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Child, Adolescent and Adult Psychiatry

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Subject Matter On: Policy Recommendations on Health Disparities, Access to Health Care, Behavioral Health and Diversity in Health Care/Culturally Competent Health Care. JOINT HEARING WITH SENATE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE. and HUMAN SERVICES
November 9, 2020 930 am

Dear Members of the Senate Human Services Committee,

I am Karen Pierce MD a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, Distinguished Fellow in the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and the American Psychiatric Society that has worked with the youth of Illinois for 35 years. I am writing representing the Illinois Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and as a member of the Illinois Psychiatric Society. I am willing to work on the legislation of issues involving children's mental health in any manner as the mental health of Illinois youth is critical.

The pandemic novel coronavirus, COVID-19, has highlighted the profound nature of health inequity within our nation with inadequate consideration of young people. The lack of response is causing lasting harm to a whole generation. 75% of the Covid-19 deaths in children were in racial minorities. The wider effects of COVID-19 policies have disproportionately and negatively affected the young. The closures of schools, nurseries, and outdoor play spaces, and reduced clinical and community services have endangered child health and widened pre-existing disparities. The Pew research Center (<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/>) reported that almost a third of households with incomes of \$30, 000 or less lack a smart phone and more than 40% lack a computer or high -speed broadband access. (<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/fullarticle/2768771>)

According to Mental Health in America 2020 (<https://mhanational.org/sites/default/files/State%20of%20Mental%20Health%20in%20America%20-%202020.pdf>) survey Illinois ranks 39th in taking care of the youth's mental health where youth have higher prevalence of mental illness and lower rates of access to care. Because of this shortage of behavioral health practitioners, primary care physicians provide the bulk of mental health care and psychopharmacological prescriptions — despite their lack of specialist training on evidence-based behavioral treatments. Both primary care physicians and their patients can benefit from the input of a psychiatrist.

We are grateful to Governor J.B. Pritzker and the Illinois legislature for working tirelessly toward achieving health equity. We welcome the opportunity to collaborate with you and encourage you to use us as a resource.

The Illinois Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry recommends the following to address inequities and the pandemic:

1. **Provide the highest level of quality care to the underserved** in the form of access to good mental health centers, staffed with clinicians that use evidenced based care. All children should have access to consult with a child psychiatrist through collaborative agreements. Increasing funding to mental health centers in high need neighborhoods.
2. **Urge the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services to reimburse for the Psychiatric Collaborative Care Management Services CPT codes billed to Medicaid, pursuant to existing law** – Illinois Public Act 101-0574 (effective January 1, 2020) – to increase access to care through the Collaborative Care Model, an evidence-based, integrated behavioral health service delivery method.
3. **Increase coverage of telemedicine** Telehealth holds particular promise for children in marginalized, rural, low-income or high-risk groups and communities, all of whom have particularly limited access to traditional healthcare: Telehealth solves problems of transportation and scheduling that commonly get in the way of accessing in-person mental health treatment. Telehealth can make it easier to overcome cultural stigma around mental health treatment. Telehealth can speed up diagnosis and treatment by connecting individuals with available providers in different areas. Telehealth has been shown to be effective in removing barriers and providing effective, quality care to youth of color who typically have less access to care. Telehealth can make care more accessible to the nearly 2 million youth who experience homelessness every year.

Governor J.B. Pritzker has issued a series of executive orders during the pandemic, temporarily increasing flexibility and broadening insurance and Medicaid coverage for telemedicine. This made it possible to treat new patients in underserved communities in both rural and major cities, while maintaining care for existing patients. Broad coverage of telemedicine going forward will ensure patients continue to receive clinically safe and efficient care.

4. **Support public health and education initiatives** that decrease stigma and prevent ostracism of those infected with COVID-19; improve the social determinants of health for marginalized communities; and strengthen engagement with marginalized communities. Evidenced- based School mental health is imperative with input by the with consultation with pediatricians and child psychiatrists to educate about mental health.
5. **Support outreach efforts to assist at-risk individuals and families**, such as case management for serious mental illness, crisis intervention, and inpatient to outpatient transitions.
6. **Mandate that all behavioral health clinicians** be trained in cultural awareness and how to screen for adverse childhood life events including exposure to racism.

Thank you for the opportunity to share the Illinois Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry concerns and suggestions. Please contact us with any questions related to addressing health disparities.

Sincerely,

Karen Pierce MD DFAPA, DFAACAP
Chair, Child psychiatry Advocacy