



2022-2023 Chair's Youth Mental Health Initiative

Pillar Agenda Recommendations

Pillar 1: Prevention and Resilience Building

NGA Focus: Providing youth with the supports and tools necessary to cope with stressors and challenges, helping them to thrive and reduce likelihood of engaging in unhealthy or damaging behaviors. Help all children develop optimally and reduce the prevalence or severity of mental health conditions by building resilience and promoting prevention and early intervention.

Policy Goals

- Screening for mental health concerns at all age levels in school and primary care settings and substance use conditions when indicated by the American Academy of Pediatrics
- Providing life skills training that assist youth in self-awareness, self-management, decision-making, relationship skills and social awareness
- Integrating age-appropriate mental health criteria into K-12 school curricula, including suicide prevention, mental health, and substance use
 - Utilizing evidence-based Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)
- Adopting the Zero Suicide framework throughout health care delivery systems and school systems

Governor's Checklist

- Institute age-appropriate mental health and substance use in school curriculum by requiring life skills and mental health and substance use curriculum standards for K-12
- Incentivize yearly screenings for anxiety, depression, and suicide in school and primary care settings
- Guarantee insurance coverage for an annual, pre-deductible wellness checks, including a review of medical history, evaluation of adverse childhood experiences, and use of a validated mental health screening tool
- Convene relevant system stakeholders to implement a statewide strategic plan for suicide prevention based on the Zero Suicide model

Pillar 2: Increasing Awareness and Reducing Stigma

NGA Focus: Promoting awareness of mental health resources and foundational mental health knowledge by expanding easy access points to education, helplines, and state services. Normalizing help-seeking for

mental health by educating children and youth on mental health and substance use conditions and by increasing access to school-based and school-linked services and supports.

Policy Goals

- Introducing effective tools and creating accessible pathways for families, parents, and youth to understand and participate in their mental health care
 - Implementing standards for K-12 mental health education and building capacity for mental health literacy for youth and their families
- Maximizing access and capacity of school-based and school-linked mental health services and supports
 - Building in-school capacity through school-based providers and peer support
 - Building community capacity through school-linked mental health services, partnerships with community providers, and telehealth services
 - Improving ratios of school mental health professionals such as school psychologists and social workers
 - Maximizing Medicaid coverage of school services (Free Care Rule Reversal)
 - Creating comprehensive and accessible youth-specific crisis supports in schools, homes and community settings, including:
 - Youth mobile crisis response teams
 - Youth-specific crisis stabilization to reduce emergency department overcapacity issues
 - Coordination between schools, juvenile justice and crisis/intensive mental health
 - Public education about 988 and crisis services
- Promoting supportive school environments that end disparities in suspensions, exclusions, and incidence of bullying
- Integrating mental health and substance use care into primary care for children and adolescents
 - Examining provider rates to support integration of care
 - Reviewing contract requirements in Medicaid

Governor's Checklist

- Institute age-appropriate curriculum standards for K-12 mental health and substance use education
- Increase ratios of school mental health professionals to students to align with nationally-recommended ratios
- Create workforce pipelines that incentivize recruitment and retention of diverse school mental health professionals
- Maximize school mental health professionals' ability to work to their license and increase inter-state licensing flexibility and agreements
- Require school and community provider partnerships
 - Build unified platforms for billing between schools, community providers, and payers

- Distribute grant funds to local community mental health agencies for mental health services in schools, including assessment, treatment and care coordination, teacher consultation, and school-wide trainings
- Create regional task forces to address workforce incentives and collaboration with community providers
- Adopt family engagement plans across all districts
- Implement mental health awareness and stigma reduction tools such as anti-bullying measures, adding 988 to student IDs, etc.
- Develop a yearly school climate improvement survey and institute a system to collect and analyze data on current and emerging needs in schools
- Implement alternatives to exclusionary discipline including suspension and expulsion policies and use of school resource officers
- Develop youth-specific crisis response systems, including mobile crisis, crisis receiving, crisis stabilization services, community programming, and warm lines, and
 - Institute 9-8-8 legislation that is attuned to the special needs of youth in crisis
 - Facilitate contracts with counties and LEAs for youth specific crisis teams
 - Incorporate peer supports into crisis models calibrated to youth
 - Include home crisis care models

Pillar 3: Access and Affordability of Quality Treatment and Care

NGA Focus: Building a robust system of supports that meet varying acuity levels, allowing youth to access care before crisis occurs. It is about addressing systemic challenges that have depleted the mental health workforce, leading to expensive treatment located in inaccessible areas with months-long waitlists. And it is about ensuring that families can afford the care they need by expanding insurance and Medicaid coverage and leveraging unique funding opportunities to supplement and amplify state investments.

