

May 23, 2022

The Honorable Ron Johnson
328 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
709 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bryan Steil
1526 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mark Pocan
1727 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ron Kind
1502 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Gwen Moore
2252 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Scott Fitzgerald
1507 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Glenn Grothman
1427 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Tiffany
1719 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Gallagher
1230 Longworth House Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Members of the Wisconsin Congressional Delegation,

The undersigned Wisconsin professional organizations and pediatric health care providers write to express our support for strengthening the federal response to the current mental and behavioral health crisis facing our children. Specifically, we ask that you work with your colleagues and House and Senate Leadership to prioritize and advance bold legislation this year that includes proposals that provide tailored and dedicated support for children's mental and behavioral health.

As recently highlighted on *60 Minutes*, children and adolescents in Wisconsin and across the nation are facing a mental and behavioral health crisis that existed prior to the pandemic and has worsened due to the added stress of the last two years. According to Wisconsin's Office of Children's Mental Health, one in five Wisconsin children have a diagnosable mental illness and approximately 40 percent are not accessing treatment. A recent analysis of health plan claims data showed that Wisconsin is in the top five states in the nation for the most intentional self-harm claims among those ages 6 to 22. Providers on the frontlines are seeing increases in the number and acuity of kids who present with primary and secondary mental and behavioral health complaints in their offices. In Wisconsin, nearly every statistic you look at related to mental health tells us our children are suffering.

As stakeholders committed to improving access to mental and behavioral health services for children in the state, we have made progress in expanding access to care, including in schools and pediatrician offices, and funding initiatives to grow our own workforce. Yet, the increased demand for mental and behavioral health services has stressed already inadequate and under-resourced systems, leaving far too many children waiting for desperately needed services at all levels of care. It is clear that existing federal programs are insufficient to address the scale of the national children's mental health crisis. More must be done to support children's access to the right care, in the right setting, at the right time.

We ask that you ensure that any legislation advanced this year includes purposefully designed and tailored investments to: bolster the pediatric mental and behavioral health workforce; promote integration of mental and behavioral health services across a variety of settings; and strengthen systems of care to ensure children have timely access to culturally and developmentally appropriate mental and behavioral health services across the care continuum. To transform the system of care for children, we need policies to ensure payer compliance with parity laws and increased investments in the Medicaid program, the largest payer of pediatric mental and behavioral health services, to ensure providers can continue working to meet the mental and behavioral health care needs of children.

It will take partnership, collaboration and investments from all stakeholders to address the urgent needs of our children. We must collaborate to ensure the kids in the state receive the supports and health care they need to thrive into adulthood. We urge you to work with your colleagues to ensure that federal policies are advanced in support of our shared goal of improving the mental and behavioral health of our children.

Sincerely,

Advocate Aurora Health
Bellin Health
Catalapa Health
Children's Wisconsin
Gundersen Health System
HSHS Wisconsin
Marshfield Clinic Health System
Medical College of Wisconsin
ThedaCare
UW Health Kids
Wisconsin Association of Family & Children's Agencies
Wisconsin Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Wisconsin Hospital Association
Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association