

U.S. pediatricians, psychiatrists declare 'emergency' in child mental health

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(HealthDay)—Fear, grief, uncertainty and isolation during the pandemic

have triggered a national state of emergency in the mental health of America's youth, leading child health care groups warned Tuesday.

Youngsters already faced significant mental health challenges, and the pandemic has made them worse, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) and the Children's Hospital Association (CHA). Together, they represent more than 77,000 physicians and more than 200 children's hospitals.

"Children's mental health is suffering. Young people have endured so much throughout this pandemic and while much of the attention is often placed on its physical health consequences, we cannot overlook the escalating mental health crisis facing our patients," AAP President Dr. Lee Savio Beers said in a [news release](#) from the three groups.

"Today's declaration is an urgent call to policymakers at all levels of government — we must treat this mental health crisis like the emergency it is," Savio Beers urged.

The statistics bear that out: Between March and October 2020, the percentage of emergency department visits for children with mental health emergencies rose by 24% among children aged 5 to 11 and by 31% among children aged 12 to 17, the groups said in a statement. And there were 50% more suspected suicide attempt-related emergency room visits among girls aged 12 to 17 in early 2021 than in early 2019.

Recent data also show that more than 140,000 U.S. children have suffered the loss of a primary or secondary caregiver during the pandemic.

"We were concerned about children's emotional and behavioral health even before the pandemic. The ongoing public health emergency has

made a bad situation worse. We are caring for [young people](#) with soaring rates of depression, anxiety, trauma, loneliness and suicidality that will have lasting impacts on them, their families, their communities, and all of our futures. We cannot sit idly by. This is a [national emergency](#), and the time for swift and deliberate action is now," said AACAP President Dr. Gabrielle Carlson.

The groups said in their [declaration](#) that policymakers need to increase funding to ensure all families can access [mental health services](#), improve telemedicine access, support effective school-based [mental health care](#), and strengthen efforts to reduce youth suicide risk, among other measures.

CHA President Amy Wimpey Knight, said, "We are facing a significant national [mental health crisis](#) in our children and teens which requires urgent action. In the first six months of this year, children's hospitals across the country reported a shocking 45% increase in the number of self-injury and suicide cases in 5- to 17-year-olds compared to the same period in 2019. Together with the AAP and the AACAP, we are sounding the alarm on this mental [health](#) emergency."

More information: Unicef has more on the [impact of COVID-19 on children's mental health](#).

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