

August 26, 2022

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human
Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

The Honorable Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, PhD
Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and
Substance Use
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Administration
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857

VIA EMAIL TRANSMISSION

Dear Secretary Becerra and Assistant Secretary Delphin-Rittmon,

We write as health, mental health, and child-serving organizations to urge the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to focus on the needs of children and adolescents in the implementation of 988 and to quickly release guidance on youth crisis systems. While we appreciate the steps HHS has taken over the last year to begin to address our national crisis in mental health and to support the implementation of 988, the needs of children and youth urgently require further attention. Young people have very different needs than adults and we are deeply concerned that the guidance has been delayed beyond the launch of the new number and during a youth mental health crisis.

As the Surgeon General stated upon issuing his advisory on the youth mental health crisis:

Mental health challenges in children, adolescents, and young adults are real and widespread. Even before the pandemic, an alarming number of young people struggled with feelings of helplessness, depression, and thoughts of suicide — and rates have increased over the past decade. The COVID-19 pandemic further altered their experiences at home, school, and in the community, and the effect on their mental health has been devastating. The future wellbeing of our country depends on how we support and invest in the next generation.

Many of our organizations have joined in [declaring a national emergency](#) in child and adolescent mental health based on the alarming data and experiences in local communities across the country. Recent CDC data indicate that 44% of students report feeling persistently sad or hopeless in the past year and emergency room visits for adolescent girls increased 51% from 2019-2021. The impact on youth of color and LGBTQ+ youth has been particularly alarming. A Congressional Black Caucus Task Force [report](#) on Black youth suicide noted that the suicide death rate of Black youth is increasing faster than any other race or ethnicity and [recent data](#) from the Trevor Project indicate that almost half of LGBTQ+ youth and more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth seriously considered suicide in 2021. Given this increase in mental distress, the need for a focus on youth crisis and an emphasis on responsive services for at-risk youth is urgent.

In December of 2021, SAMHSA issued extensive technical assistance on adult crisis systems, including guidelines, a toolkit and other materials for states and other stakeholders. This information has been very helpful as states develop their 988 implementation plans. Unfortunately, SAMHSA has not issued similar resources for the child and adolescent crisis system. Several of the undersigned organizations requested this guidance in February of 2022 and were told that the documents were in clearance. Six months later, the materials have not been issued.

Many of our local affiliates and members have reported lack of adequate youth crisis services and in-home resources in their communities. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services issued Medicaid guidance on mobile crisis services in December 2021 so more guidance on the implementation of these services specifically for children and in the context of a comprehensive youth crisis system would be an important complement to the earlier financing guidance. Moreover, the need for guidance and youth crisis services only grows more urgent as the 988 number becomes better known and youth return to school where teachers and counselors are expected to highlight this new resource. In the transition week to 988, there was a 45% increase from the prior week in calls, texts and chats and a 66% increase from the same week in 2021. Given that requests for help are expected to continue to rise, it is critical for the federal government to provide timely guidance on community-based crisis services and supports for young people.

We respectfully request that the youth crisis guidance be expedited for release and that the focus on youth in crisis is continued in the upcoming CMS guidance on Medicaid Early Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment requirements and school-based mental health services as required by the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (S. 2938).

Thank you for considering this request. We are eager to work with you moving forward, to ensure that children and youth in crisis can receive the services and support they need. For any questions or follow-up, please feel free to reach out to Mary Giliberti at mgiliberti@mhanational.org, Madeline Curtis at mcurtis@aap.org, or Katherine McGuire at KMcGuire@apa.org.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Pediatrics
American Psychological Association
Mental Health America
2020 Mom
Amer Acad of Soc Work and Soc Welfare
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare

Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Association
Crisis Text Line
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
Education Plus Health
Families USA
First Focus on Children
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
Inseparable
Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Behavioral Healthcare
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC)
National Eating Disorders Association
National Federation of Families
National Health Law Program
National League for Nursing
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies
REDC
RI International
Sandy Hook Promise
School Social Work Association of America
School-Based Health Alliance
The Jed Foundation
The Jewish Federations of North America
The Kennedy Forum
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
The Trevor Project
Trust for America's Health
Youth Villages