



CALIFORNIA ACADEMY of
CHILD & ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRY



March 7, 2022

Governor Gavin Newsom
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: State of Emergency in Children's Mental Health

Dear Governor Newsom:

We have reached a critical juncture in our ability to address the child and adolescent mental health crisis as the need quickly outpaces the State's response. Between 2019 and 2020, almost all age groups saw a decline in suicide rates, except youth aged 10-18 years. This age group saw a dramatic *increase* of 20 percent in suicide rates for 2020. Of note, due to overt and systemic racism and lack of treatment for depression, black youth experienced a 28 percent increase in its suicide rate in 2020.¹ Data from the University of California San Francisco (UCSF) Children's Hospital showed a 50 percent increase in suicidal ideation between January 2020 and January 2021. The UCSF Children's Hospital Oakland reported a 63 percent increase in children experiencing mental health emergencies in 2020 compared to 2019. "Looking at the overall census, fewer kids are coming in but the kids who are coming in are more in crisis," explains one Bay Area doctor.²

This worsening crisis in child and adolescent mental health is tied to the stress brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing struggle for racial justice, representing an acceleration of trends observed prior to 2020. California's Mental Health and Oversight Accountability Commission, for example, released a report in 2020 stating that the "pre-existing student mental health crisis has grown deeper and more widespread—and at the same time less visible to schools and communities."³

These problems are indicative of a national youth mental health crisis. As a result, in October 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the Children's Hospital Association came together to declare a National State of Emergency in Children's Mental Health⁴. In this unprecedented action, this group of 77,000 physicians and hundreds of hospitals declared the "worsening crisis in child and adolescent mental health is inextricably tied to the stress brought on by COVID-19 and the ongoing struggle for racial justice and represents an acceleration of trends observed prior to 2020."

The statistics are staggering, and the problem is simply too large and too complicated for any one institution to tackle alone. Young people in our state are experiencing soaring rates of depression, anxiety, trauma, loneliness, and suicidality that will have lasting impacts on them, their families, and their communities.

The reforms anticipated through the historic Children & Youth Behavioral Health Initiative are necessary and important. However, the impact of those reforms will not be realized for years, while the mental health crisis facing children and youth are immediate and urgent. Leaders must identify strategies to meet these challenges through innovation and action, using state, local and national approaches to improve access to and quality of care across the continuum of mental health promotion, prevention, and treatment. Declaring a State of Emergency will allow for key regulatory flexibility and an influx of dollars into the children's mental health system to address the current crisis now.

For these reasons, Children Now, California Children's Hospital Association (CCHA), Stanford Children's Health-Lucille Packard Children's Hospital, California Academy of Pediatrics (AAP-CA), California Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (CAL-ACAP), California State Association of Psychiatrists (CSAP), the California Alliance for Children and Family Services (CACFS) and the California Council of Community Behavioral Health Agencies (CBHA) are joining together to highlight the dire state of affairs and propose a statewide State of Emergency in Children's Mental Health. The challenges facing children and adolescents are so dire and widespread that we call on state and local policymakers to join us in making this urgent declaration. To that end, we respectfully ask **you, the Governor of California, to formally declare the status of child and adolescent mental health in California a public health emergency.**

Our hope in making this bold declaration is to bring greater attention and resources to bear as we seek to make progress in solving the current mental health crisis in California. **In addition to requesting the State of Emergency declaration, we request a meeting to review possible solutions that can support the mental health of children and youth immediately.**

Sincerely,



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¹ [California Suicide and Self-Harm Trends in 2020](#)

² [Loss of in-person class results in mental health pandemic for Bay Area students, families](#)

³ [Every Young Heart and Mind: Schools as Centers of Wellness](#)

⁴ [Pediatricians, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists and Children's Hospitals Declare National Emergency in Children's Mental Health](#)