**Strengthen Kids’ Mental Health Now (H.R. 7236)**

**Q&A**

**Q: What will the Strengthen Kids’ Mental Health Now Act do?**

**A:**

* The Strengthen Kids’ Mental Health Now Act will expand access to mental health services and build greater mental health capacity across the country to better support children and the dedicated professionals who care for their mental health.
* This legislation will address the unique mental health needs of children, who to date have not been adequately prioritized, too often falling between the cracks of our existing system, without access to programs and support tailored to meet their needs.
* Strengthen Kids’ Mental Health Now Act will:
	+ Support Pediatric Providers: Increase Medicaid reimbursement for pediatric mental health services to match Medicare levels, providing direct targeted support to pediatric mental health practitioners.
	+ Expand Services: Direct HHS to issue guidance to states on how to expand pediatric mental, emotional and behavioral health services under state Medicaid plans.
	+ Establish Best Practices for Telehealth: Require HHS to issue guidance to states on best practices to enhance the availability of telehealth services.
	+ Promote Flexibility for Hospitals and Providers to Better Care for Patients: Direct HHS to provide guidance to states on existing flexibilities for hospitals and other providers to enhance their capacity to provide pediatric care for children with significant mental health needs.
	+ Create Programs to Support Pediatric Behavioral Health Care:
		- Fund grants for eligible health care providers, hospitals and clinics to engage in activities to enhance the delivery of community-based mental and behavioral health services for children and adolescents.
		- Fund new programs focused on developing and expanding the pediatric mental health workforce.
	+ Increase Investment in Pediatric Behavioral Health Services: Authorizes a grant program to develop and strengthen critical pediatric mental health infrastructure and address gaps in the continuum of care for children, including new facilities, investment in technology to facilitate telehealth and expanding intensive outpatient services, partial hospitalization programs and day programs.

**Q: Why is this comprehensive legislation necessary?**

**A:**

* There is a severe mental health crisis among our children and teens.
* Children's mental health concerns were common before the COVID-19 pandemic, with 1 in 5 children experiencing a mental health condition annually.
* A shortage of pediatric mental health professionals and a longstanding lack of investment in dedicated supports to aid children and teens have exacerbated this escalating crisis:
	+ Visits to children’s hospitals for emergency care and inpatient treatment more than doubled for 6- to 12-year-olds for mental health conditions since 2016. [Children’s Hospital Association Pediatric Health Information System Database (PHIS)]
	+ Nationwide, 60% of youth with major depression are not receiving any type of mental health treatment. [Mental Health America, [2022](https://mhanational.org/sites/default/files/2022%20State%20of%20Mental%20Health%20in%20America.pdf)]
	+ There are only 8,000 to 9,000 child and adolescent psychiatrists in the U.S.—that’s only 10 per 100,000 kids and teens ages 0 to 19. However, it’s estimated that the country actually needs 47 child and adolescent psychiatrists per 100,000. [American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, [2018](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Advocacy/Federal_and_State_Initiatives/Workforce_Maps/Home.aspx)]
	+ There are only 5.4 clinical child and adolescent psychologists per 100,000 people under 18 years old. [Behavioral Health Workforce Research Center, [2020](https://www.behavioralhealthworkforce.org/project/supply-of-child-and-adolescent-behavioral-health-providers/)]
	+ Nearly 3 million students do not have access to a school-based mental health professional, such as a school psychologist, counselor or social worker. (American School Counselor Association, [2019](https://www.schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/b079d17d-6265-4166-a120-3b1f56077649/School-Counselors-Matter.pdf)]
* The pandemic worsened this ongoing and significant crisis in children's mental health by causing disruptions in daily routine, social isolation, financial insecurity, prolonged stress and grief for many children and families.
* Unfortunately, our current system and infrastructure to handle this mental health crisis are inadequate and fragmented, and families, children and teens are suffering.
* American families, children and teens need this comprehensive investment to improve our nation’s mental health infrastructure to fill the gaps, stem the tide of suicide and self-injury and support struggling youth.

**Q: Why does this bill have this associated cost?**

**A:**

* Severe problems require comprehensive solutions. While trends in kids’ mental health have been worrying for some time, we are currently facing an unprecedented, wide-spread crisis in kids’ mental health.
* Children and teens are a uniquely vulnerable population, and for too long the mental health issues they face have been lost within broader concerns of mental health or overlooked entirely.
* The importance of investing in services and supports that promote access to necessary pediatric mental health care cannot be overstated.
* By investing in prevention, early identification and treatment, children will grow up healthier and develop the skills they need to go on to fulfilling lives, helping American families and communities everywhere.
* Children need access to developmentally appropriate mental health services and supports within their communities—and they need it now more than ever.