Policy Goals

- Utilize all available federal funding and ensure schools are maximizing Medicaid reimbursement for school-based mental health services
 - Maximizing available school mental health funding through the free care rule reversal and bridging ESSR and other COVID era funding supports
- Ensure commercial reimbursement for medically necessary mental health services through strong coverage requirements and effective regulations
 - Improving commercial insurance coverage through:
 - Requirements for plans to use generally accepted standards of care and nonprofit clinical association-developed levels of care
 - Commercial coverage of services provided in schools or ordered by a court
- Foster family wellness by expanding workplace mental health coverage and partnering with platforms providing virtual mental health care to youth and families
- Expanding access to continuity of quality coverage through continuous enrollment, waivers, and extended Medicaid coverage, including:

- Section 1115 waivers for continuous enrollment for children under 6 years old and two years of continuous enrollment for all members aged 6 and older, food assistance, housing supports, and other wraparound supports
- Extended coverage through EPSDT and Free Care Rule Reversal
- Commitment to ensuring compliance with EPSDT mandate and parity
- Exploring innovations in access through free mental health visits and telehealth integration
- Build investment in innovative, evidence-based comprehensive treatment modalities based on whole-person care
 - Co-occurring mental health and substance use treatment for youth
 - Coordinated specialty care for first episode psychosis and other evidence-based wraparound models
 - Specialized treatment options
 - Evidence-based nurse home-visiting programs

Governor's Checklist

Maximizing Reimbursement: Medicaid

- File state plan amendments (SPAs) with CMS to expand school-based mental health services to all Medicaid eligible students, including tele-mental health services accessed through video, text, and chat
- Ensure Medicaid plan allows school-based and school-linked mental health providers to be reimbursed for all Medicaid-eligible students
- Require Medicaid contracts to incentivize partnerships between children's mental health providers and school districts for school-based and school-linked mental health and substance use services
 - Build unified platforms for billing between schools, community providers, and payers
 - Distribute grant funds to schools to contract with local community mental health agencies for mental health services in schools, including assessment, treatment and care coordination, teacher consultation, and school-wide trainings
 - Require commercial plans to cover mental health services provided in school settings

Maximizing Reimbursement: Commercial Coverage

- Ensure health plans cover needed youth mental health services by making coverage determinations consistent with accepted clinical standards, rather than treating only children's current symptoms or forcing families to turn to taxpayer-funded public programs.
 - Require health plans to cover out-of-network services if families cannot access in-network services on a timely basis.
 - Institute standard parity compliance and data reporting at state regulatory agencies.
- Ensure health plans cover needed youth mental health services by making coverage determinations consistent with accepted clinical standards, rather than treating only children's current symptoms or forcing families to turn to taxpayer-funded public programs.
- Require health plans to cover out-of-network services if families cannot access in-network services on a timely basis.

- Institute standard parity compliance and data reporting at state regulatory agencies.

Pillar 4: Caregiver and Educator Training and Support

NGA Focus: Ensuring that the adults who surround youth are empowered to manage their own mental health, thereby better supporting positive mental health outcomes for youth. It is also about ensuring that educators and caregivers understand how to identify youth mental health challenges and when and how to refer them to care.

Policy Goals

- Supporting existing school mental health professionals
 - Comprehensive benefits coverage for school employees
 - Providing school teaching staff with tools to recognize and respond to mental health concerns and emergencies by
 - Ensuring pediatric mental health professionals have training in effective interventions for suicidal ideation
 - Mental health training/education for teachers and caregivers
 - Growing the future school mental health workforce
- Supporting families and caregivers
 - Supporting parents by expanding workplace mental health coverage
 - Partnering with platforms providing virtual mental health care to youth and families
 - Requiring school districts to adopt family engagement plans
 - System navigation for caregivers
 - In-home intensive mental health services for families and children

Governor's Checklist

- Grow the school mental health workforce pipeline by implementing licensing changes to target key shortages, introducing new school mental health professional pipeline programs and programs
- Maximize school mental health professionals' ability to work to their license and increasing inter-state licensing flexibility and agreements
- Create regional task forces to address workforce incentives and collaboration with community providers
- Require school teaching staff to attend trainings to recognize and respond to signs of mental health and substance use disorders and include cultural competence in mental health trainings
- Invest in mental health resources for staff and ensure health insurance covers medically necessary mental health care for school employees

Additional Policies for Sustaining Momentum

Policy Goals

- Ensuring long term success and progress of state policy objectives through long term partnerships, centers for training and innovation, and data reporting
- Building state regulator's capacity to track parity violations for youth mental health and addiction services

Governor's Checklist

- Build school demonstration sites and learning centers for school staff and administrators
- Facilitate partnerships with universities, research institutions, and hospitals
- Leverage technology platforms to evaluate outcomes of school reforms
- Implement state tracking of youth-specific parity violations and appoint state insurance regulators to launch investigations of parity violations, including for youth mental health and addiction care and autism services
- Leverage "lessons learned" from Project AWARE sites and scale statewide

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