families will share their individual health care journeys with their lawmakers.

This year will have a special focus on pediatric mental health, a crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In partnership with Children’s Hospital Association (CHA), seven patients and their families have agreed to speak publicly about their battles with mental, emotional and behavioral health issues to help persuade Congress to advance more impactful policies such as those in the legislative proposal Strengthening Kids’ Mental Health Now.

- **Samuel, age 4**, and **Tori, age 10** – Connecticut Children’s
- **Xander, age 11** – Seattle Children’s
- **Lainey, age 12** – Dayton Children’s Hospital
- **Zach, age 16** – Wolfson Children’s Hospital
- **Iker, age 17** – St. Joseph’s Children’s Hospital
- **Carson, age 18** – Children’s Wisconsin

“These courageous children and teens and their parents represent the experiences of millions of families across the country,” said Amy Knight, president of CHA. “The pandemic has shone an unfortunate light on the many ways our youth have been impacted by the pandemic and we must confront the mental health crisis facing our kids through supportive policymaking.”

From April to October 2020, hospitals nationally saw a 24% increase in the proportion of mental health emergency department visits for kids ages 5 to 11, and a 31% increase in the 12- to 17-year-old age group, compared to 2019 according to the CDC. In the last half of 2020, children’s hospitals saw a 17% increase in suicide and self-injury cases (inpatient and emergency) compared to the year before.

- Connecticut Children’s emergency department screens all patients age 10 for risk of suicide. On average, in 2020, 15-17% of those screenings were positive. In the current fiscal year, 22-25% of children are screening positive for suicidal ideation.
• Seattle Children’s in Washington reported seeing one or two patients every night in March of this year for attempted suicide while also noting that due to a statewide lack of inpatient beds, some patients were waiting in the emergency department for up to two weeks.
• Dayton Children’s Hospital saw a 23% increase in behavioral health inpatient days from July 2020 through May 2021 compared to the same period in the previous year.
• Wolfson Children’s Hospital in Jacksonville, Florida, has seen a 300% increase in the number of behavioral health emergency admissions since April 2020.
• St. Joseph’s Children’s Hospital in Tampa, Florida, is seeing an explosion in volume and acuity of mental health needs with increased inpatient admissions for serious suicide attempts.
• Children’s Wisconsin in Milwaukee has experienced an 80% increase in referrals for mental health services in December 2020 compared to December 2019.

“The overwhelming demand for pediatric mental health services is putting an unprecedented strain on pediatric facilities, primary care, schools and community-based organizations that support kids’ well-being,” noted Knight. “Children’s hospitals and patient families are asking Congress this week to help us confront the mental health crisis by improving access to care across all health settings.”

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ABOUT THE CHILDREN’S HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION

The Children’s Hospital Association is the national voice of more than 220 children’s hospitals, advancing child health through innovation in the quality, cost and delivery of care. Learn more about the patient advocates participating in the 2021 Speak Now for Kids Family Advocacy Week.