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**June 8, 2022**

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**Children's Hospitals Continue to Press Congress on Prioritizing  
Mental Health Needs for Youth**

WASHINGTON, D.C. — As Congress continues its work to develop bipartisan mental health legislation, children’s hospital patients and their families from across the country will ask legislators next week to prioritize the needs of children.

More than 40 patient families from 32 children’s hospitals are participating in the 17th annual Speak Now for Kids Family Advocacy Day, June 12-14, conducted by Children’s Hospital Association (CHA). CHA, joined by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP), declared [a national emergency](https://www.soundthealarmforkids.org/2021/11/02/sound-the-alarm-for-kids-raises-awareness-of-national-mental-health-emergency-in-children-and-teens/) in children’s mental health last October. Following that declaration, the U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, M.D., released a [national advisory](https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf) on youth mental health emphasizing a whole-of-society approach to address the crisis and mitigate the pandemic’s impact on kids.

Since then, bipartisan mental health bills that include children have been introduced in both chambers. Through their visits with lawmakers, children’s hospitals and their patient advocates will stress the need to prioritize comprehensive legislation focused on kids for enactment this year.

Six patients and their families have agreed to speak publicly about their journeys with mental, emotional and behavioral health conditions to help persuade Congress to advance child-focused policies.

[Emma](https://www.speaknowforkids.org/meet_emma_2022_family_advocacy_day_champion) – age 17 – Children's Hospital Colorado (CO)

[Lydia](https://www.speaknowforkids.org/meet_lydia_2022_family_advocacy_day_champion) – age 11 – Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (PA)

[Adrian & Maria Isabella](https://www.speaknowforkids.org/meet_adrian_and_maria_isabella_2022_family_advocacy_day_champions) – age 13, age 10 – Seattle Children’s (WA)

[Lizzy](https://www.speaknowforkids.org/meet_lizzy_2022_family_advocacy_day_champion) – age 17 – St. Joseph’s Children’s Hospital/BayCare Kids (FL)

[Austin](https://www.speaknowforkids.org/meet_austin_2022_family_advocacy_day_champion) – age 11 – Children's Wisconsin (WI)

“Long before COVID-19, children were increasingly suffering from mental health concerns, many were in crisis. The pandemic has made it much worse,” said Amy Wimpey Knight, president of CHA. “We need to urgently respond and meet the comprehensive mental health needs of kids and teens. From preventive care to trauma-informed treatment, kids and families need help now. Congress is in a position to help by increasing the capacity—workforce, programs and services—of our pediatric health care system to meet this unprecedented demand.”

Children’s hospitals, pediatricians and other mental health providers see firsthand the impact mental, emotional and behavioral conditions have on children and families. For children’s hospitals, this means treating a growing number of children in crisis in their Emergency Departments (EDs), specialty clinics and inpatient units. Children presenting in children’s hospital EDs for mental health conditions since the onset of the pandemic have been more likely to require admission and have had longer patient stays.

* Compared to 2016, in 2021, children’s hospitals saw a 153% increase in emergency department visits for suicide attempts and self-injury among kids ages 5-18.
* Currently there are 10 psychiatrists per 100,000 kids and teens ages 0-19. However, it’s estimated that the country actually needs 47 per 100,000.
* The kids’ mental health crisis has caused an increase in boarding. Compared to before the pandemic, 84% of hospitals are boarding more youth patients, and 75% are reporting longer boarding stays.

“We urge Congress to pass legislation this year that will strengthen our nation’s pediatric mental health system and guarantee the resources today’s kids need to grow into healthy, thriving adults,” added Knight.